‘WHAT HAVE WE DONE?’ TRENDS IN CRIMINOLOGICAL THEORISING

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ABSTRACT

Having been invited to South Africa to reflect on the current state of criminological theory, it seemed appropriate to explore empirically quite what the trends and foci of the discipline have been over the last few decades. This article attends chiefly to work appearing in The British Journal of Criminology because that is the medium with which I am most familiar, but it also compares and contrasts its findings with a content analysis of Theoretical Criminology and Criminology and Criminal Justice. The conclusions which one is bound to draw is that all the stories we have told ourselves about the development of the discipline in and around the United Kingdom are quite misleading; and that there has been no time at which any single theory or substantive theme has been in dominance. To the contrary, the criminology presented in those journals is remarkably diverse and heterodox. If any feature does distinguish it, it has been the discipline’s anchorage in more or less theoretically sophisticated descriptions of the empirical world of crime, justice and corrections.

INTRODUCTION

Some time ago I attempted to capture a particular feature of British criminology: Its propensity to flirt with the new and forget the old (Rock, 2005). I now want to extend that notion by considering not only how criminology talks about how it has gone about the work of theorising and making sense of the world, but also what one small feeler has revealed about the patterning of work we have actually done. In doing so, I hope to lay bare properties of the discipline that have either been obscured or contested. At stake, and closely interconnected, are the stories we tell about ourselves, stories about the history of British criminology and of the history of the discipline as it is conceived by British criminology.

More particularly, this article was stimulated by an invitation from the University of Cape Town and the University of South Africa to talk about current, indeed ‘cutting edge’, developments in criminology. Uncertain about quite what passed for such developments, I decided to devise a way of exploring empirically what we as criminologists have done in the past and are doing now. I took the decision to concentrate on British criminology, not because it is necessarily the most important or interesting branch of the discipline, but because it is the one with which I am the most familiar and with which I can work with the greatest confidence. Knowing something of its history and principals enables me to make judgements which go beyond the text of articles alone. No doubt it would be rewarding to conduct a similar exercise on other branches elsewhere. In our present state of knowledge, there is so much to learn and it is far from clear whether different criminologies have marched in step and whether, indeed, it is profitable to talk of national criminologies at all.

Criminology may not be as voluminous or wordy as some other scholarly disciplines, but it has become substantial, and I cannot imagine any criminologist who is able to keep abreast of everything that is and has been written. I recall Robert Reiner telling me that when he began...
teaching, he took it to be his professional duty to read every work of note that appeared in sociology. When that was no longer feasible, he concentrated on sociological criminology, and then on the sociology of the police, and then that too overwhelmed him. We can, it seems, have but a limited understanding of the totality of what is being practised in our discipline, and our imagery is framed accordingly. We may have centres of intense, intimate and informed scholarly understanding of our field, usually shaped by whatever project and interests we have immediately to hand. However, they cannot but be surrounded by zones of progressively less certain knowledge, and, at the outermost reaches, all we possess at best can be somewhat dated, stereotyped and sketchy images of what our colleagues, particularly in the other disciplines constituting the field, do and think. Schutz gave a graphic description of this kind of mapping:

> Distinguishing . . . two kinds of knowledge, namely, ‘knowledge of acquaintance’, and ‘knowledge about’, we may say that within the field covered by the contour lines of relevance, there are centers of explicit knowledge of what is aimed at; they are surrounded by a halo knowledge about what seems to be sufficient; next comes a region in which it will merely do ‘to put one’s trust’; the adjoining foothills are the home of unwarranted hopes and assumptions; between these areas, however, lie zones of complete ignorance (1967, p. 93).

We may imagine that we have a good enough working familiarity with the overall dimensions and contents of our discipline, but I suspect that we have not always devoted sufficient attention to them as topics in their own right. We have certainly not approached criminology as if we were sociologists of knowledge. We actually know very little (apart from anecdotally) about how criminology is produced, disseminated and represented. We do not know with any accuracy how many people in Britain (or elsewhere) call themselves criminologists, what they mean when they employ that term, how others identify them, and what it is that they do when they profess to practise their discipline. Garland and Sparks (2000, p. 190) aptly called ‘criminology’ and ‘criminologists’ “problematic and permeable categories”. There are almost no studies of how we organise courses and compile reading lists; how students make sense of what they are taught and read; how conference themes, programmes, panels and papers are chosen; how we decide what to read, research and write; how publishers select and commission work or appoint readers to review what has been commissioned or submitted; how we resolve whether to publish our work, and, if we do so, in what form; and how the editors, review editors and referees appointed by journals and publishers accept, reject or modify what they receive. Apart from anecdotally, we do not know, in short, much about how and what criminology enter the public realm. Neither do we know much about how criminology has changed over time. Although she had American criminology in mind chiefly, Rafter (2009, n. p.) remarked in her Sutherland Address that there is a puzzle “why criminology (in contrast to closely related fields) has generated so few studies of its past”, and, she continued; “We lack a sense of our work as part of a project in time. Large chunks of our memory have fallen away, leaving us, like victims of Alzheimers [sic] disease, stripped of our identity.”

What we have instead, is a number of competing, ready-made and, perhaps, rather self-serving accounts of what we think has happened. I am not confident about how well-founded any of them are. Criminology is what David Downes once called a rendezvous discipline where various branches of learning converge loosely around a common substantive theme, sometimes merging, more often speaking past one another and never quite moving in the
same direction. Such a baggy and incoherent enterprise probably defies a simple, all-enveloping description. It was David Downes again who wrote:

On closer examination, [no] version of post-war British criminology seems wholly satisfactory. The ‘from conjecture-and-refutation’ to ‘paradigmatic revolution’ approach, has difficulty in dealing with the extraordinary eclecticism that characterizes the sociological, as well as (though of a differing kind) the more orthodox criminological, perspectives. The move to a deviancy, as distinct from a purely criminological perspective, has never really transcended the heuristic phase (1978, p. 486).

