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*Cross-border crime and collaborative journalism:
Leveraging transnational production
and listenership for true crime podcasts*

ABSTRACT: Compelling narrative storytelling draws great numbers to the “true crime” genre of podcasting with an intimate investigative journalism experience for listeners, frequently prompting the audience to participate in solving the crime. Through an in-depth case study of the award-winning podcast *Death in Ice Valley*, this study examines the cross-border collaboration between the BBC World Service, Norwegian broadcaster NRK, and online audiences across Europe who contributed to criminal reporting through podcast listener groups to crowdsource case information. With nearly 10.000.000 downloads since the initial podcast release in 2018, listeners have helped the BBC discover new information, prompting Bergen, Norway’s police to reopen the investigation of this fifty-year-old cold case. Through textual analysis of *Death in Ice Valley* episodes and various social media communities surrounding the podcast, we argue that the collaborative relationship between transnational reporting teams and their audience members throughout Europe contributed to the podcast’s popularity and improved the quality of the material being produced. Implications for international co-production and crowdsourcing audience dynamics include data collection for police and reporters. News production and consumption are changing, especially among younger generations. With the increasing popularity of podcasting, the future of journalism is collaborative in nature and participatory in execution.

KEYWORDS: podcasting; participatory journalism; true crime; cross-border collaboration; cold case

Introduction

Nearly a full minute of haunting music opens the first episode of the hit podcast *Death in Ice Valley*, setting the scene for an award-winning collaboration between the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) World Service and The Norwegian Broadcasting Corporation (NRK).

McCarthy: «This is the story of a woman traveling in Norway in 1970, who died a terrible death and left behind a trail of strange clues.»

Higraff: «Her real identity has remained unknown for almost fifty years and it's one of the world's most intriguing unsolved mysteries» (Higraff & McCarthy, 2021).

NRK investigative reporter Marit Higraff spent several years studying the case of the “Isdal Woman”, prompting Norwegian authorities to re-open the cold case. After discovering DNA evidence of the Isdal Woman's European heritage, Higraff teamed up with BBC radio documentary maker Neil McCarthy to hunt for answers. The story that emerged during their twelve-episode podcast series is not truly about solving a true crime mystery. It is the story of a cross-border team of journalists who worked with experts and podcast listeners from around the world in an incredible example of the power of transnational participatory podcast journalism.

Through textual analysis of the *Death in Ice Valley* series and its official Facebook community, this chapter examines the cross-border collaboration between the BBC, NRK, and a dedicated community of international listeners. With nearly 10.000.000 downloads since the initial podcast release in 2018 (Rephonic, 2024), *Death in Ice Valley* invited listeners to contribute to the story, boosting the podcast's popularity and enhancing the quality of the podcast in the long run.

Cross-border true crime podcasts

Podcasts are currently one of the top twenty most important innovation areas according to a group of experts from Austria, Germany, Spain, and Switzerland (Körner & Graßl, 2024). Many podcasters are collaborating across borders regarding both the content produced and the production process (The Webby Awards, 2024). Transnational collaboration is relatively inexpensive thanks to the remote capabilities of digital audio production (Gay *et. al.*, 2006). Combined with the low barrier of entry for podcasting as a mass medium (McGregor, 2022), the possibilities of global production are boundless. Beyond audio entertainment, the concept of cross-border podcasting is gaining traction for positive outcomes. Academic leaders formed an international podcast project between Austria, the Netherlands, Switzerland, Thailand, and the United States, teaching students to collaborate on producing podcasts as part of a course (Wiggins *et. al.*, 2017). Outside of education, many other fields also benefit from crossing national podcast lines, including investigative criminal reporting.

