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Creating and Destroying Prejudices. Romanian Characters in German Television Thrillers Beginning with the Millennium

Abstract: The study includes over 30 German TV thrillers and series aired during a 20-year period, with the plots located in different regions, in which Romanians play parts of different degrees of importance for the story. The main interest is to identify whether or to which extent the different roles are tributary to stereotypes about Romanians and to what extent the characters might contribute to creating a perception of Romanians in the German society, respectively to changing the existent one.

Keywords: Eastern Europe; Romanians; German Crime Series; Imagology; Stereotyping; Migration; Discrimination; Crime Scene.

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1. Motivation and Methodology

The abundance of Romanian characters of importance for the story in crime films aired on German national TV stations starting with the new Millennium is impressive for a Romanian viewer. This induced the idea of a closer exploration of how far the parts are the result of the German stereotypical perception of Romanians and what type of new stereotypes they are creating. In order to get a more accurate picture, various series of crime films depicting Romanian characters aired on the main German public TV channels were examined by using content analysis with consideration for the sociological aspects. Special attention is also to be paid to the means (geographical elements, *realia*, habits, cultural elements) by which Romanians are identified as such. The theoretical background for the construction of image and characters is given by the articles on Romanians and Gypsies from *Imagology* edited by Manfred Beller and Joep Leerssen (2007).

Almost all of the analysed films and episodes were aired on the German national

TV stations Das Erste and ZDF at different time slots and on different days, during 2001 -2021. The films employed for the present analysis are: *Tatort (Crime Scene)*, with the plots located in different regions of Germany) on Das Erste, aired on Sundays at 20:00 alternatively to *Polizeiruf 110 (Emergency 110)* with the plots located in different regions of Germany, the thrillers aired under the collective name *Der Donnerstag Krimi (The Thursday Murder Mystery)* aired also on Das Erste, at 20:15 and some films on ZDF, among which I mention the 45 minutes short detective stories aired on weekdays at 6 p.m. *SOKO (Special (Investigation) Commission)* from different German cities like Munich, Leipzig, Cologne, Stuttgart etc., the one hour Friday detective story from 20:15 p.m. (i.e. *Der Alte – The Old Man, Die Chefin – The Lady Boss*, both located in Munich), and the usual Saturday crime scene film (among which *Ein starkes Team – A Tough Team*). The most viewers, in some cases over one million, were registered for *Tatort (Crime Scene)* aired on Das Erste every Sunday on 20:15 and for *Ein starkes Team (A Strong/Tough Team)* acting in Berlin) with airing time on Saturdays during the show the Saturday Crime Scene Film with 7,25 Million viewers.¹ The reason for indicating the number of viewers is that it can be relevant for creating or modifying a certain perception of Romanians among the Germans.

2. The Historical European Perception of Romanians vs. Romanian Self-Representation

The historical perception of Romanians initially framed by Italian travellers and chroniclers (Deletant, 2007: 223) and is

based on the similarity between Italian and the language spoken in the visited areas, which lead to the conclusion that the inhabitants of the territory that was once the Roman province of Dacia were themselves descendants of the Romans. This also came hand in hand with the negative label, stating that the Romans sent to Dacia province were exiled wrong-doers, which implied that the descendants still bore the stigma of moral degeneration. In their effort to prove their continuity in Transylvania, Hungarians also described the resident population as a people of uncivilised peasants as opposed to European development of the Hungarian people. Other descriptions range from “indolence” (Deletant, 2007: 224), “apathy” (Deletant, 2007: 224), “indulgence” (Deletant, 2007: 224), “lack of spirit of contradiction” (Deletant, 2007: 224) and “resignation” (Deletant, 2007: 224) over “fatalists” (Deletant, 2007: 224) to the “good savages” (Deletant, 2007: 224). But the most widespread image and perception of Transylvania in the western Culture comes from Jules Verne’s *Le Château des Carpathes* and Bram Stoker’s *Dracula* where “Technical gadgetry is counterpointed by the popular superstition of peasantry” (Deletant, 2007:225). The population is haunted by “vampires, werewolves, evil spirits, ghosts” (Deletant, 2007:225) whom they fight with religious/Christian objects of devotion such as the crucifix and the holy water. Deletant sees in this religious symbolism an important part of the success of the *Dracula* image, which also became the main symbol for Transylvania region and later on was extended to the whole image of Romania.