It struck me that it might be instructive to begin to consider what we have actually been doing over these last few decades. There are very different images on offer, each possessing merit, but they have been allowed to sit side by side largely unchallenged, and the validity of what has been said has rarely been examined.

On the one hand, there are those who say that British criminology is, and in some cases, has become increasingly marked by a commitment to what is variously and usually unflatteringly described as a meld of correctionalism, modernism, abstracted empiricism, unprincipled eclecticism and positivism (Haines & Sutton, 2000; Nelken, 1994). There is perhaps some warrant for a version of that view. Consider the state of affairs at two different points in time. The first is what Rostow (1991) would have called the stage of ‘take-off’. Of the 72 people attending the first National Conference on Research and Teaching in Criminology Conference held in Cambridge in 1964, 42 or 58% were academics; 20 being students and staff at the new Cambridge Institute of Criminology itself. The others were recruited largely from penal institutions and the Prison Staff College (6); the probation service (3); medical institutions (6); and the Home Office (9, including 3 from the new Research Unit). Three sessions were chaired by James Douglas of the Medical Research Council; Sir Charles Cunningham, Permanent Under-Secretary at the Home Office; and Tom Lodge, founder of the Home Office Research Unit. Its themes were ‘Ways of Classifying Offences for Criminological Research’; ‘Interviewing in Criminological Surveys’; ‘Family Patterns in Delinquency’; ‘Prog-nosis in Young Criminals’; ‘Research into Probation’; ‘Research in Penal Institutions’; and ‘Research in Criminology’. The issue of The British Journal of Criminology that was published at very much the same time mirrored those foci: there were three articles on ‘Strategic Problems in the Study of Criminal Behaviour’; ‘Clinical Psychiatry and Crime’; and ‘The Impact of Short-term Institutionalisation on Prison Inmates’; and a survey of current research on the effects of probation; research studies on Approved Schools; and ‘Studies of Treatment in Particular Types of Institution’. And, in that, the themes of the conference and the journal were very similar to those proclaimed in the White Paper, The War Against Crime in England and Wales (1959-1964):

Criminological research is essential to the battle against crime. It is necessary to obtain a better understanding of the nature of criminality: to study statistics and the realities which lie beneath them: to examine crime in detail and to evolve ways of accurately describing it. The social and psychological aspects of criminality must be investigated. Delinquent behaviour must be studied in the framework of normal behaviour to increase understanding of its causes. Ways of preventing crime must be explored, and experiments carried out to test them. The effects on offenders of different sentences and of the different ways in which treatment can be carried out within the penal system, must be examined (Home Office, 1964, p. 25).
A very similar conference, addressed by many of the same speakers, and organised only a short time later by the Howard League - the British Congress on Crime of 1966 - revolved around a number of ‘keynote lectures’: the first, on ‘a century of causal theory’, was delivered by Nigel Walker, and it touched on ‘analytical theories’, typologies, aspects of addiction, social theories, white-collar crime and games theory; the second, delivered by Tom Lodge, looked at research and research methods, subdivided into the nature of crime, causation and prevention, and treatment research; and the third, delivered by Bob Morrison, explored individualization and involvement in treatment and prevention. The composition of its membership again veered heavily towards the practitioner. Academic criminology was small in those days (see Gibbens, 1967, p. ix), it was outnumbered by those working in the institutions and agencies of the criminal justice system, and its conception of what should be done and how it should be practised was shaped accordingly. It was held by some then and thereafter that it was unduly mesmerised by numbers, subservient to the utilitarian and bereft of big ideas. Hermann Mannheim himself was led to reflect around this time that:

> It is not enough to go on piling up more and better statistics, constructing better indices of crime and adding more and more little theories or sub-theories to the abundance of existing ones. What is needed is new worthwhile ideas, and there is a deplorable shortage of them internationally in present-day criminology. What is the use of more and more refined techniques . . . if the object of all such efforts is not worth pursuing . . . ?’ (1970, p. 320).

Four decades later, a larger affair, the 2009 British Criminology Conference held in Cardiff, marked the stage of high mass consumption. There were some 400 speakers and chairmen and chairwomen listed, a number of whom appeared more than once. On this occasion, 380, or 94% of those so named, were academics, many from universities which had not even existed at the time of the first conference. The shift in the centre of gravity towards the academy was palpable. But other matters did not seem to have changed quite so radically. The pragmatic and empirical – not infrequently empiricist - character of the discipline remained intact, despite a few new words like risk, victim, governance, transnationalism and globalization having crept in; and the state and its institutions being held up to occasional critical scrutiny in the name of human rights and allegations of punitiveness, corruption and collusion. The criminology presented in 2009 talked about the impact of probation, judicial, penal and police practices and policies just as its predecessor had done.

There was an apparent continuity – or acceleration - of a trend that, in critical vein, Jock Young called the problem of ‘unchecked positivism’ (2004, p. 20); Hillyard and others “an endless conveyor belt of predictable and auto-suggestive findings, often generated by large-scale, publicly funded, state-sanctioned, evaluation-oriented research projects that are ultimately self-serving” (2004, p. 383); and Phil Scraton “a number crunching, schematic and instrumental positivism” (2001, p.3) in the service of state power. Kevin Stenson came away reflecting on how it:

> ...illustrated the growing power of academic Police Centres tied to state and police organizations, and the danger of criminology being reconfigured as the tame police science of the new, centralized security state. . . . data gathering with real people carries low status. Data are mathematized, and then analysed . . . at a sanitized, safe distance . . . ” (2010, p. 163 - 164).

David Downes commented that:
I think he captures what is happening very well. The papers were rarely theoretical. The conference began with a half hour speech by [a] Chief Constable . . . , who was meant to speak for five minutes. This put back the presentation of the first [British Society of Criminology] Award to Stan [Cohen], and meant Larry Sherman had to cut his plenary by twenty minutes (personal communication).