Innovative true crime podcasts reach across international borders to report foreign stories more accurately (French, 2022), such as the collaborations be-

tween the BBC and Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC) on *Bloodlines* and *The Six Billion Dollar Gold Scam* (CBC, 2024). Some of the stories span several countries and require the work of journalists and law enforcement from different areas. After a journalist was killed on the Mediterranean island of Malta, an international team of journalists produced *Who Killed Daphne?* an active investigative report about their investigative reporting that led to her killers (Wondery, 2022). Such multi-country podcasts are not always centered on crime but sometimes emphasize criminal justice systems. As the top podcast in Finland, Poland, and the Netherlands, and number one for true crime in the United Kingdom, *Murder in the North* focuses on policing and courts in murder cases in Finland and Scandinavia (Podimo, 2023). Multiple countries can contribute to the process of production from start to finish, as in CBC Podcasts and Norwegian newspaper *Verdens Gang's* *Hunting Warhead* in which investigators traverse continents in search of a suspect, collaborating with different police forces and hacker groups (CBC Listen, 2024). Despite the industrious nature of these shows, their international audiences have not been folded into the production itself. *Death in Ice Valley* broke the mold by moving beyond international production and storytelling and into inviting participatory journalism within the cross-border criminal investigation.

Although well-known now, the true crime genre of podcasting did not gain widespread attention until the release of breakout hit *Serial* in 2014, which drew millions of listeners into the host's journey as she investigated a crime and subsequent murder conviction (Vogt, 2016). Since then, novice podcasters and seasoned reporters alike have joined their voices to the popular category, such as German podcast *Zeit Verbrechen*, which draws large audiences among young people in particular (Körner & Graßl, 2024). Although true crime's popularity has skyrocketed over the past decade (Matsa *et al.*, 2023), the gruesome genre is not a passing trend. Crime reporting is a founding discourse of journalism, predating newspapers by more than 150 years (Usher, 2023).

Scholars believe that criminal reporting reached recent renewed success through podcasting thanks to the longform availability afforded by the new medium (McHugh, 2016). Long episodes and multiple seasons allow for richly woven narratives. These frequently contain moments of self-reflection from hosts, who invite listeners along to experience their vulnerable moments of uncertainty during the investigation. This style of podcasting is also known as the «narrative podcast», which is defined as episodic nonfiction audio storytelling that «interweaves voice, music, and ambient sound recordings to create a layered audio experience with a narrative arc» (McHugh, 2012: 105). Narrative audio immersion is achieved through a personal and confessional speaking voice that builds listener trust (Dowling & Miller, 2019), creating a metanarrative beyond the storyline of the crime, which draws audiences into the inner workings of the unfolding journalistic production process. This appeals to listeners who may doubt the validity of standard sources of news. «Podcasting is particularly well placed to promulgate evolutions in journalistic

approaches that reflect contemporary audience desires for greater authenticity and transparency in reporting» (Bird & Lingren, 2024: 435). While doubt in traditional reporting is low (Stubenvoll *et al.*, 2022), listening to a podcast host walk individual listeners through their reporting process can feel more like partaking in a one-on-one conversation.

Investigative podcast communities

A key feature of the medium's authenticity is the informal audio narrative centered on a strong relationship between hosts and their listeners (McHugh, 2016). The relationship is initiated when a listener hears a compelling podcast episode, but it truly begins to develop through active niche community building on social media. Platforms like Facebook provide a centralized location for fans to discuss the podcast and hear directly from the hosts and producers, facilitating collaboration between podcasts and their listeners (Hernandez, 2019). Digital spaces help producers build an interactive community by inviting listeners to be a part of the conversation. While any podcast fans can chat online, true crime listeners build tight-knit communities that attempt to solve cases they learn about through the podcast (Boling, 2019). These podcast-specific groups often attempt to participate in criminal investigations by sharing information publicly, also known as «crowdsourcing» (Gray & Benning, 2019). These groups sometimes engage in «web sleuthing» (Yardley *et al.*, 2018), which refers to online activities that attempt to solve cases. While crowdsourcing can include the sharing of theories or personal experiences, web sleuthing is accomplished through evidence-based activities such as collecting and analyzing digital clues (Havard *et al.*, 2021).

