

Palgrave Studies in Crime, Media and Culture

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### **Aims of the Series**

This series aims to publish high quality interdisciplinary scholarship for research into crime, media and culture. As images of crime, harm and punishment proliferate across new and old media there is a growing recognition that criminology needs to rethink its relations with the ascendant power of spectacle. This international book series aims to break down the often rigid and increasingly hardened boundaries of mainstream criminology, media and communication studies, and cultural studies. In a late modern world where reality TV takes viewers into cop cars and carceral spaces, game shows routinely feature shame and suffering, teenagers post 'happy slapping' videos on YouTube, both cyber bullying and 'justice for' campaigns are mainstays of social media, and insurrectionist groups compile footage of suicide bomb attacks for circulation on the Internet, it is clear that images of crime and control play a powerful role in shaping social practices. It is vital then that we become versed in the diverse ways that crime and punishment are represented in an era of global interconnectedness, not least since the very reach of global media networks is now unparalleled.

*Palgrave Studies in Crime, Media and Culture* emerges from a call to rethink the manner in which images are reshaping the world and criminology as a project. The mobility, malleability, banality, speed, and scale of images and their distribution demand that we engage both old and new theories and methods and pursue a refinement of concepts and tools, as well as innovative new ones, to tackle questions of crime, harm, culture, and control. Keywords like image, iconography, information flows, the counter-visual, and 'social' media, as well as the continuing relevance of the markers, signs, and inscriptions of gender, race, sexuality, and class in cultural contests mark the contours of the crime, media and culture nexus.

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Editors

# Transmedia Crime Stories

The Trial of Amanda Knox and Raffaele Sollecito in  
the Globalised Media Sphere

With a Foreword by Yvonne Jewkes

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FOREWORD: THE TRAGICOMEDY OF PERUGIA:  
POWER AND PREJUDICE, VISIBILITY  
AND INVISIBILITY IN THE MAKING OF  
A TRANSNATIONAL, POSTMODERN MEDIA STORY

INTRODUCTION

This is a book about the ‘crime story of a decade’ and its coverage by the Italian, British, and American media. It began on 2 November 2007 when a 21-year-old British exchange student was found murdered in the house she shared with an American and two Italians in the University town of Perugia in Italy. This collection of essays on the case has significance and reach beyond the analyses of the immediate facts of that criminal offence and the subsequent trials, because the intertwined stories of the *Dramatis Personae* in this tragedy—Meredith Kercher, Amanda Knox, Raffaele Sollecito, Rudy Guede, and Patrick Lumumba—give rise to multiple complex, contested meanings that speak to broader politico-economic and socio-cultural indices of power and powerlessness, visibility and invisibility, agency and non-agency, local and global. As the volume illustrates, the intensity of focus, diminishing as it broadens, tells us much about the relationship between media, legal, and political apparatuses in micro and macro contexts. The chapters take us from the lead actor (Knox) to the odd couple (Knox and Sollecito), a possibly deadly ménage-à-trois (Knox, Sollecito, and Guede), the quartet of key players (Knox, Sollecito, Guede, and Lumumba), and then to the expanding contexts of Perugia, Italy, the transnational online communities in which friendships and enmities have been formed, and finally to the more casual consumption of the story by a global media audience.

Several of the authors observe that one of the reasons for its ongoing newsworthiness is that it is a story without end. Ten years on from the