The contemporaneous issue of The British Journal of Criminology looked at substantive themes akin to those of its predecessor: restorative justice for banks through negative licensing; the international ban on ivory sales and its effects on elephant poaching in Africa; two articles dealing separately with the fear of crime and vulnerability to victimisation in China; the causal connection between drug misuse and crime; gender, parole and the governance of reintegration; and co-offending, age, gender and crime type: implications for criminal justice policy. One could readily construct an argument to the effect that there has been a remarkable survival, indeed growth, of what began as a medico-legal science, grounded in statistics and applied penology, trained to be serviceable to the State, embedded in prisons, asylums and the scientific units of government departments, and described by Garland as an “institutionally-based, administratively-oriented” (1988, p. 7) discipline. But perhaps after all that is not so very remarkable because the defining, empirical core of the field is, always has been, and must remain the world of crime, criminals and crime control, the topics once defined by Edwin Sutherland and Donald Cressey as “the processes of making laws, of breaking laws, and of reacting toward the breaking of laws” (1970, p. 3).

Many official and criminologist insiders working in and around government and its agencies, those institutions of administration, would contest that argument. Their account is not one of unmitigated prowess in establishing a methodical science orchestrated by the State and geared to reforming criminals and preventing and predicting crime, but of an obfuscating, impractical criminology that tends to be too long on ideas and too short on method, certainly as it is conceived in the United States. They have frequently lamented that it is riddled with would-be theorists who lack rigour, focus, an application to problems of policy and a basic statistical competence. It is their judgement that British criminology is, in effect, neither very good at being positivist nor at being applied.

There was discontent from the first when, in 1957, Tom Lodge justified the establishment of the Home Office Research Unit on the grounds that academic criminologists did not and could not produce worthwhile research:

_The two main handicaps to research hitherto have been shortage of money and shortage of competent research workers . . . we have on only very few occasions been able to induce University departments to set about research with what we regard as sufficient attention to scientific rigour and the use of modern statistical techniques (Home Office, 1957)._

Nine years later, Hugh Klare, the then Secretary of the Howard League and sponsor of the pioneering 1966 British Congress of Crime, was reported to have been disappointed at the outcome of his experiment in bringing criminologists and practitioners together. The minutes of a meeting of the League’s Executive Committee recorded that: “There had been a language barrier between the academic criminologists and the practical people in the field. And a large congress always posed special problems of communication. . . . Several members who had attended the Congress had felt that too much jargon had been used” (Minutes of the 844th meeting of the Executive Committee, 15th September 1966). Two decades later, in 1990,
Cohn and Farrington felt impelled to argue that the lack of impact exerted by British criminology on its American sister discipline should in part be explained by its innumeracy:

...our impression [is] that British criminological research was rarely cited in leading American criminology journals and books, and therefore (presumably) had little scholarly impact in the United States. . . . American criminologists mainly valued quantitative research, such as in Causes of Delinquency . . . or Explaining Delinquency and Drug Use . . ., whereas British criminologists mainly valued qualitative research, such as in Psychological Survival . . . or Folk Devils and Moral Panics . . .; and that quantitative researchers rarely cited qualitative research, and vice versa.’  

(1990, p. 481).

Not so very long ago, Tom Lodge’s complaint was to be once more voiced by his heir. Paul Wiles, first an academic and recently the head of the Home Office Research and Statistics Directorate, remarked of sociology: its “practical utility is at an historical low and . . . is regarded as the least developed of the social sciences in terms of the rigour of its methods” (Wiles, 2004, p. 31). There was, he said, a critical:

...question of whether British criminology has the skills to produce evidence? The answer in this case is . . . straightforward. There is broad agreement that British criminology has some obvious skills shortages at present — especially in those types of research methods which depend on higher levels of numeracy. I am stating this rather baldly because it is the judgement of the British Economic and Social Research Council. . . . The reasons for these problems probably go back to our school system, which allows pupils to specialise early and so abandon maths after the age of 15. It would be quite unacceptable in Britain for people to admit they were illiterate but it is still culturally acceptable to admit to innumeracy (2002, p. 246-7).

THE ICONOGRAPHY OF BRITISH CRIMINOLOGY

How are dominant representations actually formed and presented to and beyond members of the profession? The task of describing the public face of criminology seems de facto to have been assigned to a division of intellectual labour, having become the province of the lecture courses, text books and learned articles occupied with a history of ideas relaying stories of genesis and change, pioneering men and women, intellectual revolutions and struggles. It has been pursued by those who have focused heavily on criminology as a continually evolving theoretical project.

Their is a not a wholly uniform story, and the episodes, periodicities and protagonists that infuse it change from teller to teller. For instance, the Fifty Key Thinkers in Criminology nominated by Hayward, Maruna and Mooney (2010), included Bill Chambliss, Louk Hulshman, Susan Brownmiller, Peter Kropotkin, Meda Chesney-Lind and Hermann and Julia Schwendinger, but it embraced no functionalists, phenomenologists or ethnomethodologists, no victimologists, no John Bowlby, no Cyril Burt, no David Downes, no Richard Ericson, no Kai Erikson, no Hans Eysenck, no John Hagan, no John Mays, no Michael Tony, no Terence Morris, no Robert Reiner, no Al Reiss, no Clifford Shearing, no Larry Sherman, no Leslie Wilkins, no Marvin Wolfgang, no William Foote Whyte. It included none of the founding troika of British criminology: Max Grünhut, Hermann Mannheim and Leon Radzinowicz. It overlapped not at all with the ‘leading authorities in contemporary criminological theory’, featured in Pioneers in Modern Criminology, and published by Ashgate under the general
editorship of David Nelken (see http://www.ashgate.com/default.aspx?page=3482). It included only one of the four scholars claimed by Cohn and Farrington in 1994 in a citation study to be the most influential criminologists of their day (1994) (and only nine of the top twenty). Fifty Key Thinkers in Criminology included only eight of the twenty highest ranking names listed by Cohn and Farrington in a follow-up citation study five years later (1998). To be sure, all such selections are arbitrary, and there must be exclusions. Fifty Key Thinkers in Criminology was historically informed, as citation practices are not, and citations are no test of quality or even of professional approbation, but the discrepancies are interesting.