When the crowdsourced information discovered through web sleuthing contributes to a professional reporter's investigation, the process is known as «participatory journalism», or the co-creation of news by an active audience (Vos & Thomas, 2023). With the booming interactive nature of the Internet, the concept of participatory journalism is generally viewed as a means of adding value to the news. Everyday people can submit their input directly to news organizations, creating a wealth of knowledge on subjects that journalists might otherwise be limited in during their workday in the newsroom. Personal knowledge from citizens can provide context and nuance, bring in a broader and more inclusive range of voices, and emphasize issues that traditional sources may have downplayed or overlooked (Knoblich, 2012). Journalists are called to embrace audience engagement because of its alignment with the journalistic value of community empowerment. However, the corporate mandate to implement the audience's input imposes an obligation on the journalists to manufacture opportunities for participation (Vos & Thomas, 2023). The industry ideal of treating audience members as partners in news creation forces a restructuring of the relationship between media professionals and the untrained public. *Death in Ice Valley* is a clear example of how to successfully navigate that relationship.

True crime is criticized for graphic descriptions of crimes, exploiting victims and their families for profit, and creating a «danger narrative» that perpetuates stereotypes against people of color (Webb, 2021). Yet many ethical criminal investigative podcasts aim to raise awareness about crime and its impact without sensationalizing or exploiting tragedy for entertainment (Goodpods, 2024). A quantitative analysis found that true crime podcasts are the most ethical medium for amplifying criminal justice issues on social media, particularly by balancing information and commentary with empathy, advocacy, and justice (Noe, 2022). Another criticism of true crime media is the potential for interference with ongoing police investigations and damage to future trials (Davis, 2019). The Australian podcast *The Teacher's Pet* generated sufficient evidence for police to charge a man with murder, but also delayed the trial by more than one year, during which time several witnesses died (Turnbull, 2022). Despite the potential disruption caused by criminal reporting, police are not opposed to gathering media attention and the help of the public. During a roundtable discussion with law enforcement officials, researchers found that police approve of online true crime participation as long as citizens report their crowdsourced findings to authorities instead of attempting to solve the crimes themselves (Dekker & Meijer, 2020).

Death in Ice Valley's investigation into the Isdal Woman combined the efforts of journalists, the police, and citizens. When interviewed about the upcoming series, BBC World Service Podcast Editor Jon Manel solicited the audience's direct participation with his request, «Can podcast listeners help to provide answers?». The idea of the listeners officially contributing to the podcast quickly gathered attention and *Death in Ice Valley* was dubbed «the BBC's answer to Serial» (Bate, 2018).

The case of Death in Ice Valley

The complicated nature of *Death in Ice Valley's* intricate storyline is reflected in the very production of the podcast itself. We conducted a thorough analysis of all 534 minutes of the podcast episodes. This was processed alongside six years of the podcast's online community discussions on Facebook in order to identify common thematic elements among communication patterns. Results are divided according to the two main co-creative entities of *Death in Ice Valley*: (1) the podcast's producers and (2) the listeners.

Producers

Findings revealed the significant nature of cross-border collaboration woven into every aspect of *Death in Ice Valley* production. The transnational nature of the journalistic investigation included: the intricate international path of

the podcast's true crime storyline, the cross-border team of investigative journalists, police, and government agencies, and the sources of various nationalities interviewed for their professional expertise and personal input.

The *Death in Ice Valley* narrative began in Norway before weaving through potential connections in Belgium, France, Luxembourg, Russia, Italy, Ukraine, and Israel. The podcast team physically traveled to several locations to follow the trail of leads, including Spain, Sweden, and Germany. In Ep. 9, the hosts were transparent about stepping into the unknown by traveling to different areas of Europe to «follow the isotope map» of where scientists placed the Isdal Woman based on the information they found in her teeth.

