Crime and Investigative Reporting in the UK

Lucia Virostková

Reporting on crime requires specific skills and knowledge on the part of journalists. Whether they are breaking the news with only scarce details from the police due to a pending investigation, gathering more facts from witnesses and acquaintances of victims/culprits of the criminal offence, or covering court trials, reporters must prevent misinformation and various types from influencing how they update their audience in a fair and impartial manner.

The book *Crime and Investigative Reporting in the UK* by Marianne Colbran provides a complex evaluation of the changing patterns in communication channels between the British police, media, and public, as well as of the working practices in different types of media when reporting crime. Although a significant part of the monograph reflects on the specific features of the British media system and communication by law enforcement organisations, it also offers rich insight for journalism scholars and practitioners on a general level.

In her introductory outline of the reasons for studying crime news, Colbran reminds readers how amazed Charles Dickens was at the almost perverse interest of the public in stories from prisons or about criminals sentenced to death and highlights the key argument suggested by several scholars: *"Knowledge and preferences about policing and crime are, for most people, shaped by the mass media rather than through personal experience"* (p. 5). Therefore, the media image of the police, its representatives, and their activities tends to influence the prism through which we see the overall state of society. The author's personal objective is to explain the social processes behind the production and setting of crime news in the UK over the past 40 years, but her findings are relevant and applicable in studies of crime reporting in other liberal democracies.

As Colbran acknowledges, the theoretical discourse framing this area of research resonates between advocates of the liberal pluralist (classical liberal) theory and control paradigm (Marxist) theory and is focused on the issue of who controls crime news, the definite narrative of the events and whose voice is under-represented or completely missing. Previous studies indicated that the relationship between the police and the press is asymmetric in favour of the police. Conversely, recent research points to a more diverse nature of police-media-public relations and their adjustments as a consequence of concrete events in the UK, as well as in the context of the global development of digital communication technologies.

The empirical research offered by the book spanned from 2012 to 2020 when the author carried out personal observations of working practices in four national newspapers and conducted more than 60 interviews with senior police officers, press officers, editors and journalists to document the changing conditions in the production of crime news in 'traditional' and contemporary settings. Based on their analysis, she argues that while modern technologies have weakened the role of journalists as a 'bridge' between police and the public, innovative digital tools have contributed to the emergence of non-profit news organisations dedicated to investigative journalism that represent *"a new and more complex network of 'bridges' that form between new journalism start-ups, news sources, legacy media organisations and the public"*. As a result, new platforms developed the investigative method that she calls a "storytelling island", based on the use of big data and the technique of *"reporting with communities rather than about them"*, which consequently achieved a *"reduction of representational harm to marginalised and stigmatised communities in their work"* (p. 15-16).

In Chapter 2, Colbran refers to the intensive cooperation between media and police in the 'golden era' of the pre-Internet (1950s – 1960s) with the celebrity-like status of crime reporters and their friendly relationships with detectives. She pointed out that media access was never guaranteed despite attempts by police officials to take an open stance with journalists, and above all avoid the potentially harmful consequences of being misquoted. She identified a set of strategies of power which the police had adopted, such as proactively planning procedures for communicating on future emergencies, pre-emptively revealing bad news to limit harmful reporting, and giving access to sensitive operations to journalists to prevent dangerous leaks (p. 44).

In Chapters 3 and 4, the author describes the significant transformation in the police-press agreement after the revelations of police malpractice and corruption scandals and the general shift in the 1980s from crime reporting almost exclusively by tabloid newspapers to the coverage of 'home affairs' and reports by 'legal correspondents' from broadsheets and the BBC. Subsequently, reporter-police contacts became less accessible and general coverage of police matters became *"increasingly critical"* (p. 49). As is apparent from the responses of her respondents, reporters in the UK followed two cultures of journalism, in accordance with the concept introduced by Ericson et al.: 1) 'inner circle' reporters who work primarily for popular news outlets and cooperate with the police on an everyday basis; 2) more detached 'outer circle' (investigative) journalists who often disclosed police inefficiency and abuse, very rarely having police as their primary source of stories.[1] She pointed to the two groups' different working methods and negotiating power. Finally, Colbran adds a detailed historical background of the 2011 phone-hacking scandal of the *News of the World* weekly tabloid and the consequent restrictions introduced almost overnight in all formal police/press relations (p. 68).