Part of the explanation for the piecemeal and idiosyncratic character of such surveys and histories must be that criminology in Britain has never been cumulative, each episode logically preparing the ground for its successor, allowing for the careful retrospective and prospective grafting of one theory on to the next. Rather, borrowings have almost always been made as if laterally from developments in sociology, political economy, social history and psychology proper: phenomenological criminology borrowing from the corpus of phenomenological sociology; Marxist criminology from Marxism; functionalist criminology from functionalism. The relation has characteristically been asymmetrical and nonreciprocal, so that the sources of inspiration – Louis Althusser, Aaron Cicourel, Robert Connell, Michel Foucault, Jürgen Habermas, Karl Marx, Robert Merton, Edward Thompson, Eric Hobsbawm and others - disdained to call themselves criminologists, reply to what criminologists said about them, or attend meetings where criminologists gather. It is perfectly possible, as a result, to remove any one theoretical episode or cluster of episodes from the history of criminology without doing much structural damage, for there is no coherent, incremental or continuous narrative structure to damage. The resulting histories inevitably have something of patchwork about them, built up of discrete items assembled in a fashion the artificer believes at the time to be useful, plausible and pleasing.

None the less, there is a broad foundational theme which is common to many of the intellectual histories, and it argues that, in the early 1960s, just before the tipping-point, when the world of British criminology began to be turned upside down, sociological analyses of crime and delinquency were rooted principally in the anomie theory first propounded by Robert Merton and Richard Cloward and Lloyd Ohlin, elaborated in ideas of cultural and subcultural responses to structurally-induced strain, and imported and, in many accounts, developed by David Downes (1966), Terence Morris and John Mays (n.d). There then followed what Frances Heidensohn called “significant shifts in the study of crime . . . [when] the academic field was redefined”. (1998, p. 56).

The argument runs that those who engineered those shifts and so redefined the character of the British sociology of crime in the latter half of the 1960s and beyond, were in the main the young Turks who had been recruited to the universities and polytechnics in the great wave of educational institution-building and student recruitment following the Robbins Report of 1963. They proceeded to found new courses in what were often new universities, were wooed by publishers eager to feed the new market, responded to the political and social transformations and crises of their day; formed a critical mass which was demographically-distinct, bearing all the marks of a generation that shared a Weltanschauung different from, and consciously set against the world-views of others (see Mannheim, 1952); and sought intellectually and politically to distance themselves from what they conceived to be a criminological equivalent of the ‘Thing’ that was demonised and simplified for purposes of theatrical
effect. Their apostasy was signified and institutionalised in the York Deviancy Symposium, established in 1968, whose first collection of papers was edited by Stan Cohen and prefaced by what was tantamount to a manifesto. The Symposium’s participants and the book’s contributors were said to entertain:

...feelings towards official criminology [which] ranged from distrust at its orientation towards administrative needs and impatience with its highly empirical, anti-theoretical bias, to simply a mild lack of interest in the sort of studies that were being conducted. ... So, as our own theory might put it – we found ourselves with a common identity problem ... (1971, p. 15).

That very audible outburst of intellectual excitement was marked by some of the preoccupations that Cohen also listed: ‘Connecting with the Public’; ‘Looking at the Others’ (by which he meant considering social reactions to deviance); viewing ‘Deviance as a Process’; defending meaning; treating deviance as continuous and permeating; and taking deviance to be a political artefact with political ramifications. Note that it was deviance, not crime, that he discussed; and that shift had denotative and connotative dimensions. Denotatively, deviance is a larger and more elusive entity than crime, and how it became articulated depended in large measure on the responses it received, control becoming problematic and politically-constituted. Connotatively, an allusion to deviance flagged what was held to be a break with an exclusive focus on crime and its science and a turning towards sociology and its preoccupations – re-introducing the asymmetrical relation of sociological criminology to its parent discipline to which I have alluded. So it was that Alvin Gouldner, the author of the Coming Crisis in Western Sociology (1970), recognised in the Deviancy Symposium’s later progeny, The New Criminology, a companion herald of crisis, and declared:

The reorienting power of this work ... derives from its ability to demonstrate that all studies of crime and deviance, however deeply entrenched in their own technical traditions, are inevitably also grounded in larger, more general social theories which are always present (1973, p. ix).

The new academics jostled with one another, competing to become what were in effect the fastest guns in Western criminology. The intellectual lives of their theories were often correspondingly short, following a Simmelian cycle of life and more-than-life, of creativity, objectification, opposition, supersession and yet more creativity. No sooner was one idea floated than attempts were made to pull it down. Ken Plummer remarked of the so-called labelling theory that had so reinvigorated discussion that, “In just ten years, [it] ... moved from being the radical critic of established orthodoxies to being the harbinger of new orthodoxies to be criticised” (1979, p. 85). Labelling theory itself was to give way to a new, critical or radical criminology that, despite rearguard action, was to be undermined by a fifth column of left realists who were eventually to be unleashed as cultural criminologists. Some criminologists have been remarkably adept at shedding their skins.

Criminology, thus portrayed, has been a ceaseless flurry of couplings and uncouplings with conversational analysis and the phenomenology and ethnomethodology of Egon Bittner, Aaron Cicourel, Jack Douglas and Harold Garfinkel; the Marxisms of Willem Bonger, Georg Rusche and Otto Kirchheimer, Evgeny Pashukanis, Louis Althusser and Nicos Poulantzas; the structural anthropology of Mary Douglas; the systems theory of Niklas Luhman; the epistemologies of Michel Foucault and Gilles Deleuze; the ontology of gender propounded by Robert O’Connell and James Messerschmidt; the attempt to establish a theory of censure by
Colin Sumner; the structuration theory of Anthony Giddens; and the civilising process of Norbert Elias. Each theory has been a vein that was mined for a while and, for the most part, abandoned and largely forgotten as the prospectors moved on to see what the next seam might yield. All this sometimes smacked of sport, of the criminologist as *homo ludens*, one who transformed intellectual inquiry into play as fashions came and went.