murder, the principal actors in the drama, Meredith's American housemate Amanda Knox and Amanda's Italian boyfriend Raffaele Sollecito, continue to make the news, with every decision and utterance they make seemingly demanding a moral position be taken by an audience still hungry for opportunities to pass judgement. With a published autobiography each to their names, countless media interviews under their belts, several dramatisations inspired by the case (including made-for-TV movie *Amanda Knox: Murder on Trial in Italy*, 2011, ABC's *Guilt*, and the critically maligned Michael Winterbottom film *The Face of an Angel*, 2014), and some controversial career decisions taken (e.g. Knox's pledge to work to help the wrongfully convicted and Sollecito's decision to start a business providing memorials to the dead on social media), there appears to be no limit to the commercial opportunities that this gruesome murder case has spawned. It is a *crime célèbre par excellence*; a truly postmodern media spectacle in which the elements of the case that should matter most have somehow been overshadowed by those that matter little. In particular, the tacky celebritisation of the chief protagonists is maintained via a continuous cycle of intertextual, image-laden, feedback loops and endless verbal sparring in chatrooms and on blogs. Few criminal cases could have generated the number of pictures and words as have been devoted to the murder and trial that lies at the centre of this book.

In addition to the media circus, the case continues to have farcical legal repercussions with a series of cross-firing legal claims and counter claims that would seem comical in less tragic circumstances. Over a period of seven years, Knox and Sollecito were accused, tried, convicted, imprisoned (for four years), re-tried, convicted again, and finally exonerated of the murder. Knox was convicted for aggravated defamation against Patrick Lumumba following her false accusation that she had seen him commit the murder; Knox and her parents were indicted in an Italian court for slandering the Italian police (they were acquitted); the colourful and notorious chief prosecutor Giuliano Mignini was accused of abusing his authority in trying to pin the murder on Knox and Sollecito, but was subsequently cleared of all charges and has resumed his legal career; he has threatened to sue Knox for defamation and has brought similar charges against a Seattle newspaper and an online blogger. Meanwhile, as this volume goes to press, Raffaele Sollecito is due back in court for insulting the police who investigated the case and for making allegedly defamatory statements about Mignini in his book *Honor Bound* (Sollecito 2012).

Other actors in this wretched tale—Rudy Guede, the man convicted of Meredith’s murder, and Patrick Lumumba, the local bar owner who Amanda falsely accused—have been quietly relegated to the wings. Bit-players, Filomena Romanelli and Laura Mezzetti, two Italian students who shared the house with Meredith and Amanda and gave extensive evidence in court, and the four male Italian students who occupied the lower floor of the building (one of whom was, according to Romanelli’s testimony, romantically involved with Meredith) have always been shadowy, backstage figures—at least in the UK and US media. And then, of course, there are the ‘extras’, the cast of thousands in the virtual communities described by Gies in Chap. 9 and Bortoluzzi in Chap. 5, and the millions of news consumers around the globe for whom Amanda Knox has become a household name (the same probably cannot be said for Raffaele Sollecito who, despite his greater number of self-promoting engagements, remains a self-confessed ‘Mr Nobody’ in the story and is still routinely referred to in press reports only as ‘Amanda Knox’s ex-boyfriend’).

My aim in this Foreword is both to pick up on some of the key themes introduced by other contributors to the volume and to add my own thoughts and reflections on the reasons for the case’s enduring fascination. In relation to the first objective, I found the content of the chapters that follow as grimly riveting as the events they describe. Examining all aspects of the story and its key protagonists, *Transmedia Crime Stories: the Trial of Amanda Knox and Raffaele Sollecito in the Globalised Media Sphere* provides absorbing new insight into the case and its aftermath. Chapters discuss the arrests, trials, and acquittals; the tactics used by British, American, and Italian journalists to construct Knox, Sollecito, and Guede in ways that suited their (and the prosecution’s) narratives about the crime and about the nations represented by the lead actors; the pivotal role of social media in many aspects of the case and its reporting; the online communities that continue to noisily protest Knox’s and Sollecito’s innocence or guilt; the flawed police investigations; the controversial court trial; and the slippery, selective, and ultimately double-edged conferment of celebrity status that has elevated Amanda Knox to a level of fame and notoriety that has seen her compared to, among others, Diana, Princess of Wales, Lady Macbeth, and child murderer Myra Hindley.