McCarthy: «This is quite a good time in our story, isn't it? We're moving to a different geographical space. We're going into Europe, into deeper Europe, into the beginning of her story, of her life story.»

Higraff: «I think the exciting thing about this trip we're doing now, I have a strong feeling we're really going into the most interesting area for us now. Germany, France, Belgium, Luxembourg...» (Higraff & McCarthy, 2021).

As the podcast crew tracked through possible locations of the *Death in Ice Valley* victim, they interviewed people, creatively piecing together a potential path, in the hope that someone local might remember the Isdal Woman or bring evidence forward of her life before her body was discovered in Norway. Traveling to random locations to find clues may seem far-fetched, but the podcasters' path followed some big theoretical discussions from the Facebook page at that time. One listener theory suggested the Isdal Woman may have been a Nazi, given her time of birth in Nuremberg, passports, and array of disguises, prompting a discussion with 153 comments. Although this idea was mostly well-received, dozens of commenters argued that the Isdal Woman was actually a Jewish girl who fled Nuremberg through the French border. Several different posts around this time mention her possible heritage, along with how she ended up in Bergen. These posts looked much like this one, full of speculation and questions:

Perhaps she was Jewish. Born somewhere in eastern Europe. Her parents killed in the Holocaust? Some of her relatives took her to Israel after the war. Mossad hired her to look for Nazis hiding in Norway? (Facebook, 2018).

The theory of the Isdal Woman's Jewish heritage and connection to Israel's Institute for Intelligence and Special Operations, known as Mossad, surfaced dozens of times over the years, eventually leading to a listener interview on the subject during Ep. 11. It was a storyline *Death in Ice Valley* followed in person,

interviewing a Jewish man who escaped Nazi takeover as a young boy, workers from a home for girls in the German countryside that may have hidden Jewish children, and an historian from near the French/German border.

Just as the storyline was told by weaving through various nations, behind the scenes of the podcast production was also a patchwork of diverse sources of information. *Death in Ice Valley* included dozens of officials and experts as a part of their team. Working closely with such sources moved them beyond the role of interviewees and into the rank of serious podcast contributors. Higrapp and McCarthy spoke with a wide range of government agencies to gather their growing body of evidence. The team worked directly with the Norwegian Criminal Investigation Service, known as Kripas, and specifically with the identity unit, handwriting experts, chemistry experts, and the forensic department. Other major relationships were formed with the Regional State Archives in Bergen and the local Bergen police, Hordaland Police District. During Ep. 8, Harald Kjongsfjell, the leader of the identity unit at Kripas, flew the Isdal Woman's teeth to Sweden to test them with some experts who heard the podcast and wanted to help. When asked about his thoughts on the case, the officer was not willing to speculate, but allowed that the case was highly unusual.

Part of the show's international cooperation included the media. The BBC and NRK are both traditional broadcasting corporations with relationships with organizations across Europe. Rather than depend on the "viral" nature of the *Death in Ice Valley* podcast through social media, the producers intentionally pushed their content through traditional media channels for better press coverage. This dynamic was transparent from the very first episode when the hosts spoke with Per Angel, the former head of the identification team at Kripas.

Angel: «The media's interest in this case could actually help us a lot because we need to build up the interest for the case in some areas and maybe some persons are going to report that lady missing again with new information that we could have today.»

The public relations tactic worked, and hundreds of articles were written in dozens of languages throughout the world. During the recording of Ep. 9, a German broadcasting crew followed the podcast around, filming their production process. The crew interviewed the podcasters, and the podcasters interviewed the crew in return. They spoke with Claudia Kaffanke, a TV reporter from Südwestrundfunk SWR, one of Germany's biggest broadcasters.

McCarthy: «We wanted to reach into people's homes with her story. A German TV and radio crew has been following us around whilst we make our inquiries, filming and recording us, helping us get the word out to somebody who might remember her.»

Kaffanke: «The story about that woman, nobody knows who she was and it's very interesting for our viewers to hear that she was

German, apparently. She had maybe German sisters or brothers, and parents, or a nephew who remembers her.»

