

Two days ago, on April 8, I received the news of the death of Roger Matthews who would end up suffering the deadly contagion of the coronavirus. I immediately had a shock, produced in the form of memories that mixed different times when I met him. Trying to put my own memory in order, I can recall the early years of the Common Study Programme on Criminal Justice and Critical Criminology which, under the auspices of Louk Hulsman (from Rotterdam), Alessandro Baratta (from Saarbrücken), Jock Young (from London), Patrick Hebberecht (from Ghent), Massimo Pavarini (from Bologna) - all of whom died in recent years - together with Roberto Bergalli and Juan Bustos (the latter also disappeared) from the University of Barcelona and also from the Autonomous University of Barcelona, constituted that wonderful intellectual and academic movement of political and cultural commitment. Saying what I have just said, and writing down all those names, gives me a feeling of deep concern that I cannot conceal. These were the years in which a strong awareness of study, research and intellectual demand was undoubtedly forged, which would mark me (us) for an entire generation in a definitive way.

The first "course" of that European Program of Common Studies (the quotes refer to the informality that characterized it, but also to the extreme demand that the aforementioned teachers made on us), began around 1985, with the first Common Session in Sermoneta (Italy), truly unforgettable. The initial critical criminology of the previous decade gradually gave way in its debates to an authentic sociology of penal control, in words closer to us, to me, as were the denominations that Baratta, Pavarini, Bustos and Bergalli adopted for this area of knowledge.

Three fundamental debates opened up in the Common Sessions that rotated every six months in the European cities mentioned above, where those teachers met. The Nordic "abolitionists" (which included other academics such as Herman Bianchi, Thomas Mathiesen, Sebastian Scheerer and other then young teachers such as René van Swaaningen and John Blad in the Netherlands), the supporters of a "diritto penale minimo" (which especially brought together other young people from the south of Europe, as Amadeu Recasens, Elena Larrauri, Encarna Bodelón, Héctor Silveira and myself) and the British cultural universe framed in "left realism" represented not only by Jock Young, but also by John Lea and Roger Matthews.

Discussions between the leaderships of the critical criminology movement at that time were frequent, and at times extremely intense, around the categories that questioned rigid, dogmatic and positivist criminal and criminological knowledge. The debates on categories such as crime, deviance, social control, prison, the drug problem, immigration, violence against women and the culture of criminal exceptionality acquired a force that called us, young students at that time (and immediately responsible for teaching tasks), to various tasks: classes, seminars, discussions, first translations of texts into other languages, writing papers and public

presentations. But above all, at least in my case, I was fascinated by the debates of that critical thinking in action, in its theoretical production and in its political practice. The commitment to the reality to be transformed was very high, there was no dissociation between private and public life, cultural and academic militancy was a whole, or at least I perceived it as such (and I know very well that I was not the only one). On the other hand, the atmosphere of human and sentimental relations was deeply fraternal (sometimes to the point of excess!).

Roger Matthews was part of that movement, but different, as always as he was represented, at least for some of us: different in a way from the continental area. The move from idealism to British (left-wing) realism was often criticised by the Marxist section of the movement, which accused him (with great affection) of giving in to bourgeois pretensions of European social democracy. Jock Young and Roger Matthews tried to sustain the strength of the "realistic" arguments by pointing out the need to put up a strong resistance to Margaret Thatcher's hard years in the United Kingdom and maintaining the validity of an analysis with a more micro social dimension (heir to the labelling approach of the current symbolic interactionism), as opposed to the macro dimension that another sector of that critical movement wanted to continue presenting in its continental dimension. Roger was clearly in the first category indicated, and the discussions were heated. But in our eyes, or at least in mine, this reflected a wealth of content and a liveliness in the exhibitions and discussions that I miss so much in these years of poor or weak thinking that has settled in the university institution, especially in the field of a criminology that today only presents a technical, pragmatic or administrative image.

With Roger we were always united (even though we had many intellectual disagreements) by the scope of what we called a "critical penology", possibly due to a healthy influence of Massimo Pavarini.

When, a few years later, he published his *Doing Time. An introduction to the Sociology of Imprisonment*, I immediately conceived the idea of translating it and publishing it in Spain under the title "Pagando tiempo" (thanks to the acceptance of Edicions Bellaterra) and it became an important volume that was also widely accepted in Latin America. Time made that with Roger and other colleagues from Portugal (Antonio Pedro Dore), Barcelona (Mónica Aranda) and Italy (Patrizio Gonnella from the association Antigone), we worked on other European projects and could conceive the birth of the European Prison Observatory that today is a reality that examines and compares the prison systems of various European countries in an extremely rigorous way.

In recent decades Roger Matthews has strongly embraced Jock Young's legacy of strengthening a critical criminology characteristic of British left-wing realism. In Argentina, thanks to Editorial Didot, his *Realistic Criminology* was translated and published. As Iñaki Anitua has so aptly pointed out, left-wing realism was still there, in Roger's work and production of recent years. As Anitua wrote (in the OSPDH's journal *Crítica Penal y Poder*, no. 11, 2016), "for leftist realism, and its plan for inclusion and pacification, it is necessary to recover

ROGER MATTHEWS, *In memoriam*
A realist, sociological, and critical criminology



tools that reduce the materiality of crime, also using the institutions of the criminal system. Particularly the police, which is no longer seen only as a repressive apparatus but also as a credible ally and defendant for those sectors doubly harmed: by the absence of the State and by crime. This is necessary above all to prevent the manipulation of the criminological right that offers itself as the defender of victims and of "law and order". For this enormous task it was necessary to turn the critical criminology itself upside down, and this is what these authors produced some thirty years ago."

In the recovery work that another great British criminologist (Pat Carlen) has done on the authors of left-wing realism, it is worth remembering here the words of Jock Young, teacher and colleague of Roger Matthews, to those who have criticised the critical direction of criminology so much. The great Scottish maestro pointed out:

*"I firmly believe that critical criminology is more relevant now than ever before and that the critical attitude fits in with the experience of late modernity...We are privileged to be able to work in a field that investigates the fundamental dissociations of justice extended to all links of the social order, a field for irony and dispute, for vituperation and transgression. Those who seek to marginalize critical criminology fail to understand its importance in social reality. Those in our field of study who pretend to despise the word "critique" and reduce it to the sectarian or esoteric fail to understand the central position of critique in countering neoliberalism and its forms of discursive control. So, let's get to work, without forgetting the imperative need to oppose, let's always analyse with an ironic and satirical look the strange ramblings of the "data-ours" and their sad scientific farce represented in front of us. But above all, let us always bear in mind the creativity inherent in human culture, the emotional and sentimental impetus that constitutes us as humans and the capacity for imagination that it engenders and that it demands (Jock Young, *The criminological imagination*)*

Without a doubt, these great British masters were able to explore in a Criminology with deep sociological roots something that in Spain has not been allowed to the detriment of the discipline itself that has had so much success in other cultures. The "realism" of Roger Matthews provoked not a few discussions, also with me. However, they never prevented our personal relationship and our professional work from being guided by a deep respect that I can evoke today. We will always have his life, his works and an intellectual honesty that characterizes a true criminologist.

Roger, rest in peace.

Iñaki Rivera Beiras, April 10, 2020