Consider the procession of headings and sub-headings of historical eras catalogued some four decades ago in *The New Criminology*: classical criminology and the positivist revolution; Émile Durkheim and the break with ‘analytical individualism’; social reaction, deviant commitment and career; American naturalism and phenomenology; Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels and Willem Bonger on crime and social control; and the then new conflict theorists. Consider the longer list presented thirty years later in Tierney’s *Criminology: Theory and Context* (2006), at a time when the new criminology was no longer new at all: strain theory; cultural diversity, subcultural theory; new deviancy theory; post-new deviancy theory; American conflict theory; critical criminology; phenomenology and ethnomethodology; control theory; feminist perspectives; administrative criminology; right-wing classicism; neo-positivism; radical criminology; critical criminology and left realism; postmodernist perspectives; cultural perspectives; critical perspectives . . . . One might have added African criminology, existential criminology, functionalist criminology, constitutive criminology, defiance theory, queer theory, consumerist criminology, public criminology, peacemaking criminology, routine activities theory, green (or environmental) criminology, convict criminology, conservation criminology . . . And all this neglects other accounts of other histories lying outside or before the advent of sociology. Rafter (2009), for example, would remind us of the importance of the discipline’s pre-history, of what she calls the early ‘cottage industries’ of criminology, of phrenology; theories of moral insanity; theories of evolution, degeneration and heredity; criminal anthropology; eugenic criminology and the like. She would also have us remember another criminology’s continuing parallel course in what she has called ‘stupidity theories’, and evolutionary theories, constitutional theories, biocriminology, and biological criminology.

Each *theoretical* position was typically paraded in its day as an important new beginning, something ‘cutting-edge’, a more or less dramatic break with the past and its failings, an intellectual revolution, a Lombrosian plain appearing under an inflamed horizon. Each was itself to be beset by lesser claims and counter-claims about how important but neglected *substantive* areas demanded recognition and inclusion: gender; race and ethnicity; the toxic crimes of the powerful; the forgotten role of the victim (and the list of victims eligible for consideration has grown inexorably); the problem of genocide; the matter of human rights; globalisation . . . There is, it seems, always one more important silence that criminologists have overlooked and simply *must* fill (see Hallsworth & Young, 2008).

It is not even as if this turmoil was always a product of new groups and ideas struggling for space and recognition. Many of the revolutions that they celebrated were wrought by the same small population of men and women continually re-inventing themselves, discarding their past identities, in a number of cases more than once, as they jumped chameleon-like from paradigm to paradigm and from theme to theme.

To be sure, these rather different images of criminology – a stagnant and corrupted correctionalism and empiricism; gross methodological and practical ineptitude; and the many, not uncommonly discrepant, histories of continual ferment at the bleeding edge of intellectual revolution - might all be adequate and, indeed, complementary enough for certain practical
purposes. Criminology is polyphonic and we hear what we choose to hear. Each voice stems from a particular set of experiences, purposes and expectations, and each may answer particular questions and satisfy a particular rhetoric or, indeed, polemic. Each is reasonably simple and effective. And the principle of parsimony would remind us that it is tedious and unnecessary to introduce too many caveats, details and qualifications into what we say. But the hydra-headed character of the discipline is not often acknowledged by those who write about it, preferring, as they do, simple typification, often based on the binary oppositions of new and (presumably) old, critical and (presumably) uncritical, radical and (presumably) reactionary, left and (presumably) right, positivist and nonpositivist. They do not appear to listen attentively or with much interest to one another. And they hint – and it is generally more than a hint – in a manner rather reminiscent of the hubris of Kingsley Davis (1959) some time ago, that it is intellectually indefeasible for criminologists not to be à la mode, that, whilst the fashion lasts, all right-thinking scholars must follow their lead and become symbolic interactionist, phenomenological, ethnomethodological, Foucauldian, post-Foucauldian, new, radical, critical, left, left realist, post-modernist, cultural criminologists. It is as if there was a tacit choreography laying down, de haut en bas, how the more enlightened members of the field, the intellectual vanguard, should all march together towards a common destination.

A SURVEY

In this welter of things we know we know, think we know, know we do not know, and do not know we do not know, I thought it might be worthwhile to make a tentative and probably rather clumsy incision into the recent history of our discipline to see what it might disclose. It could help to illuminate more clearly the intellectual context in which we think and act, the claims we have made, and the prospects for our future. If we do not understand the nature of the discipline we practice, we may well misread its accomplishments and potentialities, and we may be doomed to repeating its mistakes.

I have heard it said that there are criminologists of the book and criminologists of the article, and it is the criminology of the article that I shall survey here because it is easier to pursue. No doubt a criminology of the book would reveal other matters, but, for the sake of simplicity, I have looked at a number of journals over the years, starting with that pivotal stage in the mid-1960s, to explore what it is we have been saying and how we have said it.

Any classification cannot but be crude and inexact, and my tools have been blunt. Many articles explore multiple themes and cannot easily be pinned down on the procrustean bed of a one-dimensional typology. It is particularly difficult to differentiate, on the one hand, between a theoretically-informed criminology which is directed at substantive analysis, and, on the other, the exposition of theory qua theory. These things tend to be a matter of degree because theory – explicit or sotto voce - always points to the selection of empirical problems and informs how they are to be approached. But criminologists do from time to time clearly advertise that they should be understood as championing, expounding, attacking and examining some theory or theorist that they are treating the theory as a topic rather than as a resource, and I was willing to be guided by their claims. In practice, it did not prove very hard to place, say, this announcement (which I took to be targeted at Foucault, the theorist):

*This paper arises out of an attempt to formulate a series of questions with which to approach research on the history of criminology in Britain. It begins by questioning some aspects of Michel Foucault's influential characterization of criminology as a disciplinary knowledge which serves to legitimize and extend modern penal power. It*
then proceeds to suggest an alternative approach which retains key elements of Foucault's analysis but places these within a wider framework of inquiry (Garland, 1992, p. 403).