Although any podcast may use publicity to gain a larger audience, *Death in Ice Valley* creators and their international media partners specify an altruistic intention beyond their own popularity. They articulated their intention to expose as many people to the information about the Isdal Woman as possible. The larger the crowd, the larger the crowdsourcing capabilities. The more participants, the higher likelihood of quality participatory journalism. This appeal to the public paid off, bringing forth more information and enhancing the quality of the podcast. During production, *Death in Ice Valley* discovered a wide range of new clues from many different sources. These included dozens of tips reported by listeners, such as “misplaced” photos and police reports from the crime scene.

Although reporting on hard evidence, *Death in Ice Valley* wove the story together as a «narrative podcast» through the hosts’ frequent personal check-ins and questioning of the confusing storyline. Despite the scientific aspect of the investigation, the podcast focused on the human elements of the story by incorporating the voices of forty-eight different interviewees during its single-season run. These included five eyewitnesses, ten listeners, and ten academic experts. The experts were associated with universities in Norway, Australia, Austria, Sweden, and the United Kingdom. They spoke on a range of topics including forensic pathology, genetic identity, odontology, DNA science, and intelligence services during the Cold War. The rest of the interviews were creatively woven to fill in gaps of knowledge throughout the production, such as a famous Norwegian crime writer, a former crime reporter for Norway’s biggest newspaper, *Verdens Gang* (VG), and a former spy for the Komitet Gosudarstvennoy Bezopasnosti (KGB). Despite the impressive range of sources, the largest cross-border relationship that *Death in Ice Valley* formed was among listeners. From Bangladesh to Australia and Antarctica, the international mix of audience members was not just for show. The impact of their efforts to web sleuth and crowdsource were evident throughout the podcast’s storyline and gained more airtime in the episodes as the series continued. The enormity of the audience’s contribution is summed up during the final episode.

McCarthy: «Of course, if it wasn’t for you, our listeners, and the work you are doing, this particular episode wouldn’t have happened. In fact, this whole podcast is driven by you. For us, that’s what makes *Death in Ice Valley* so special: we know we aren’t investigating the story alone.»

Listeners

Added together, more than one-third of the podcast series would not exist without the hard work of the listeners and the podcast creators’ willingness to

intentionally engage them. The greatest gathering space for *Death in Ice Valley* listeners was on the Facebook page established by BBC World Service. Textual analysis of the podcast's Facebook presence revealed a group of more than 42,000 listeners from around the globe, crowdsourcing information and providing their unique international perspectives, often with specialist insight in areas such as genetic coding or geographic analysis.

The collective conversations occurring on Facebook did not include direct responses from the podcast, but the producers were paying attention and taking notes. Ep. 3 contained the first mention that the podcast was following leads provided by listeners. This might typically be considered a "teaser" intended to gain more audience engagement, except the podcast followed through. Listener leads popped up throughout the rest of the podcast series, often used as serious input that changed the direction of the storyline. In Ep. 4, the hosts made a call-to-action, asking listeners to look at the codebook pictures they posted to their Facebook page. On their social media post, they asked, «Can you help us crack the rest?» (Facebook, 2018). Hundreds of listeners liked, commented, and made posts of their attempts to solve the riddle. Each clue mentioned during the series was posted on Facebook and analyzed by the community. The new crowdsourced information was then gathered by the podcast for further consideration. Ep. 9 and Ep. 10 followed listener leads, sometimes mentioning the listeners directly by name.

Higraff: «After episode nine, the Facebook group has done some amazing research, and that's without even seeing the photos of the engraving we've just posted on the website. We must give special mention to Mike Alexander who found out that this symbol with the SCH/P within a heart, was the trademark of a steel company in Vienna, the capital of Austria.»