Chapter 5 is dedicated to a highly pressing issue in the UK and beyond: the effect of social media on press/police relations and crime reporting. The author argues that the use of these information channels further weakened the role of journalists as the bridge between police and the public, while the power of the press and of the public to hold the police to account through digital technologies has proved to be limited (p. 90). The survey among journalists reflects their awareness of the phenomenon. However, some younger respondents highlight the possibilities of crowding from new sources and the benefits of 'sousveillance' practiced by members of the public when sending their mobile phone footage and other evidence of police incompetence or aggression to journalists. From the police point of view, Colbran notes that, along with the benefits in the form of positive news dissemination and trust building through social media, *"it also poses serious problems in terms of inaccurate reporting, obstruction of police work, and the potential to compromise investigations"* (p. 112).

In Chapters 6 and 7, the new investigative journalism start-ups/non-profits and their impact on crime reporting and challenges to the 'traditional' journalistic norms and concepts are presented. The author outlines her evidence to prove that the practice of solution journalism and engaged journalism by the three selected examples of novel media outlets enabled: 1) challenging the mainstream crime reporting of stereotyped and under-represented communities; 2) investigating previously undercovered topics in innovative ways; and 3) exploring social issues and presenting possible solutions (p. 125). Colbran stresses that the content of crime reporting produced by start-ups differs from traditional coverage in *"giving a voice to communities generally portrayed negatively in legacy media; reporting on systemic and social harm rather than crime as a specific event, and, through the practice of transparency and publication of data used to research stories, allowing causes and effects of crime also to be brought into the crime news discourse"* (p. 156).

Finally, in Chapter 8 the research findings are summarised in the context of their theoretical frameworks and in relation to the previous academic research in this area. The author reiterates the greatly diminished ability of reporters from legacy media outlets to fulfil their role in distributing accurate and complex information on crime due to several technological and economic changes. She argues that 'legacy' crime reporters must be more critical of the system and attentive to the choice of experts quoted in their stories.

1   See: ERICSON, R. V., BARANEK, P. M., CHAN, J. B. L.: *Negotiating Control: A Study of News Sources.* Toronto : University of Toronto Press, 1989.

More openness in relations with the police is emphasised as essential and beneficial not only to journalists but also to the police themselves.

Crime and Investigative Reporting in the UK by Marianne Colbran is a valuable publication for journalism scholars and practitioners mainly due to its wide-ranging list of data from empirical research and theoretical resources. Journalists beyond the UK will identify similar structural problems in their relations with police and challenges in accessing data related to criminal investigations. They will most likely share similar experiences if working in the inner or outer circle of reporters covering crime and police affairs. Furthermore, the increasing tendency of police to communicate directly with the public through the use of social media is also apparent.

In contrast, some qualitatively different data could probably be obtained from the comparison of processes and working practices of media operating in smaller states and with incomparably less powerful media markets. Also, the democratic and rule of law aspects may prove a distinguishing factor elsewhere: e.g., in Hungary, several mainstream and public media can hardly be considered independent from undue political and government influence, with consequences for crime reporting and investigative journalism in relation to journalist contacts with the police.

Similarly, a case study of crime and investigative reporting in Slovakia analysed under the same theoretical framework and methodology as presented by Colbran would provide interesting data in areas she does not explore due to different historical and political settings in the UK. Apart from the mentioned regime- and democracy-related features applicable to the period before 1989 or during the government led by Vladimír Mečiar, the relations and communication channels between legacy media and the police in charge of the Smer-SD party nominees, and subsequently, following the parliamentary election in 2020, could indicate different challenges: conflicting interests and attempts to manipulate journalists by unofficial inside sources in the police and other state institutions, the official reaction by the government bodies and representatives against whistle-blowers or critics from inside, and against media in general.