## THE POWER OF THE IMAGE AND THE WORD

This volume follows the media's lead in largely concentrating on the enigmatic and compelling figure of Amanda Knox. Throughout the chapters, it is she who features most prominently, just as she has done in news reportage over the last ten years. 'Who is the real Amanda Knox?' is a question posed by Katrina Clifford in Chap. 4 and further pondered by many of the other contributors. In Chap. 3, Siobhan Holohan notes that like so many notorious women before her, Knox is 'emptied of meaning'. She has become the vessel into which society poured its darkest secrets—its misogynistic attitudes, its fears about women who offend, and its pornographic fantasies. Many of the authors, including Atalanta Goulandris and Eugene McLaughlin in Chap. 1 and Stevie Simkin in Chap. 2, note that a powerful visual register was constructed from a myriad of paparazzi photos, CCTV footage, and images originating from Knox and Sollecito themselves. The case threw up so many 'money shots' that it is little wonder that news journalists grasped it with such relish.

In fact, this was the first major criminal case in which social media was pivotal in the reporting of the investigation and initial trial that saw Knox and Sollecito found guilty and sentenced to 26 and 25 years imprisonment respectively (in their second trial Knox's sentence was raised to 28 and a half years). Unencumbered by the usual legal restrictions that would severely limit what could be reported about the co-defendants had the case been tried in the UK, British journalists mined the pair's social media sites for images that could be re-imagined and re-framed to cast Knox and Sollecito as capable of involvement in a sadistic, sexually motivated murder. Quite simply, the case marked a new form of journalism: one that relied on quick, lazy but eminently fruitful investigation techniques. Not only were these images a gift for news sub-editors required to fill their publications and broadcasts with attention-grabbing content, but they also served a deeper purpose in establishing what kinds of people the defendants were. As Goulandris and McLaughlin comment, the appropriation of personal, 'private' images gave these visual representations—and the narrative constructed around them—a novel authenticity and veracity. They served as self-created, visual indictments, affording journalists the power to 'explain and represent the inexplicable and un-representable'. Interesting, then, that Amanda Knox later employed social media to refute this 'truth' and promote a powerful counter image (see Clifford, this volume). Using Twitter as a vehicle for proffering her own 'truth' while awaiting the



court's verdict in the second trial, Knox tweeted a photograph of herself proclaiming her innocence. Of course, aesthetic judgements are always normative and contested (Young 2010), but, for Clifford, this act reflects a symbolic attempt to assert her 'self' and communicate a more 'real' persona, albeit probably one that has been dreamt up by publicity advisers.

Visual imagery, then, has been of huge significance in the 'affective' dimensions of spectatorship of this case (Young 2010). But, as other contributors to this volume underline, the linguistic features of the reporting of the case are equally noteworthy, especially in explaining how the media tap into, and magnify, deep-seated social fears about women implicated in deviant acts, while paying much less attention to male offenders whose profile does not meet the psychosocial criteria of 'otherness'. I argue in *Media and Crime 3rd edition* (Jewkes 2015) that women who are arrested for serious offences already have significant news value attached to them by virtue of their relative rarity, but such women become even more newsworthy when the crime is sexually motivated and/or if they can be further marginalised by reference to their sexuality. Essentially, if a woman can be demonstrated to have loose moral standards, the portrayal of her as manipulative and evil enough to commit a serious crime is much more straightforward (Jewkes 2015).

