Undeniably, African criminologists are redirecting much needed research toward the production of quality scholarship that addresses the missing link in the development of African criminology and criminal justice. The latest such cogent work is manifest in *Law and Justice in Post-British Nigeria*, written by Professor Nonso Okereafoezeke of Norfolk State University in Virginia. Noting that Nigeria is a complex society with its multifaceted ethnic dimensions rooted in Eurocentric and egocentric scrambling of wealth and power, Okereafoezeke investigates the confusion, prior to colonial dominion, that was engendered by the introduction of alien laws on an already existing native jurisprudence in divergent regions of Nigeria. He also employs Igbo legal traditions to illuminate the incongruities of the manifold legal systems that operate in Nigeria. Further, Okereafoezeke offers a lucid framework for the development of a
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justice system in Nigeria that is reasonable, equitable, and satisfactory to all its citizens.

Excluding the introductory and concluding chapters, the book is divided, essentially, into three parts, each of which is comprised of three chapters. Part I explores native and colonial justice systems in Nigeria, as well as the application of formal and informal legal rules. The acceptance and elevation, by Nigerians, of the British legal systems over the universal acknowledgement and respect for the native legal systems is questioned. Naturally, the author resolutely asserts that the imposition of English law on Nigerians cemented the confusion that has led to inept case management in the country. (It should be emphasized at this juncture that, prior to receiving his doctorate in criminology, professor Okereafoezeké was a practicing attorney in Nigeria, which confirms that his apt analyses of Nigerian jurisprudence are not solely informed by critical scholarship, but also by his personal participation as a bona fide Nigerian jurist.)

Using the reach criminological literature on formal and informal social control mechanisms and a survey of many actual Igbo cases, Okereafoezeké explains the principles for measuring formal and informal judicial proceedings. He accomplishes this by drawing on data showing, in the Nigerian context, that judicial matters are neither utterly official nor unofficial. Okereafoezeké contends that, against the bedrock of the Nigerian indigenous legal establishment, the imposition of alien laws on the natives produces
cultural and legal anomie.

In Part II, the author examines selected aspects of justice in “contemporary traditional” Igbo land. He explores law-making techniques and the growth of Nigeria’s native justice systems, principles of Igbo traditions, customs and laws, and the enforcement of Igbo judicial decisions. Okereafoezieke advocates that traditional Igbo was characterized by “customary laws,” which were generally unwritten laws. However, like any other society, as the Igbo and Nigerians move away from mechanical to organic communities, contemporary laws are written down in order to minimize exceptional vagueness and uncertainties in the application of the law. While traditional customary laws were rooted in truthfulness, respect, and universal conduct norms, Okereafoezieke contends that “a written law should be preferred to an unwritten law” (see page 115).

Chapter 5 specifically addresses the methods and procedures used in the study. Employing the research techniques of content analysis, the author examines archival records and government and unofficial data, conducts interviews, and participates in field observations. In order to establish the dissimilarities between the Igbo traditional laws prior to colonial command and after the yoke of foreign law, actual cases and issues are addressed based on the research questions posed by the author. He notes that native laws have been subjected to English jurisprudence and urges the relevant organs of the government to bestow respect and dignity upon traditional legal institutions. This is important because traditional ways of enforcing judicial decisions are poles apart from enforcement mechanisms introduced by the metropolis.
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Part III, the final section, focuses on the future of the plural justice interface in Nigeria. Its chapters encompass the interactions between Nigeria’s natives and foreign justice, criminological implications of official policies on native law, and social control. Okereafoezeke clearly shows that the confusion and contradictions in the Nigerian legal system today stem from the over reliance on what he describes as the “repugnancy test” (see pp. 160-173 for definitions and full explanations) that no laws, native or otherwise, should be offensive or odious to officially promulgated law. This law was entrenched in the British regal and imperial heritage, and was designed as a check on native laws that were intended to protect the interests of colonial invaders. The contradictions inherent in the plural legal justice systems may be avoided if Nigeria recognizes that native laws can work well with foreign law. The subjugation of native laws in favor of foreign law will only hamper impartial justice in the country. Therefore, for social control in the Nigerian polity to be efficient and effective, there must be a recognition of native law as an authentic form of justice. The author has demonstrated that both legal systems can work hand in hand. After all, both systems are already planted in Nigeria’s legal memory bank.

I believe that Okereafoezeke’s book is a very important work in criminology and criminal justice; it is significant because it has also demonstrated the existence of laws and judicial practices in Nigeria prior to the colonial foray of the continent of Africa. The
book is appropriate for a comparative study in law and social control, comparative justice systems, and for courses which focus on international law and legal systems in Africa. I find the book to be edifying, and it is an excellent addition to the literature on African criminology and criminal justice.

Indeed, Okereafoezeke’s methodology is profound and insightful, particularly since contemporary criminological and criminal justice studies demand empirical evidence, as well as because Igbo customary laws were generally oral in nature and unwritten. But I find a deficiency in the author’s choice of Ajali (a small borough in Igbo land) as his primary unit of analysis. That is, because, the book utilizes the Igbo as its unit of analysis, and yet, a small district called Ajali became the axis of the study. Is the author, therefore, declaring legitimately that the Ajali justice system could be used to make generalizations about other forms of “amalatocracy” (customary administration of justice) in Igbo land?

Even if the Igbo were used holistically as the base of study of the plural legal systems in Nigeria, it may be difficult for critical readers to adequately generalize the findings to the other areas of Nigerian constituencies. I must stress that the Yorubas, for example, have their own unique conventional legal systems and that Sharia in the North is a much more complicated and complex draconic form of law. In a country where various dialects are spoken, it is virtually impossible to have a homogeneous customary practice.

Overall, I commend Professor Okereafoezeke for a splendid book, and I look forward to reading more from him on this critical area of study. With high regard and enthusiasm, I recommend this
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book to political scientists, criminologists, and other scholars in America, Africa, Europe, and the global society. Students will also benefit greatly from his work and learn tremendously about the plural legal systems that exist in Nigeria, including their contradictions and compromises. A starting point will be for African criminologists in the Diaspora universities and our African colleagues at home to commence adopting and integrating such works in their courses.