



Book Reviews

Anita Lam (2014) *Making Crime Television: Producing Entertaining Representations of Crime for Television Broadcast*. Abingdon, Oxon; New York: Routledge.

Alyce McGovern

University of NSW, Australia

With crime-related programming firmly embedded in commercial television schedules around the globe, Lam's call to criminologists to direct their attention to the production of such programming is well overdue. Although possibly downplaying some of the related criminological research into the processes and relationships that underpin media content in its various manifestations (see for example Doyle 2003; Lee and McGovern 2014; Lovell 2003, Schlesinger and Tumber 1994; Perlmutter 2000; Wilson and Groombridge 2010) and overplaying criminological interest in 'negative media effects', Lam is right to question the relative lack of criminological attention to the production of crime entertainment television. This monograph joins Marianne Colbran's recent publication, *Media Representations of Police and Crime: Shaping the Police Television Drama* (2014) as a welcome addition to criminological theorising about the media-crime nexus.

Introducing the book with a reflection on the impact of television juggernaut *CSI: Crime Scene Investigation* on fictional crime programming, Lam situates the focus of her study, that being the cultural processes of television writers and producers that underpin the telling of fictional crime stories (p. 2). Influenced by cultural and popular criminology, yet critical of the assumptions they make about the culture industry and the media more generally (p. 11), Lam proposes that criminologists break away from their traditional conceptualisations about 'the media' and interrogate the 'what' and the 'how' of these industries in an empirically-informed way. As follows, Lam offers her own documentation of fictional crime television programming as a response to the omissions of cultural and popular criminologists before her. Deploying Actor Network Theory (ANT) as both a methodological and theoretical frame for this analysis, Lam proposes to understand how television writers and producers know about crime, and how this knowledge is transformed into fictional crime television programming, via ethnography and interviews (p. 3).

In undertaking this analysis, Lam references three Canadian crime television productions as sites of empirical case study: *Cra\$h and Burn* (formerly *Lawyers, Guns and Money*), a television drama modelled on the *CSI* format; *The Bridge*, a police drama series; and *F2: Forensic Factor, Cold Blood* (also known as *True CSI*); as well as *Exhibit A*, a series of three crime docudramas that recreate true events (p. 5). Interestingly, while Lam's study purports to fill a gap in

criminological interrogation of fictional crime programming, the three docudramas cited in this third case study highlight an element of television programming seemingly overlooked by Lam: that is, the rise of what Leishman and Mason (2003) term 'factional' or infotainment style programming. Increasingly common across television networks, factional programs, which blur the boundaries of fictional and factual programming, raise a number of questions about the involvement and influence of criminal justice agencies, such as the police, in the television production process. While Lam does address the role of the police consultant in fictional television programming, and even acknowledges the impact such roles may have on the production processes, a more nuanced reading of the fiction/faction divide, or lack thereof, would have added an interesting dimension to the analysis of these processes, further highlighting the implications of production companies pairing with criminal justice agencies in such ways.

Chapter 2 of the book serves to delve deeper into Lam's methodological approach. How and where to address method is always a little tricky in texts such as these. The question of whether to dedicate a whole chapter to method, or integrate the discussion in other parts of the book, is not easily answered. While some of the finer detail here was not vital in understanding the data that follow – and, indeed, some of the arguments repeated points addressed in the previous chapter – Lam has provided a strong logic for the ANT approach in her work. For anyone interested in undertaking an ANT approach in their research, this chapter would serve as a useful reference. Further, given Lam's critique of existing methods, this chapter was important in reframing criminological approaches to crime fiction television.

Chapters 3, 4 and 5 present Lam's empirical data, following the crime television-making process from writers' room through to production. Chapter 3 sets the scene by asserting the importance of documenting what happens in the writers' room. Comparing the writers' room to a 'Latourian laboratory' (pp. 61-62), whereby the process of constructing crime fiction is compared with the making of scientific facts (pp. 60, 61 and 88), Lam traces the processes by which fictional television is created. In the case of *The Bridge*, for example, Lam traces the ways in which knowledge enters the writers' room, whose knowledge shapes the writing process, and the way this knowledge is made episodic, exiting the writers' room in a way that often 'universalises' the story (pp. 68-69). Chapter 4 follows the revision phase of the process by documenting the outputs produced in the writers' room and how these outputs are transformed during the rewriting of these texts. Chapter 5 examines the production process at the point where the story moves outside the 'laboratory'. Paying particular attention to the Canadian experience, Lam examines how television producers balance the 'universality' needed to satisfy broadcasting demands with the specificity that particular locations might dictate (pp. 135-136). In this way, Lam interrogates how crime television producers take the laboratory product out into the field.

Lam's study is clearly a signal that there is considerably more to be understood about the way(s) in which crime becomes a media product, whatever form that takes. While Lam's case studies demonstrate the conditions that led to the production of specific crime fiction examples, it could be argued that the overarching themes and contingencies are universal, revealing the need for criminologists to pay more attention to the 'front end' of media production. While the nature of the analysis presented does not necessarily preference the reader who wishes to dip in and out of the content, what Lam has successfully achieved is a re-visioning of the way in which we make assumptions about the way in which crime is presented in fictional representations. Given the diversification of the media sphere, such questions are increasingly important in a world in which we are increasingly witnessing the convergence of entertainment, news and advertisement.

Correspondence: Dr Alyce McGovern, Senior Lecturer in Criminology, School of Social Sciences, University of NSW Australia, Sydney NSW 2052 Australia. Email: a.mcgovern@unsw.edu.au

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