When reporters and editors covering 'the Knox case', as it is commonly referred to, had exhausted the visual repertoire that supported their construction of Amanda Knox as a young woman with dubious morals, a feckless femme fatale with a masculine lust for sexual depravity (the footage of 'the kiss' at the murder scene, the image taken from Knox's MySpace page of her fooling around with a large machine gun, the CCTV images of her buying 'sexy lingerie', and so on), they sanctimoniously started to throw just about every derogatory term applicable to women at her in a breathtakingly hypocritical stream of invective that Simkin (in Chap. 2) characterises as 'slut shaming'. In essence, Simkin argues, behaviour which would be deemed 'normal' aspects of growing up in a young man was recast as wayward and amoral in Knox, adding another layer of drama to the story she found herself at the centre of. Visual and linguistic motifs combined to convey an impression of a Jessica Rabbit figure with a penchant for sex toys and a sociopathic lack of inhibition. So powerful was this caricature that investigators said they didn't need evidence; they could read Amanda's guilt in her face and her bodily demeanour—as Ms Rabbit famously said, 'I'm not bad, I'm just drawn that way' (see Clifford, this volume). Indeed, one of the shocking, yet scarcely surprising, features

of the reporting of the police investigation and prosecutors' case is that the media uncritically reproduced these professionals' 'bad girl' discourse, while failing to raise questions about the potential dangerousness and culpability of institutions such as the police and a criminal justice system in reducing a brutal sexual assault and murder to scintillating titbits reminiscent of a soft porn magazine.

Another aspect of the linguistic framing of the case noted by many of the authors in the chapters that follow is the tendency of media commentators to reductively present complex realities as simplistic binary oppositions based on stock stereotypes. In most cases it is Knox who provides the point of reference against which others are countered and the contradictory constructions of her underline the pliability of her image. She is the vamp to Meredith's virgin; the innocent 'ice maiden' to the dark recesses of Rudy Guede's depravity; the creative, free spirit to Sollecito's geek (Jessica Rabbit seduces Harry Potter); and the unwitting victim of Prosecutor Mignini's perverted imagination. In some reports she provides her own point and counterpoint; two paradoxical halves of a 'familiar stranger', as Clifford describes her. She is the normal, all-American college kid who coexists as a sex-crazed, drug-taking she-devil; the manipulative ingénue; cool and calm yet 'oddly libidinous'; the calculating yet lucky beneficiary of a bungled investigation conducted by police officers who were less clever than her; and a figure who polarises online communities to elevate her to sainthood while she is simultaneously denounced as a witch. An important aspect of this book, and one for which its editors should be congratulated, is that it acknowledges the potency of these oppositional characterisations while not forgetting Knox's co-accused (see in particular Lieve Gies' discussion of Raffaele Sollecito's marginalisation in Chap. 9 and Heim's analysis of Rudy Guede's representation by the Italian media in Chap. 8); nor does it overlook the centrality of her adversary Giuliano Mignini in polarising public opinion about her (see particularly Chap. 7 by Riccardo Montana).

### THE INVISIBLE VICTIM AND A JUSTICE SYSTEM UNDER THE SPOTLIGHT

The other key character in the *Dramatis Personae* is, of course, Meredith Kercher herself. As many of the authors in this book tell us, Meredith has got rather lost in this story. By all accounts offered by those who knew her, Meredith was a bright, attractive, popular, and confident 21-year-old

studying at the University of Leeds. She had many of the attributes of an ‘ideal type victim’, yet she never quite came to the forefront of this drama. It is as if so much attention has been given to Amanda that there is no room left for Meredith. One cancels out the other. Of course, the main reason for Meredith’s lack of presence and voice is tragically self-evident. In addition, and as already noted, her relative invisibility may be explained by her characterisation as a ‘good girl’ to Amanda’s ‘bad girl’. But, interestingly, the centrality of each young woman’s sexual behaviour and sexual history (as interpreted by lawyers and reporters) is also interwoven with a discourse that brings to light themes of national identity and stereotype which help to explain their relative newsworthiness. Meredith is not only English but is, as Simkin suggests in Chap. 2, cast as a staid, buttoned-up Brit; the uptight, English girl who disapproved of her flatmate’s loose morals and lax attitude to hygiene. Yet the framing of her as prudish and somewhat old-fashioned is countered by photographs, released by her family and friends, which show Meredith to be a fun-loving party girl too. Media representations of Sollecito (and Sollecito’s *Italianness*) are similarly caricatured and contradictory. The indulged only son of a wealthy Italian physician, Raffaele is both cerebral (nerdy) and manipulable (stupid). He is at one and the same time Forrest Gump, Harry Potter, and a privileged Daddy’s boy who collects knives as a hobby. It is only Rudy Guede, the sole individual serving time for Meredith’s murder, who is reduced to a simple characterisation; a single word, in fact. Despite having lived in Italy for 16 years at the time of the murder, and having become a naturalised Italian citizen, by far the most common descriptor of Guede in the Italian press is ‘ivoriano’ (see Heim, Chap. 8).