This article presents a critique of Michel Foucault's work during the middle and later periods of his scholarship and the notions of preventative control that arise therefrom. A number of important deficiencies in Foucault's theories are demonstrated, which limit the efficacy of a Foucauldian approach as a basis for critical engagement with contemporary penality. Particularly, Foucault’s formulations offer scant resources for understanding the affective dimensions of penality, and particularly the significance of the weight of the past to the insecurities and popular vengeful moralism of today (Valier, 2001, p. 425).

The Jesness Inventory . . . was designed to help classify types of delinquents, predict social and personality problems and assess change over a relatively short period. The test consists of ten scales and a derived predictive score, the Asocial Index. The claim that the test provides a sensitive and valid measure of deviant personality has stimulated considerable interest in Britain. A recent review . . . concluded that there was good evidence to suggest that four of the scales (social maladjustment, value orientation, alienation and manifest aggression) are related to deviant personality among British delinquents (Harrison et al., 1978, p. 387).

Along with the growing complexity of Soviet society has come a greater diversification of official measures aimed at juvenile delinquents. The trained personnel, supporting institutions and clinics which treat delinquent children, can be grouped into two broad categories. Educational measures are applied to all 14-16 year-olds and those 17 and 18 year-olds who are guilty of the most minor types of crimes, such as hooliganism (disorderly conduct in a public place), petty theft and vandalism. Punishments for such cases come under the competence of the commissions on the affairs of juveniles (Hinners, 1973, p. 218).

“The article is concerned with the way in which a masseuse forms her self-identity. The labelling perspective will be used to highlight that formation because it is necessary to show the processes through which her self-image is built” (Velarde, 1975, p. 251).

And, even if there was occasional clumsiness in classification procedures, I conjectured that some effort was better than none - a rough sketch being preferable to no sketch at all.

There was yet another difficulty. The articles did not, as it were, emanate by parthenogenesis from the brow of the criminologist-author: it would certainly be helpful to know more about the impact of changes in editorial regimes and reviewing conventions. More important still may have been the effect of the proliferation of new journals dedicated to cadet branches of the discipline: policing, victims and the media, homicide and the like, which could
well have sifted articles into specialist publications. One of the first editors of one such journal, *Criminology and Criminal Justice*, Tim Newburn, told me that ‘The publisher had established, roughly contemporaneously, a journal devoted entirely to theory (*Theoretical Criminology*) and also *Punishment and Society*, both of which no doubt had an impact’ (personal communication). I have tried to accommodate that impact in what is to come, although I would not pretend that the exercise I describe can lead to any firm conclusions, and I can rehearse most of the objections which might be made about the validity of its methods. Still, it cannot but be helpful to dispel some of the fog that besets us.

Let me begin with *The British Journal of Criminology*, probably the most venerable journal in our field in this country. I am not the first to survey its contents. Martin Wright did so forty years ago when the journal celebrated its twentieth birthday. He examined nearly a thousand articles published between 1950 and 1970. Over the period, comparing the first decade with the second, Wright (1970, p. 379) noted a modest increase in the small number of papers on the recognisably sociological theories of deviance and *anomie* (from 1 to 7), the only such theories to be listed by name. But it clear that they were overshadowed by other, largely unspecified forms of work on the functioning of institutions and on typologies of offence and offender.\(^\text{16}\) The empiricist charge seems to have had substance, but Wright’s work needs to be extended in time and amplified in detail before it begins to elucidate the particular questions which I wish to put.

*The British Journal of Delinquency*, the original incarnation of *The British Journal of Criminology*, was launched in 1950 by a consortium based at the Institute for the Study and Treatment of Delinquency, and it was intended to be a kind of criminological almanac which would not only publish learned articles, but also “book reviews, abstracts of papers, papers and journals not readily accessible, a calendar of existing or projected researches, a survey of current activities in different regions, and a record of administrative policies or changes in policy” (Editorial Announcement, 1950, p. 1). Twenty years later, looking back, Edward Glover (1970, p. 314) reflected that it had started out “with the modest if nationalistic aim of providing a quarterly news-letter for what in Britain was as yet an unshriven criminology”. That role as almanac and intelligencer remained pronounced throughout the early years. The preponderance of articles was taken up with reports of administrative, legal and policy changes in the criminal justice system in the United Kingdom and beyond, and it is remarkable how many British criminologists who would later make their mark as theorists cut their teeth on the writing of fairly straightforward descriptions of practical reforms and innovations. So it was that Roger Hood and Ian Taylor (1968) collaborated on a ‘study of the effect of pre-sentence investigations in reducing recidivism’; Keith Hawkins (1973) reported parole procedure; and Richard Sparks senior (1973) the enforcement of fines.

The tables that follow track the progress of the most significant thematic categories over a forty five year period, and a number of trends are evident. Reviews of administrative, legal and policy changes were once predominant\(^\text{17}\) and they have steadily declined (and the decline is even more apparent in Table 1a when the numbers of reviews are expressed as percentages of the growing volume of papers published in the journal – particularly after its expansion from four to six issues a year in 2004). There was a similar decline in the reports of empiricist research and offender typologies untouched by overt theorising,\(^\text{18}\) and in reports of psychiatric and psychological assessments of offenders and offending behaviour. They have been replaced by a modest rise in an interest in a spread of theoretically-informed, substantive areas of enquiry, including victims and victimisation, prompted largely by the emergence of crime surveys at the end of the 1970s and beginning of the 1980s;\(^\text{19}\) studies of the social
organisation of offending, linked particularly with the work of people like Richard Wright and Dick Hobbs; by studies of the social organisation of the prison, linked to the work of Richard Sparks junior and Alison Liebling; studies of the social organisation of the police and policing, linked to the work of Nigel Fielding, Martin Innes, Robert Reiner, Clifford Shearing, Tank Waddington and others; restorative justice linked to the work of John Braithwaite; and so on. Theorising, as an expressly focused activity, grew over the four decades, but the growth of theorising was not spectacular, and, unless it was the object of a special issue, as Stan Cohen’s idea of moral panic was to be in January 2009, no single episode of theory-making and theoretical debate proved to be substantial or long-lasted. The sheer abundance of bids to launch paradigmatic revolutions brought it about that theorising manifested itself in a succession of tiny bursts which petered out rather quickly to succeed or fail in its effort to become absorbed into the body of substantive analysis which appears to characterise British criminology proper.