Ep. 11 and Ep. 12 are almost entirely composed of listener interviews. In Ep. 11, the podcasters talk to one listener who found an old room planner for a hotel the Isdal Woman stayed in, which provided context to some of her behavior. They also spoke to another woman who found a box full of documents from the Isdal Woman case stored in her basement. One of the interviews included Ketil Kversoy, an eyewitness who came forward to give his account after keeping it a secret for decades.

Kversoy: «I had to tell somebody about it. Because this tragedy filled me up. I have remembered it for forty-eight years. I have always had a need to tell somebody. I didn't want to keep it to myself.»

Listener clues abounded, but they did not necessarily make the case any clearer. Despite the overwhelming community response, the trail of evidence

did not lead to answers. The podcast series ended as it began: with an unsolved mystery and a cry for the public to help with the investigation.

McCarthy: «And so, the search continues. We always hoped the listeners would take this and run with it. Maybe even crack it. So, keep on looking, because as we've said all along, somebody must know something» (Ep. 12).

Audience members took McCarthy's order to continue the search seriously. Listeners continue to collaborate online to search for new leads and re-examine old evidence. Many listeners visited Bergen to follow the trail of clues for themselves, sometimes even hiking up to where the body of the Isdal Woman was found. In 2023, a listener posted a «Role/ Evidence Matrix» chart in which they plotted the top theories of the Isdal Woman's identity, evaluating each on how many boxes they "checked off" when compared to the major pieces of evidence in the case. In 2024, users from France, India, the Netherlands, Norway, the United States, and the United Kingdom all contributed to several new in-depth discussions surrounding the Isdal Woman's teeth and DNA evidence.

The issue of DNA is consistent and considerable among those still working to solve the case. While many listeners are still active, there is a commonly held belief among Facebook community members that the case will remain unsolved until Norway's government allows for DNA testing through private companies. In 2017, Norway's Kripos sent out a "Black Notice" to 190 countries via Interpol – the world's largest international police organization. They hoped the Isdal Woman was reported missing somewhere and they could match the missing person's report to the DNA collected from relatives (Aardal *et al.* 2017). This only applied to government-collected sources. Many countries do not search the genetic material provided to private DNA companies, including Norway. *Death in Ice Valley* skirted the issue, only addressing it once in the series during Ep. 11:

McCarthy: «The most frequently asked question from listeners has been why don't we compare the DNA profile of the Isdal Woman with the biggest commercial databases containing millions of DNA profiles? And as we've explained before, the DNA material in the case belongs to the police. The Norwegian police have so far not allowed the material to be run through commercial databases that people use to find out about their ancestry. And that's for legal and ethical reasons.»

Higraff: «Since there has been a revolution in solving cases with methods like this, there's now going to be a legal hearing to decide if the police can use this process to solve cases like the Isdal Woman.»

In 2019, around fifty people gathered to discuss the DNA issue on Facebook. Several Europeans argued that it is impossible to gain consent from a deceased person in order to test their DNA, making the process unethical. Some Americans and Canadians responded by poking at the argument. One poster questioned the moral hierarchy of consent to genetic testing over consent to other aspects of criminal reporting. The variety of perspectives from different areas of the world enhanced the discussion, which remained respectful. While the issue of consent was a major part of the ethical debate over DNA testing, cultural aspects specific to the region informed the discussions taking place around the halt in case progress.

The privacy laws in Europe are different than they are in the US. When I worked in the Netherlands, I learned that during WWII, the Nazis raided town halls throughout the country, and used the information there to hunt down the Jewish population of the country. This is in part the reason why EU data protection is so stringent (Facebook, 2019).

While there is still a hopeful tone in the Facebook group that Norway's policies may eventually change, at the time of this study, the law remains the same. In 2021, the Supreme Court of Norway ruled that assumed consent cannot be invoked to collect DNA from a biological registry, even if the purpose of accessing the DNA is to help find a missing person or their remains (Library of Congress, 2021).