Mgr. MA Lucia Virostková, Ph.D., Department of Journalism, Faculty of Arts, Comenius University, Gondova 2, 811 02 Bratislava, Slovak Republic
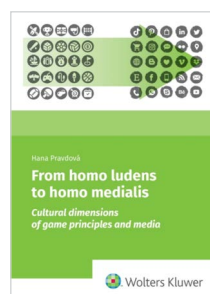
From Homo Ludens to Homo Medialis: Cultural dimensions of game principles and media

PRAVDOVÁ, H.: From Homo Ludens to Homo Medialis: Cultural Dimensions of Game Principles and Media. Prague : Wolters Kluwer, 2022. 132 p. ISBN 978-80-7676-542-9.

Veronika Šašalová

Jaroslav Švelch, one of the prominent scholars affiliated with Charles University in Prague, Czechia, declares in his study *Počítačové hry a jejich místo v mediálních studiích* that research on digital games often argues their legitimacy by mentioning the profitability of examined products and the immense capital generated by the digital games industry.[1] This also shows us why digital game studies, established in the early 1980s, has to constantly prove its validity within the academic circles, especially in Central Europe. The reviewed book *From Homo Ludens to Homo Medialis: Cultural Dimensions of Game Principles and Media* brings an original viewpoint on games in general and shows us that they have always been a part of any culture, more specifically, that they have been and still are an element that co-creates our cultural environment. In terms of digital game studies, the monograph opens up new possibilities for thinking about the field differently, beyond the standard context of media and communication studies.

The publication is not primarily intended for university students, but rather aimed at wider professional readership. The way how the author thinks about the game principles and Huizinga's discussion on the *homo ludens* principle in the context of both human history and problems of late modern society provides interdisciplinary knowledge that can further inspire cultural scientists, sociologists, psychologists or media scholars to reflect on how and why media products such as digital games are created, distributed and consumed.

The book is divided into three chapters. The first part is titled *Homo Ludens as Co-Creator of Culture* and looks at Huizinga's term *homo ludens*, examining it as a part of what *homo sapiens* means. The chapter shows why creative and playful thinking is necessary in terms of any successful adaptation strategies and how it has accompanied the human being since the very beginnings of evolution. She concludes that *"the need to celebrate, play cult games and break out of every day life is its anthropological constant"*,[2] a statement which the author further develops in the chapter called *Cult Game Rituals in the Context of Creating Entertaining Media Culture*. This part focuses on the phenomenon of "cult games", their development and changes from the ancient times to the Middle Ages. We can observe the change of cult games that have transformed from transcendental forms to pure entertainment, cruelty and bloody spectacles, which also explains how the human body was presented during different periods of time.

The author explains these transformations based on different perceptions of entertainment, communication and culture preferred by Ancient Greeks, Ancient Romans and medieval people. Applying the game principles to individual time periods provides us with a reason why the various forms of *ludi,* from Olympic games, through gladiator clashes to medieval carnivals or even Shakespeare's plays, were so popular and widely accepted, even demanded by their audiences.

Caillois's observation related to the game principles is further explored in relation to media in the last chapter titled *The Magic of Game in Media Culture*, along with the relationship between games and art culture. The author shows how the media were an equally important part of the human development and states that this is why we can observe a transformation from *homo ludens* to *homo medialis*. According to the author, this transformation can also be observed in the development of games and the existence and popularity of digital games, which we can only agree with. However, the term *homo medialis* appears almost exclusively in the last chapter, while the concept of *homo ludens* is anchored and analysed from different perspectives throughout the whole text. *Homo medialis* and their specifics merge with the description of a person living in the playful late modern era. The term itself appears in the text for the first time close to the conclusion; thus, until the reader finishes the entire book, it is hard to see the true difference between *homo medialis* and a person who could, based on how the prefix 'hyper-' is being used nowadays, also be ironically called *hyper-homo ludens*.

