

Public perception of crime and the reaction of the (postmodern) criminal justice system

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The article deals with the relationships among public opinion, the mass media, the perception of crime and the operation of the criminal justice system in the postmodern era, which is marked, among other things, by a politicization of professional (for example, criminological) issues and their integration into so-called populist concepts of democracy. After an introductory communicological exposition of the concepts of public opinion and mass media, the authors present a construct of "gothic populism" as a possibly more adequate explanatory mechanism of the public valuation of deviant (criminal) phenomena in relation to the well-known sociological phenomenon – a moral panic. The paper addresses some basic traits that constitute the presumably punitive nature of public opinion (connected with the increasingly repressive trends of western criminal and sentencing policy), which is a far more complex issue, inseparably connected with the structural and cultural characteristics of postmodern (capitalist) communities.

On the basis of a comparative analysis of two qualitatively opposite media, covering two actual criminal cases in Great Britain and Norway, the paper provides basic findings about contemporary media reporting of crime, its perpetrators and victims. In the concluding part of the article, the authors highlight, in a critical but optimistic spirit, inherent contingencies of every social order in which it is possible to identify typical structurally and culturally determined emotional attitudes towards the subjects of a criminal justice system but which are looked on from the perspective of acknowledgement and respect for the dignity of other people, their basic rights and life opportunities within the context of assuring fulfilling emotional freedom and self-determination, undoubtedly changeable.

Key words: crime, public opinion, perception of crime, mass media, criminal justice system, postmodern era

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