Regardless of the cross-border complications forming a roadblock, the case is open and active. *Death in Ice Valley* listeners continue to post on the Facebook page, with a few dozen dedicated fans posting frequently, still optimistic they may crack the case. There are periodic comments about how the case will forever remain a mystery. These statements are not negative, but a sort of good-natured suggestion that the story will continue to fascinate future generations. This idea is echoed by Ingver Nedrever, the director of Norway's regional state archive in Bergen, during Ep. 10.

Nedrever: «The most fascinating thing is, of course, that no one has been able to find a solution.»

Solving the case is no longer essential to many listeners who participated in *Death in Ice Valley's* investigation. The power of the podcast and the collaborative cross-border movement it began are still in effect today. In 2023, listeners held a discussion on the podcast's Facebook page about the tremendous impact the podcast made in their lives. One woman summed it up well, writing:

I have to say, this case, and this woman, have led me down the most far-fetched research and unique paths, as well as to interest-

ing people... It's a very strange thing; the lives this woman continues to touch. And in astonishing ways. It truly is unique among all the mysteries of the world (Facebook, 2023).

Discussion and conclusion

Journalism's central role in the true crime genre can be enhanced by cross-border collaboration, especially in areas of diverse nationality such as Europe and regions with many political subdivisions such as East Asia. As with other news media, true crime podcasts carry meaning based on the technological features, affordances, and consumption practices of its users. As such, its stories bear a tension between pulp crime fiction at the one extreme and public service driven investigative journalism at the other (Murley, 2008; Punnett, 2018). The latter is responsible for serving the public interest by narrating a version of real events to the public through «moral messages and social truth» as epitomized by the podcast *Suspicious Activity: Inside the FinCEN Files* (Punnett, 2018: 93). Launched in 2020, this collaboration between BuzzFeed, Pineapple Street Studios, and the International Consortium of Investigative Journalists produced a milestone exposé on global money laundering, a project of monitorial watchdog journalism in service to global democracy.

The International Consortium of Investigative Journalists' collaborative model represents a new future for global journalism that embraces collaboration through podcasts such as *Suspicious Activity*. Compared to production processes associated with traditional print, television, and terrestrial radio, the relative versatility and efficiency of podcast production is particularly well suited to the Consortium's cross-border collaborations, as seen in its podcast *Meet the Investigators*. With a production practice driven by transparency and peer scrutiny, the Consortium includes investigative journalists from 105 countries across 140 newspapers, television and radio stations, and online media organizations (ICIJ, 2024). The podcast medium serves the broader goal of publishing investigations simultaneously around the world, which are made available for free. Among journalistic podcast genres, true crime is the most co-creative as seen in its signature calls for audience input and commitment to fostering inclusive discursive space for amateur investigators. Beyond single news teams canvassing support from listeners, multiple teams from various nations benefit from a larger pool of data and feature reporting gathered by independent journalists whose priority is primarily to serve the public interest.

The staffing of cross-border podcast collaborations with world-class investigative journalists mitigates the liability of prioritizing entertainment over information associated with podcasting in the true crime genre. In a series of interviews with true crime podcasters, Boling (2019) found that the news function as a form of public education was paramount in the production values of the industry's top producers, who took measures to protect against «the like-

likelihood that they might misinterpret the cases or manipulate audiences in a particular way» (168). Boling's podcast producers drew confidence from «the months of preparation that went into their podcasts and how seriously they considered their job of presenting the facts of the cases in a clear and concise manner to the audience» (*Ibidem*). In isolation, however, news teams may succumb to market pressure and competition by sensationalizing stories. Working in multi-team cross-border collectives can prevent the tendency to compromise principles, especially when subsidized by an entity such as the European Union. This insulation from market pressure can thus elevate production standards due to the larger scale international investment in projects. In this manner, production in subsidized cross-border collectives orients reporting toward the education of the audience on the international criminal justice system, a goal reinforced through expanded multi-nation editorial oversight. International multi-team projects can curb the risks of journalistic reporting and writing for the true crime genre, particularly through podcasting's established conventions of transparency and self-reflexivity.