The intertwined themes of identity, difference, sovereign power, political economy, and global privilege are never far from the surface in this story, particularly in the febrile atmosphere of the courtroom as the world looked on. Italy’s sense of itself at the eye of a storm is strongly conveyed by many of the contributions to this volume. In Chap. 7 Montana presents a socio-legal analysis of the role of prosecutors during the pre-trial phase, discussing the peculiarity of the socio-politico-cultural context in which Italian prosecutors work which, he says, led to many misunderstandings and misinterpretations by non-Italian commentators. Michael Boyd further comments in Chap. 6 that, against this complex, technical backdrop, the tendency for reporters and readers to latch onto the easily decoded, sensationalised aspects of the case seems understandable. The eccentric but naïve Knox is portrayed in some news commentaries as a victim at the

mercy of an arcane Italian judicial system represented by a flamboyant and flawed chief prosecutor with a vivid, oversexed imagination. For Boyd, with the world's media critically analysing its treatment of this female 'outsider', Italian justice was on trial every bit as much as the individuals arrested for Meredith's murder. Italian police were also lampooned for their botched investigation of the case—a comedy of errors that, according to reports, included their disturbance of the murder scene, a casual disregard for vital forensic evidence, and their alleged mistreatment of Knox while she was in their custody. In these respects, the initial court trial in Perugia was very much like O.J. Simpson's televised trial in 1995 (where, in the wake of the Rodney King case two years earlier, allegations of racism in the LAPD and American justice system cast a long shadow over proceedings) and the televised trial of Oscar Pistorius in 2014 (during which the race and gender politics of South Africa were widely debated and where ANC women protested against the high levels of domestic violence in their country every day outside the courthouse). In all three legal cases, the trials provided a catalyst for far wider and much deeper social problems to be examined under the microscope of the world's media.

### GLOBAL POLITICS, LOCAL SENSITIVITIES

The importance of Perugia as a context should not be underestimated, as Bortoluzzi reminds us in Chap. 5. A somewhat insular Italian city that, in the telling of this saga becomes a site of conflict, revenge, retribution, and tragedy every bit as compelling as the Medieval Florence that informs Dante Alighieri's vision of Hell in *The Divine Comedy*, Perugia became representative of the whole of Italy as incestuous and corrupt, and nowhere more so than in the US media. Broader indices of global power thus reveal themselves in the localised mediated iterations of this story and it is interesting to observe—as many contributors to this volume do—the visual and linguistic tropes employed to convey the cultural capital of powerful and subaltern groups. According to a *Guardian* headline (28 March 2015), 'Amanda Knox is free because she's rich and American, says Patrick Lumumba', while an online site called *True Justice for Meredith Kercher* notes that the 'US Government sprang into action to help Knox', finding her a Roman lawyer who spoke excellent English, maintaining contact with her throughout her trial and imprisonment, and paying her legal costs. By contrast, say the authors writing on this web page, the 'pathetic UK government' have shown a 'complete dereliction of their duty of care