An inspection of the contents of the British Journal of Criminology does not therefore make it possible to award authority to any of the competing images of British criminology which I have listed: administrative, correctionalist and empiricist criminologies are not on the rise, but in marked decline; theorising, rather than being a grand parade, is but a succession of small sputtering; and the major effort expended by the discipline has dwelt ever more intensively on the theoretically informed study of a cluster of substantive areas: chiefly gender, victims, policing and the social organisation of offending (Refer to Tables 1-9 below).
Table 2: British Journal of Criminology

'Positivist' articles

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<td>Articles</td>
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<td>15</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>5</td>
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</table>

Table 3: British Journal of Criminology

Psychiatric & Psychological Papers (%)

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<th></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Therapeutics</td>
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<td>15</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Psychoanalysis</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Psychiatry</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Psychology</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>5</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Lest these conclusions reflect no more than the peculiarities of a single, generalist journal, it seemed sensible next to turn to two other, rather different, publications. I shall look first at *Criminology and Criminal Justice*, a periodical established in 2001 with the object of seeking:

> . . . to provide a forum in which the best scholarship will be brought to bear on criminal justice policy and practice. We seek to engage with a wide range of academic work. . . . We hope that Criminal Justice [the original title] will provide a forum for a broader and more critical involvement in policy and practice issues (Mair & Newburn, 2001, p.5).
Table 5: British Journal of Criminology
Some Substantive Themes II (%)

Table 6: British Journal of Criminology
Some Substantive Themes III (%)
It is apparent that in a tacit apportioning of the ground, the journal did succeed in encouraging the submission of scholarly studies of what the first editors called ‘policy and practice issues’ (although that emphasis remains on all fours with the wider British criminological focus on substantive analyses of crime and social control). There were no articles expressly and solely given over to criminological theory in what was a journal avowedly devoted to applied issues, but there was an abundance of analyses of gender, policing, victimisation, the social organization of offending, and restorative justice just as there had been in the *British Journal of Criminology* (Refer to Table 10 below).
Table 9: British Criminology
Some Specimen Theoretical Themes II (%)

Table 10: Criminology & Criminal Justice
Principal Themes
Lastly, and for contrast, consider a decade of articles published in *Theoretical Criminology*, the journal given over to:

. . . the advancement of the theoretical aspects of criminological knowledge. The journal is committed to renewing general theoretical debate, exploring the interrelation of theory and data in empirical research and advancing the links between criminological analysis and general social and political theory. 30

(Refer to Tables 11 – 12 below).

**Table 11: Theoretical Criminology**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Life course</td>
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<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Restorative Justice</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Policing</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Policy and research</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Governmentality</td>
<td>2</td>
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**Table 12: Theoretical Criminology**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Principal Themes II</th>
<th>2000-2004</th>
<th>2005-2009</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Case Study</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Globalisation</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gottfredson</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotion</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Genocide</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Penalty</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Risk</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anomie theor</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Note the reference to ‘the interrelation of theory and data in empirical research’. Even in an explicitly theoretical journal, that also permeated the most frequently occurring themes. There were no administrative reports, but the bulk of articles again reproduced theorising through the medium of empirical reports on the criminology of gender, restorative justice and the like. There was also a thinly scattering of papers over a proliferation of themes: four on ‘left idealism’, three of which were centred on an exchange following an attack (Cottee, 2002) on the alleged use of the term by Jock Young and Stan Cohen; two each on Michel Foucault, Norbert Elias and post-modernism; and one each on a long catalogue of topics that included human rights, control theory, psychoanalysis, and the work of Anthony Giddens and Émile Durkheim. Here too, in an ecumenical journal which promised “to be broad and inclusive, embracing the wide diversity of thinking within criminology” (http://www.uk.sagepub.com/journalsProdDesc.nav?prodId=Journal200923), there were very few pronounced concentrations of wholly theoretical interest.

CONCLUSION

So what, in sum, does this review amount to? The conclusions are not extraordinary, and I might well have been able to anticipate them. Yet they have not to my knowledge been given much prominence before, and they do seem to run counter to some of the stories we tell about ourselves. British criminology - and the criminology published in British journals which becomes part of British criminology – has moved significantly from its earlier heavy emphasis on intelligence about policy developments and therapeutic interventions, and that is a move that reflects the changing professional engrossments of its practitioners, now preponderantly based in the academy. It is grounded in diverse explorations of a small cluster of features constitutive of the empirical world of crime and control. Theorising as a self-conscious pursuit may be more or less pronounced in those explorations, and it can be practised with sophistication, but its vehicle does remain ineluctably empirical. It could not be otherwise: theorising as a disembodied practice is difficult to accomplish and appreciably rare. Moreover, the theorising that does occur cannot be represented in terms of broad, consensual sweeps of thought that clearly succeed one another over time. Rather, it seems to take the guise of a multitude of ever smaller voices all more or less speaking at once, none attaining clear dominance, leading to no clear prospect of scientific progress in any discernible direction.