True crime's allure with audiences has traditionally derived from the promise of a resolution to a mystery. Podcast narrativity's signature transparency and self-reflexivity plays on and intensifies listener intrigue. Yet beyond individual journalists, such as *Caliphate's* Rukmini Callimachi, cast as protagonists in the dramatic throes of solving crimes to whet the audience's appetite for a revelatory denouement, cross-border collective production teams approach problem solving through a different epistemological lens. In particular, the community of audience and expert investigators behind *Death in Ice Valley* has shown a powerful capacity to tolerate the ambiguity of indeterminate evidence and the reality that the crime may remain unsolved. Sitting with uncertainty is not necessarily an industrial norm in podcasting, but instead represents one of its most promising leading edges. This mode of what Habgood-Coote (2021) calls «inquiry-driven narrative non-fiction» explores the boundaries of knowledge and the inherently unstable epistemic nature of evidence and artifacts» (29). Failure is built into large scale criminal investigations, as ratiocination is stretched to its limit. The inconclusive search for the Isdal Woman's true identity and cause of death suggest a «recessive epistemology», one with distinctively postmodern sensibility that problematizes ways of knowing over and against strident or stentorian solutions (Verma, 2022: 179). Just the reverse, a collective tolerance for ambiguity is embraced by the producers and community of listeners of *Death in Ice Valley*. Yet as the ongoing nature of the investigation shows through social media posts on the case that continue to appear as of this writing, this recessive epistemology should not be confused with passivity or a lack of energy and engagement. Instead, it is characterized by robust activity, endurance, and appetite for knowledge on the subject, a recessive epistemology that questions totalizing and dominant preconceived theories with an unmistakable questing agnosticism.

A key challenge to the cross-border investigation for *Death in Ice Valley* re-

garded concessions made to Norwegian law enforcement, mitigating the principle of independent journalism. A truly independent investigation would have leveled more severe scrutiny at law enforcement beyond its refusal to allow for the use of DNA evidence to solve the case. Deceptive testimony can plague true crime podcasts, particularly those relying on single sources or institutions for the main narrative. This is exhibited in podcasts relying solely on the perspective of police. The principle of a free press is violated when the police – rather than independent reporters – provide the bulk of the evidence. *Crime Junkie* and *Break in the Case*, for example, tend to polish the image of law enforcement and «oversimplify complex, tragic cases» such that «the good guys find justice for the victims and the bad guy gets what he deserves» (Locke, 2020). These are «more summary than investigative» because they rely upon «official accounts of law enforcement as the factual backbone of a story», thus perpetuating the myth of a functional criminal justice system beyond critique. Shows such as Madeleine Baran's *In the Dark*, published by American Public Media, instead «investigate the injustices of the criminal justice system rather than extending the myth of its competence» (Locke, 2020). The producers of *Death in Ice Valley* were not afforded such an opportunity due to their partnership with the Norwegian police that enabled the investigation in the first place. Compensating for this limitation was the strength of the international audience as investigators of the case and co-creators of the series operating in the spirit of mutual aid and cooperation.

There was not a single part of the podcast series that remained untouched by a mix of diverse sources and nationalities: the cross-border team of journalists and production crew, the Isdal Woman and her international trail of clues, the widespread witnesses and sources for the podcast, the intercontinental police and government agencies who provided evidence, and the various experts who analyzed evidence. Yet, throughout the complicated weaving of the true crime story at the heart of *Death in Ice Valley* there was a consistent throughline: the active participation of the global listeners. Without significant input from the transnational audience, the producers would not have achieved the same high standard of quality for the podcast. Without the foundational investigative work of the producers, the audience would not have a story to convene around. This symbiotic relationship is a glimpse into the future of podcasting, where the information is crowdsourced, the story is co-created with the audience, and international borders are extraneous.

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