

## On Presenting the BSC's Outstanding Achievement Award to Professor Pat Carlen

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Talk given at the opening plenary of the BSC conference at University of Leicester, 12 July 2010

*Friends and colleagues, I am deeply honoured* to have been asked to make this oration for the British Society of Criminology's Outstanding Achievement Award to Professor Pat Carlen, currently Visiting Professor at Kent University. And it is a particular pleasure to see members of Pat's family here this afternoon.

Earlier this year Keith Hayward, Shadd Maruna and Jane Mooney edited a book entitled *Fifty Key Thinkers in Criminology*<sup>1</sup>. Within this volume, Jackie Tombs has written a chapter about Pat Carlen and anyone who wants a full summary of Pat's outstanding career and writings might wish to consult that. Today I am going to read just one paragraph from that chapter before talking briefly at a more personal level about what I and other members of the BSC owe to Pat. This is what Jackie said:

Pat Carlen, one of Britain's most imaginative and innovative sociologists, has often been called a 'feminist criminologist' though maybe that is something of a misnomer since she always insists that she never has employed any body of feminist theory when doing sociological analysis. Nor does she think of herself as a criminologist but rather as some-one who engages in sociological work. She describes herself as 'a knowledge worker... whose creative and theoretical work is about objects of knowledge'. Her interest in criminology is not for its own sake but rather as a dimension of sociology in general and social exclusion in particular. As a 'thinker', one of her greatest characteristics is her refusal to be pigeonholed; she does not belong to any particular 'school' of thought nor is she any sort of 'ist'. None-the-less, her writings have exerted distinctive and important influences on feminist, critical and abolitionist perspectives and on criminology more generally.

I first met Pat in 1976 when she interviewed me and, with the late Mike Collison, subsequently taught me on the MA in Criminology in the Law Department at Keele University. John Pratt was also on the course that year and I imagine that there are a number of people here today who also experienced that uniquely inspirational duo of lecturers. Pat had just published *Magistrates' Justice*<sup>2</sup> and it was clear that this was a new and innovative voice in the field of criminology. In 1980, I was fortunate enough to be appointed a temporary lecturer to cover for Pat while she undertook the fieldwork for *Women's Imprisonment*<sup>3</sup>, so I have always felt (quite unjustifiably) that I made a contribution to that book.

A year later, Pat became my PhD supervisor and taught me everything I know about research. I am sure there are others - some here today - who have experienced Pat's uncompromising but supportive style of supervision: Bankole Cole, Jo Phoenix, Hillary Bradshaw, now Jones, to name but a few. In

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<sup>1</sup> Hayward, K., Maruna S. and Jane Mooney, J. (2010) *Fifty Key Thinkers in Criminology*, Abingdon: Routledge.

<sup>2</sup> Carlen, P. (1976) *Magistrates' Justice*, London: Martin Robertson

<sup>3</sup> Carlen, P. (1983) *Women's Imprisonment: A Study in Social Control*, London: Routledge and Keegan Paul.

1987, Pat invited me to edit *Gender, Crime and Justice*<sup>4</sup> with her. This was a typically generous gesture and indicative of the support and guidance she gave to young academics - she also co-edited books with Mike Collison<sup>5</sup> and Dee Cook<sup>6</sup>. She is always an exacting but hugely stimulating collaborator.

It was 20 years ago that Pat founded the Department of Criminology at Keele and the first undergraduate criminology degree programme in the country. Dee Cook, Richard Sparks and Ian Loader joined Pat and Mike and, by 1993, so did I. It was an exciting time as the undergraduate programme expanded. By the time Pat left Keele in 1996, we had been joined on the staff by Lynn Hancock, Ruth Jamieson, Tim Hope, Sandra Walklate and Barry Godfrey. Evi Girling had joined us as a Research Fellow. At least two other well-known criminologists - Elaine Crawley and David Gadd - were undergraduate students at that time and Rob Mawby was a PhD student. Please forgive me if I have missed out others with strong Keele connections during that period.

As a Head of Department, Pat set very high standards for the rest of us but she was a fiercely loyal and protective colleague and she always seemed to get the best out of us, partly, I'm sure, because of her commitment to transparent equality. She never asked us to do anything she wouldn't do herself and she would always teach more hours and mark more essays than anyone else. An ethos of equality was one of her great legacies, continuing, I believe, to this day. Another was her determination to keep a strong gender balance at all levels within the staff group.

Since leaving Keele, Pat has written more books (18 in all on subjects as varied as truancy, homelessness, official discourse and imaginary penalties as well as women offenders) and scores of journal articles. She has taught and supervised more students and become Editor-in-Chief of the *BJC*. She was the second of only four British-based women to receive the American Society of Criminology's Sellin-Glueck Award for outstanding international contributions to criminology in 1997. Throughout her academic career she also worked tirelessly for women prisoners and, with the late Chris Tchaikovsky, founded the *Women in Prison* campaigning group.

Pat's latest book, *A Criminological Imagination*<sup>7</sup>, was published in June. It consists of excerpts from all Pat's major publications, selected by her - what might be termed a 'retrospective' of her work. It confirms the breath-taking range of Pat's writing and the unfettered nature of her thinking. In the nicest possible way, you never know what Pat is going to say next!

So it gives me great pleasure to present you, Pat, with the British Society of Criminology's 2010 Award for Outstanding Achievement.

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<sup>4</sup> Carlen, P. and Worrall, A. (1987) *Gender, Crime and Justice*, Maidenhead, Open University Press.

<sup>5</sup> Carlen, P. and Collison, M. (eds.) (1980) *Radical Issues in Criminology*, London: Martin Robertson.

<sup>6</sup> Carlen, P. and Cook, D. (eds.) (1989) *Paying for Crime*, Maidenhead: Open University Press.

<sup>7</sup> Carlen, P. (2010) *A Criminological Imagination: Essays on Justice, Punishment, Discourse*, Aldershot: Ashgate.

# 2010 Outstanding Achievement Award Acceptance Speech

Pat Carlen

Visiting Professor, University of Kent

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Speech given at the opening plenary of the BSC conference at University of Leicester, 12 July 2010

*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 Compton 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



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

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!

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