The empirical character of British criminology must certainly invite reflection about the kind of science that we are developing. There are those who might wish it to be otherwise, but it does seem, in Nicky Rafter’s words, to discourage the view that the trajectory of criminology “resemble[s] [that of] the hard sciences, which aim at making progress, testing theories, and growing stronger theoretically over time, hoping to turn criminology into more of a hard science”. She adds that that is, “an impossible aim [for criminology and the social sciences], in my view, since they have to contend with constant change over time--and with time itself” (personal communication). Ours is not a steady march of progress but an untidy meander, not a discipline of orthodoxies and dogmatics but of pluralism, diversity and hybridity. Kenneth Burke once observed that “a way of seeing is always a way of not seeing” (1935, p. 70). Social phenomena are open to numberless analytic incisions, each revealing some facets and concealing others, and an insistence on any sovereign method, or cluster of methods, cannot but cramp understanding. Instead of one royal route to knowledge, British criminology abounds in alternatives, available, intentionally or unintentionally, to be tailored to different purposes. And that is, after all, the standard format adopted by the idiographic wing of all the
Merging the theoretical with the empirical, drawing on a variety of standpoints, British criminology has proved to be lively, fertile and, indeed, pragmatic. David Downes observed:

*British criminology has been more engaged than any other, and over a wider array of topics. A great deal of research feeds the penal reform groups and indeed the more reasoning parts of the Home Office. Useful work has been done on almost every area of criminal justice life. For those who care to look, British criminology is stuff[ed] full of insights into what we used to call social problems. Think of Dick Hobbs [and his colleagues’ work] on city centre drink-fuelled unruliness. Ethnography has flourished. I think we've earned our keep* (Personal communication).

And that is no bad verdict.

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Times. *British Journal of Criminology, 40*(2), 189-204.
Plummer, K. (1979). Misunderstanding Labelling Perspectives. In D. Downes, & D. Rock,
Acta Criminologica 24(1) 2011

(Eds.). *Deviant Interpretation*, Oxford: Martin Robertson, 85-121.

ENDNOTES

1 I would like to thank David Downes, Tim Newburn and Nicky Rafter for their most helpful comments on earlier drafts of this paper.
2 Emeritus Professor of Sociology, London School of Economics and Visiting Professor of Criminology, University of Pennsylvania.
3 Carrabine and his colleagues remarked that ‘hidden within [criminology] there come many different topics, different approaches to ‘science’ and different disciplines’ (2004, p. 3).
The preponderance of articles he reported focused on a miscellaneous category called criminology, described rather broadly as crime (statistics), studies of offenders and the like (379); a penology that included studies of institutions and of offenders’ characteristics (205); and the administration of justice (67); abnormal psychology (80); psychiatry and therapy (37). Social sciences, again defined very broadly, were represented by 79 articles.
on ‘attitudes, public opinion, deviance, anomie, families, parental separation, etc.; education, employment, etc; and children’. His Table III, not shown here in its completeness, gives a rank ordering of subject areas. It is again rather too widely conceived for my purposes, but it does convey some important features of what appeared:

Subject categories in order of frequency of occurrence 1950-70

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Juvenile delinquents, delinquency</td>
<td>110</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Institutions for juveniles</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Criminology</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prisons, imprisonment</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Offenders, recidivists</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Psychiatry, therapy</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classification, prediction. Typologies</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Probation and after-care</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Juvenile, family courts</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social work</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Psychoneuroses, behaviour disorders, etc.</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Law, legislation, etc</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Psychology</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social sciences, social factors</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

17 Early examples include the reprinting of an address by Sir Joseph Simpson, the then Commissioner of Metropolitan Police: ‘The Police and Juvenile Delinquency’ (1968); and a report by Lord Kilbrandon on ‘The Scottish Reforms’ (1968). Intelligence was sometimes brought home from foreign expeditions. In 1971, for instance, there was a report of how ‘with the enactment of [the new] Juveniles’ Law . . . in 1962, the Republic of Iraq demonstrated her acceptance of the value of protection, treatment and rehabilitation in dealing with juveniles accused and/or convicted of acts punishable by areas of graded responsibility and penalties based entirely upon age. During 1965 and 1966, the authors were in the Republic of Iraq and were able to gather impartial data relevant to the effectiveness of this new law . . . ’ (Chambers & Barker, 1971, p. 176).

18 A fairly representative instance was based on a methodology which consisted of ‘Data concerning previous convictions, height and weight [being] extracted from official records. All other information was obtained from the prisoner himself by means of a standard questionnaire without reference to other sources, as the latter were found to vary considerably in volume, detail and ultimate origin. The questionnaire was devised with the aim of obtaining the maximum of factual information compatible with simplicity of calibration and ease of administration’ (Griffiths & Rundle, 1976, p. 353). Many studies counted anything that was within reach. There was, for example, an interesting, albeit brief, spate of interest in tattoos, measured and compared, one imagines, simply because they were there. See McKerracher and Watson (1969) and A. Taylor (1968). ‘A Search Among Borstal Girls for the Psychological and Social Significance of their Tattoos’, British Journal of Criminology, April 1968; Vol. 8, 170 - 185.

19 But also by Mike Maguire’s pioneering article on the impact of burglary (1980).

20 For technical reasons, the labelling of the columns in Table 10 is a little obscure: the first displays studies of policing; the second administrative, theoretically-innocent reports of policy and legal developments; the third of offender resettlement; the fourth – enlarged by the publication of a special issue – gun control; the fifth, evaluation studies; the sixth socio-legal studies, chiefly of sentencing practice; the seventh studies of the social organisation of offending; the eighth, self-report studies; and the ninth studies of victimisation.

xx I am grateful to Tim Newburn for this point.

xxi At a joint British Academy/Oxford University Press panel discussion on Writing National History, taking place on 4th March 2010, for instance, Sir Brian Harrison likened history to a joint of meat that could be carved in numerous ways, and Linda Colley, in a slightly less pungent simile (at least to a vegetarian), likened it to a number of different lenses through which the past could be seen. They did not entertain the idea of what Colley called ‘one hegemonic narrative’.