

2010 Outstanding Achievement Award Acceptance Speech

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Anne, thank you. It is a great honour to receive such a prize, and especially from this Society and at the hands of someone who has been one of my closest and most valued associates for the past three decades.

A few weeks ago I was referred to a hospital consultant about a minor foot injury. In reply to his enquiry about how much exercise I take, I explained that I am a retired sociologist who nowadays gets little exercise because of spending too much time sitting at a computer. In answer to his terse: 'Sociology, huh? What subject?' I replied, equally tersely: 'Crime'. And that was all. Imagine, therefore, my surprise when I discovered that he had begun his report to my doctor with, 'Thank you for referring to me this 70 year old lady who is trying to write crime stories'.

My woman doctor claimed that such a characterisation was both sexist and ageist. But upon reflection I thought that it was a pretty accurate, description of how I've spent the last 40 years - except that there haven't been *several* stories, only *one*, and that one, a story without jokes, without an end, and with the crudest of plots - about the rich getting very much richer and the poor getting more and more prison.

But today, I want to recount two more cheerful stories.

The first is about luck. Throughout my life I have been lucky with my family, friends and colleagues. It has been because of their commitment to knowledge and justice that I have over the years fashioned my one rationale for doing criminology: that as justice remains imaginary in societies based on inequality, one reason for investigating the meanings of contemporary law-breaking and the social responses to it, is to imagine the possible conditions for them being otherwise. And I owe that criminological perspective both to my parents who inculcated me with Old Labour socialist values when I was a child; and, nowadays, to my family, friends and colleagues who, by their moral example, politics and writings have continually reinforced my belief in those values.

As a child I was privileged to grow up during the inaugural period of the British welfare state, and to go to a grammar school at a time when only 1 in 600 working class girls went. Later, aged 28 and already the mother of two children, I was encouraged by my husband to go to university to study sociology. It was wonderful: everything I'd been taught by my parents about class fell into place. Thereafter my luck continued: at Keele University where I worked with such brilliant and principled colleagues as the late Mike Collison, Anne Worrall herself, Dee Cook, Sandra Walklate, Jo Phoenix, Ian Loader, Richard Sparks and Tim Hope; in Scotland, where the then head of crime research, Jacqueline Tombs, funded my research at Cornton Vale prison and afterwards defended the study when it didn't quite say what her Home Office Colleagues had expected; and in the Women in Prison Campaigning Group where I was surrounded by lively, straight-talking and passionate women, including the late Chris Tchaikovsky who regularly reminded me of my privileged professional existence by repeatedly asking: 'Why can't you get a full-time job in a university, instead of hanging

around with ex-prisoners? Is it because you don't ever write anything in plain English?' Then, five years ago, I had one more piece of good fortune: I succeeded Geoffrey Pearson as Editor of the *British Journal of Criminology*, just at a time when Geoff had already done all the hard work of establishing it as a vibrant international Journal.

My other story is one of optimism.

It would probably be an understatement to say that, as a sociologist, I have never been very starry-eyed about either academic institutions or criminology. The full title of my PhD was: *Magistrates' Courts: A Study in the Sociology of the Absurd* and throughout my time working in Universities it was easy to continue the study of the absurd as a kind of situational sideline. But since my retirement I've been fortunate in being able to enjoy doing criminology without being involved in Universities. And from outwith the academy, it seems to me that there is much to applaud in present day crime and justice studies. OK, I know that in Universities the absurd quantification of quality continues; I guess that there are still hundreds of academics who think that meetings about meetings are the lifeblood of the academy; I realise that so-called ethics committees, heavy teaching and administrative loads and the pursuit of profits and 'relevance' together add up to an environment unsympathetic to critical empirical research; I know that many women academics are still undervalued and that many are certainly under-promoted and underpaid; and I understand why some criminologists have perennial bouts of masochistic agnosticism when they wonder whether or not criminology actually exists. And if it does, do they belong to an epistemologically correct branch of it? BUT, and nonetheless, as a journal editor, an external examiner and a conference participant I also see an immense amount in contemporary criminology that is worthy of celebration:

1. I see excellent criminology graduates coming through who seem to be much more knowledgeable about philosophy, social theory and statistics than my generation was.
2. At undergraduate level there are many more inventive course and programme designs, together with more imaginative and productive teaching methods, than had ever been thought of 30 years ago.
3. I see a radical questioning of the definitions of crime bearing fruit in an ever-widening range of books and articles which refuse to take official, traditional, or even Campbell collaboration crime definitions and concerns as their starting point.
4. At the *British Journal of Criminology* we receive increasing numbers of first-rate articles from new PhDs and even from PhD students, while in publishing generally the supply of excellent monographs continues, criminology in the UK having really been put on the map by the prize-winning publisher, Brian Willan.
5. Critical criminology and abolitionism are still being cherished and renewed, and I see new angles on old questions being promoted through energising perspectives such as cultural and public criminologies, harm reduction, green criminology, psycho-social criminology, and many more; and also through vigorous and fearless public interventions by individual academics such as David Nutt and Rod Morgan, and organisations such as the Centre for Criminal Justice Studies.
6. And even though the research assessment exercises are not conducive to responsible academic citizenship and public criminology, there seems, none the less, to be an unending supply of new, young academics campaigning on all kinds of criminal justice, human rights, civil liberties, and prison issues.

7. And last, but not least, I see more and more women in full-time and senior academic posts - though there is still a long way to go before enough of them have working class and/or ethnic minority backgrounds too.

But, you might say, in light of the fact that in the 27 years since the Women in Prison Campaigning Group was founded, the women's prison population in England and Wales has increased from about 1,600 females in prison in 1983 to over 4½ thousand in 2009; and in light, too, of my own assumption about the poor prospects for criminal justice in materially unequal societies, you might well ask whether I still really believe that it is worth struggling for justice and knowledge? And the answer is, 'Yes, yes, yes. Of course I do'. Critique is a human necessity and while it certainly does not produce Truth, it does allow everyone to imagine and struggle for alternatives to present social arrangements. Today, I see a vibrant criminology which, in its better manifestations at least, still imagines a justice and a law which will not forever be predicated upon today's inequalities, triumphalist greed and silent oppressions.

So... enjoy the Conference, enjoy the struggle for knowledge and justice. Thank you, once again, and good luck!
