Book Review

Media, Crime and Racism
Moneish Bhatia, Scott Poynting and Waqas Tufail (eds)
London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018

The rise of populist political parties in the West alongside global refugee crises and terrorist attacks, along with politically charged, and at times fabricated news stories about racialized and criminalized others on social media, necessitate an updated investigation of the intersections of news, race and crime. The rise of movements such as Black Lives Matter and Me Too speaks to the potential of social media as a tool of social movements, while the rise of white supremacist and misogynistic rhetoric on the same platforms compels sociologists and criminologists to examine the contradictions of democratized media. For students of criminology as well as sociology, *Media, Crime and Racism*, by Bhatia, Poynting and Tufail offers critical readings on the above issues with special focus on Europe and Australia.

The book is a collection of 18 chapters, authored by a global group of social scientists, which addresses issues ranging from media coverage of Pakistani communities in the UK since the 1960s to the European moral panic about the influx of refugees since 2010, German and Swedish media representations of crime and terror impacting migrants and asylum seekers, and criminalization of indigeneity in Australia. Rich in illustrations and case studies, the book is nonetheless grounded in a cogent theoretical approach; specifically, the critical traditions of Stanley Cohen (1972) and Stuart Hall et al. (1978), and although not explicitly stated, that of Louis Althusser (1971). The function of the news media as a social institution is not always clearly stated in the book, but the authors recognize its status as an ideological apparatus. As such, the authors posit that news media does the following: it reflects and feeds into moral panics about (globalized) folk devils; it represents crime in terms of racialized others who are unable to 'assimilate'; and it reifies structures of power in society. Although the chapters focus on the 21st century, the authors also revisit news coverage of race and crime from the second half of the 20th century to note the stubborn forces of racialization and criminalization in the media and political discourse.

For instance, in chapter 2, 'Turning the Tables?', Colin Webster follows UK media coverage of South Asian immigrants and British citizens since the 1960s. Webster notes the mercurial ways in which the media constructs migrants both as victims and problematic others. For example, the hostile coverage of South Asian strikes for equality

coincided with societal changes, as migration rose while British society confronted a changing landscape of work. Further, he notes that while the media may at times appear sympathetic to the plight of migrants, the narrative more often constructs them as unsettling and culturally dangerous – a construct which remains salient since the 11 September 11 2001 attack.

The contributors' analyses of the media as an ideological state apparatus which manufactures consent and reflects social existential angst in the West, bring this course reader closer to critical and cultural criminology. Chapter 6, 'Cultural Media and Everyday Practices', by Fatima Khan and Gabe Mythen, offers an empirical study of how South Asian British Muslims experience micro- and macro-level forms of racism. In their interviews, the authors focus on the impact of stereotypical representations of veiled women on South Asian and Muslim Brits in their everyday lives. They find that young British Muslims maintain their dual cultural identity of being British and Muslim closely against persistent prejudiced attitudes. The study is useful because it reveals the real costs of Islamophobia in heterogenous western countries such as the UK. The cultural criminological perspective is present throughout the book, as the authors focus on how both otherers as well as those who are othered experience race and crime.

Moreover, the book is founded on critical theories of racialization and criminalization. In looking at media coverage of racialized and criminalized others, the authors recognize that race and crime are socially constructed. For the authors, racialization is a process by which the other comes to be identified with essential cultural differences to the extent that ossified culture replaces biological traits as the basis for difference. Both processes occur at the level of news media production and the political discourse of the state, with grave consequences. For instance, in chapter 3, 'Cultural Repertoires and Media Menaces', Tina G. Patel discusses British media coverage of sexual exploitation of white female minors by South Asian men between 2010 and 2015. Patel finds that the media narrative grounds the perpetrators' predatory behavior in their cultural identity, shifting the focus from the crime of sexual violence to issues like assimilation and mass immigration. Problematically, the media's fixation on South Asian perpetrators created the perception that this is a problem of South Asian predatory men, even as white men made up the majority of sex criminals. In addition, the media engaged in a cultural war against the so-called culture of political correctness. In chapter 4, 'Media, State, and "Political Correctness"', Waqas Tufail argues that the sexual abuse scandal was presented as a problem of persistent political correctness, in which violent foreign cultures are tolerated in the UK at the expense of vulnerable white girls. Both Patel and Tufail argue that criminalizing brown men in this instance exacerbated hostility toward racial minorities while concealing state neglect of victimized young women, who were poor girls of various ethnic backgrounds.

The book is a critical text in cultural studies, which considers ideology, the state and capital. The focus on non-American case studies is useful, given the plethora of course readers focusing on the American context. The book is suitable for undergraduate as well as postgraduate students in sociology and criminology studies. It is a timely update on media and crime that offers insightful analysis of traditional as well as digital media. Given that the theoretical foundation is illustrated by numerous case studies, the book works best as a companion reader alongside readers and textbooks on theories of media and crime.

References

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