to a murdered British national and her family’—perhaps, it is speculated, because of the involvement of an accused woman from the UK’s closest political ally ([http://truejustice.org/ee/index.php?/tjmk/comments/italy\\_fights\\_for\\_justice\\_for\\_a\\_murdered\\_student\\_as\\_the\\_pathetic\\_uk\\_governme/](http://truejustice.org/ee/index.php?/tjmk/comments/italy_fights_for_justice_for_a_murdered_student_as_the_pathetic_uk_governme/)). Meanwhile, Knox’s fellow former students at the University of Washington argue that there appears to be a thinly disguised vendetta against Knox in some of the international media simply because she is American; or rather, she is, ‘a pot-smoking, unstable, sex-crazed American’ (<http://www.com.washington.edu/commIR/vol2/editionOne>; cited in Jewkes 2015). An anti-American sentiment has also been attributed, in numerous reports and blogs, to Mignini. For some of Knox’s supporters, what else could explain his guilty verdict?

The topic of race similarly cannot be ignored in this case; though so sensitive are discourses of race and ‘difference’ that in the several discussions in this book of Meredith’s relative invisibility in the media reporting of the case, none of the authors venture to suggest that her part-Asian heritage (her mother was born in India) might have been a factor in her not being perceived by journalists as an ‘ideal victim’, although Clifford (Chap. 4), quoting Greenslade (2011), hints that it is *Amanda’s* appearance—‘young, attractive, Anglo-Saxon’—that made *her* the ‘perfect’ victim in this story. The framing of Rudy Guede in discriminatory language is more straightforward, as Heim demonstrates in Chap. 8. Prejudiced in the sense that his identity was persistently defined by reference to his race and colour, and his guilt was explained by the Italian media as an outcome of his African heritage, rather than, say, any disadvantage he may have faced as a young black man abandoned in Italy by his natural father, the Italian news media used Guede as a cypher to reinforce Italian national identity in relation to both what it is and what it is not. The fact that he was adopted and brought up by a wealthy Italian family in Perugia does not diminish the power of their negative characterisation of Rudy Guede; if anything, it further augments the sense of anomic dislocation that helps to explain Guede’s guilt.

The crude racialisation of serious violent offences is, of course, very common in political and media discourses. Elsewhere, I have written about how crime and punishment may be understood through Dantean metaphors of light and dark, Heaven and Hell (Jewkes 2014). Cultural theorist Richard Dyer (1997) illustrates with numerous examples from the arts—including some of the religious Renaissance paintings hung in the churches and civic buildings of Perugia—that ‘light’ is associated with

seeing, understanding, transparency, innocence, knowledge, and privilege. The metaphorical associations between whiteness, light, and transcendence are given further significance and meaning by their opposites: blackness, darkness, and descent. As the Perugia case illustrates, modern media perpetuate these centuries-old cultural ideas and representations, linking ‘whiteness’ with purity and innocence, and ‘darkness’ with impurity and guilt. Lightness and whiteness are also commonly associated with visibility, while darkness and blackness signify the unseeable and unknowable. Contrast, then, the scenes of the newly liberated Amanda Knox emerging from the enveloping darkness of the Italian prison in which she had been incarcerated for four years, pale and blinking in the shock of daylight and paparazzi flashbulbs, with the invisibility of Rudy Guede, buried deep within the Italian prison system and the collective consciousness (for an examination of Dantean imagery in relation to the experience of imprisonment in penal ‘hell-holes’, see Jewkes 2014). These visual and linguistic metaphors serve to add further layers of significance to the already polarised ‘meanings’ attributed to these protagonists. Dyer observes that ‘white people have had so very much more control over the definition of themselves and indeed of others than have those others’ (1997: xiii). The contributions to this collection problematise this assertion *somewhat*, given that lives lived ‘in’ the media are always controlled to a degree by those who produce and those who consume the narratives. But while these producers and consumers continue to be hooked on the unfinished stories of Amanda, Raffaele, Patrick, Giuliano, and Rudy, for one person this story does have an end. Let us not forget Meredith Kercher.

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In Chap. 2, Fig. 2.1 *Daily Mail*, 7 November 2007, pp. 8–9 are reproduced with permission of the *Daily Mail*.



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