Nevertheless, it can be seen that the author's conclusions about the participation of both *homo ludens* and *homo medialis* in the creation of culture are based on a set of sensitive observations of (not only) the current state of culture. Many conclusions like *"It turns out that the game in its digital version has outgrown the boundaries of game environment and became part of complex of media world and the players' lived reality"*[3]

1   ŠVELCH, J.: Počítačové hry a jejich místo v mediálních studiích. In *Pražské sociálně vědní studie: Mediální řada (MED-009)*, 2007, p. 1–49.
2   PRAVDOVÁ, H.: *From Homo Ludens to Homo Medialis: Cultural Dimensions of Game Principles and Media*. Prague : Wolters Kluwer, 2022, p. 39.
3   PRAVDOVÁ, H.: *From Homo Ludens to Homo Medialis: Cultural Dimensions of Game Principles and Media*. Prague : Wolters Kluwer, 2022, p. 118.

are the very same ideas that have even been defined by the players inside their own subculture as a celebratory manifesto of their preferred medium. Zimmerman and Chaplin created the *Manifesto for a Ludic Century* to defend gamers who have long been frowned upon within society. The manifesto was first released as a web article, and later re-released as a chapter in a monograph. The authors state that *"increasingly, the ways that people spend their leisure time and consume art, design, and entertainment will be games – or experiences very much like games".*[4] The mentioned confirmation of the author's conclusions that originates outside the academic environment, created by the players themselves, i.e., by those who contemplate and celebrate a certain way of life, only underlines the fact that the reviewed book offers important insights into our general understanding of the current state of the world and the timeless processes of cultural evolution visible throughout the ages.

Mgr. Veronika Šašalová, Faculty of Mass Media Communication, University of Ss. Cyril and Methodius in Trnava, Nám. J. Herdu 2, 917 01 Trnava, Slovak Republic
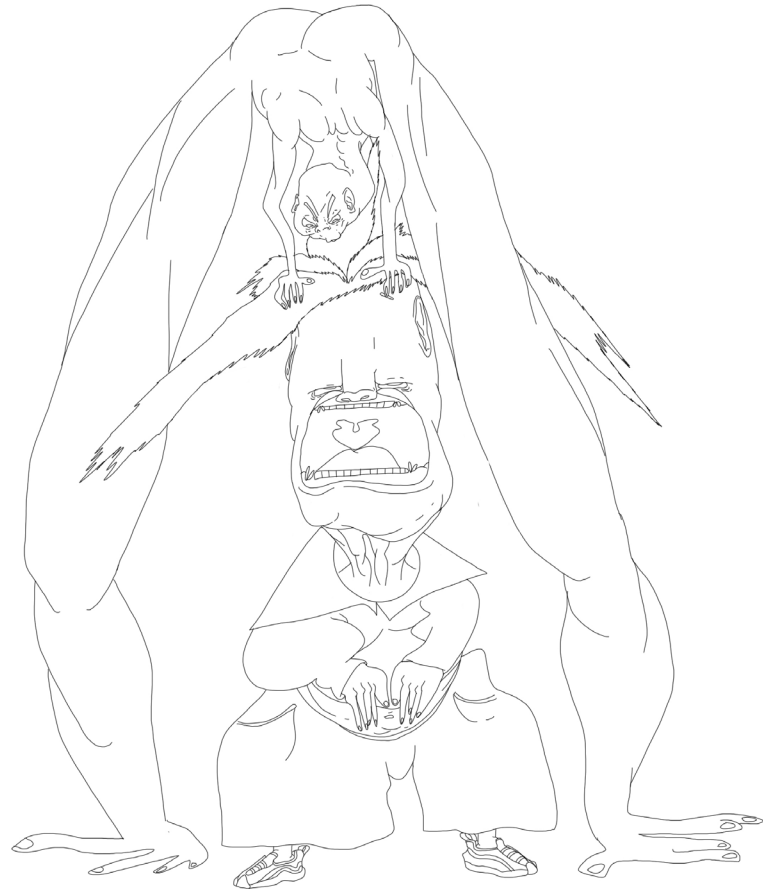
4   CHAPLIN, H., ZIMMERMAN, E.: *Manifesto: The 21ˢᵗ Century Will Be Defined by Games*. [online]. [2023-04-11]. Available at: <https://kotaku.com/manifesto-the-21st-century-will-be-defined-by-games-1275355204>.

A Consideration on the Impact of Artificial Intelligence on Society

Michal Kubovics

The world has received a fundamental innovation since the days of the Internet and search engines; we are witnessing the arrival of artificial intelligence. At present, the topic of artificial intelligence is a highly resolved sphere in the scientific, educational and commercial spheres. The development of artificial intelligence is in many ways with an exponential growth tendency and regularly, every day, artificial intelligence systems are refined and improved. The areas of coverage for artificial intelligence are practically unlimited. In particular, areas that can be automated, from healthcare to education, can be made more efficient thanks to tools using artificial intelligence. We are currently witnessing the integration of artificial intelligence into our daily lives. At the same time, artificial intelligence systems are constantly being improved and range from simple to more advanced and intelligent. For both the scientific and practical spheres, it will be necessary to consider their impact on the whole of society, and the consequences and possibilities of the best possible methods of integration.

Simply put, artificial intelligence is a certain type of computer system that, after entering commands, can perform certain tasks that have been performed by humans for most of the time, such as speech recognition, visual perception, translation into a specific language, decision-making, text writing, etc. In connection with artificial intelligence, various algorithms are currently being experimented with, which include certain statistical models that are improved and innovated over time. The current state of artificial intelligence brings various connections between algorithms, neural networks, deep and machine learning. Another important division is the division into weak and strong artificial intelligence. Weak, narrow or specialised AI aims to perform specific and specialised tasks. Strong, which also carries the label 'general' artificial intelligence, can solve any given problem. It should be noted that general artificial intelligence is an ideal that has not yet been achieved, but there are predictions pointing towards it.

There are many possibilities of using artificial intelligence. It is currently used in medical devices for diagnosing diseases and defining specific personalised treatment plans, or in the overall process of education across multiple disciplines. At the same time, coverage is found in improving customer service, where there can be a communication process that has the potential to be automated in repetitive tasks. Thanks to this, costs in the given industry can be reduced. On the other hand, it is appropriate to think critically about the negatives that artificial intelligence can bring. The dreaded change is supposed to bring modification of jobs, where artificial intelligence can make work easier for many employees, since a significant part of the tasks can be processed through artificial intelligence. In the future, however, we can expect certain jobs to be replaced, and thus this may lead to economic inequality and social unrest. Another possibility is the creation of prejudice and discrimination, which can support the influence of opinion and the creation of hoaxes. Therefore, it is extremely important to design and program artificial intelligence systems in a related symbiosis with ethical aspects that will reflect transparency, accountability, impartiality and society as a whole. Another significant problem that arises is the creation and dissemination of false information and the overall development of automated systems that can support it. It is also important to note that machine learning is based on processing so-called big data in the form of extensive data packages, which may contain false information. It should also be noted that the algorithm that produces the resulting outputs may define false information or create non-existent

conclusions based on input and comparison. For this reason, it would be highly desirable to pay attention to the collective improvement of the algorithm by marking positive or negative feedback and ensuring high-quality data packages. Furthermore, it is a solution to replacing jobs, which can be resolved through education and training programs that prepare workers for specific jobs or retraining. In addition, artificial intelligence makes it possible to augment human skills by increasing productivity in various industries.

Artificial intelligence can automate repetitive tasks, which can allow people to better focus on more creative and complex work. Thus, it is a potentially fundamental element of innovation that has the potential to change various aspects of society. In doing so, it is important to ensure the ethical and responsible use of artificial intelligence, through investing in educational and training programs. It is also essential to create new legislation framework and consider the impact of artificial intelligence on society as a whole. By balancing the benefits and risks of artificial intelligence, we can ensure that it is used in a way that benefits everyone.