Besides the Carpathians and Transylvania, Bucharest and Nadia Comaneci are other major markers that overdetermined

the Western framing of Romanian identity. Starting with Romania's adhesion to the EU, the newest stereotypes were created by the perception of corruption at all levels of society leading to extreme poverty. "The country and its people will carry its negative image with them as they cross the threshold into the Union but it is unlikely to overshadow the mystique of the unknown and the perceived authenticity of *La Roumanie Profonde* which continues to lure foreigners." (Pop 2015: 226)

Other stereotypes of the Romanians in the relevant British and French media with echoes in the European society are identified by Doru Pop in his paper *An Analysis of Romanians' Self-Image in Contemporary Cinematographic Representations*. According to Pop, Romanians are represented as "Gypsies, "beggars", "lazy immigrants", the "thieves and whores of Europe" (Pop 2015: 139). Pop reminds how Cristian Mungiu was represented as being a beggar in the French show "Les Guignols de l'Info" on the French channel Canal+ (Pop 2015:139). The negative perception of Romanians is considered to be exclusively due to the fact that they are confused with the members of the Roma ethnic group. Roma people are perceived almost only in negative stereotypes such as beggars, thieves, impostors, lazy, immoral, or kidnappers of children, that is, as perpetrators of all imaginable felonies (*Kommers* 2007: 171). According to an IRES survey from May 2013, Romanians themselves consider they have a bad or very bad image in Europe.²

Doru Pop states that Romanians themselves believe that their bad image in Europe is partially a result of their negative self-representation in Romanian films after

1990 like for instance the "Romanian mioritic nothingness and the poverty, the devaluation of the human being occurred due to the moral degradation of the post-communist society in a contrast to the heroic image of the film figures Burebista, Ștefan cel Mare, Mihai Viteazul or that of the good, kind and hard-working modern-time hero from before 1989 (Pop, 2015: 154).

This generated the question: "Are we the thieves or the whores of Europe, or, on the contrary, we are hard-working, industrious and a creative resource for this "old land"?" (Pop 2015:139).

In chapter 4 I will attempt to determine, to what extent elements of the historical European image of the Romanians appear in German crime scene films.

3. The Stated Mission of German State TV/Public Broadcasting

Look at the stated mission and role of the German public broadcasting is necessary in order to determine if and to what extent it is reflected in the construction of Romanian characters in German crime films.

From official documents on the German public broadcasting policy³, the following can be summarised: the functions of public broadcasting include the information mandate, the forum function, the complementary function, the integration function, the role model function, the innovation function and the culture and production mandate. One of the other essential tasks of the German public service broadcasting is to maintain political and economic independence.

The radio programs should serve, in equal measure, information, education,

culture, and entertainment. Essential aspects are independence from state interference, as well as internal and external freedom of the press.

The dignity of human beings must be respected and protected in the broadcasts. Furthermore, the programs should be committed to the truth.

The political position is considered to be centre left⁴, which is also reflected in crime scene movies.

4. Romanian Characters in Television Thrillers

There were considerations whether to group the films according to the importance of the Romanian characters in the economy of the plot (main characters, secondary characters or just episodic appearance), to chronological criteria (that would be relevant for the evolution – if any – of the image of Romanian characters), according to series, to airing time, to TV station, or to the setting. Eventually, the final decision is to group the films according to the characters' typology in conjugation with the chronological criteria (sections 4.1-4.4, whereas the criteria linked to the relevance to the plot would be resumed in section 4.5).

4.1. The Victim

The main role attributed to Romanians in German crime films is that of victims of human trafficking, being forced into prostitution and beggary. *Verraten und verkauft* (*Betrayed and Sold* - 2001) from the series *Ein starkes Team* (*A Tough Team*, a series located in Berlin) is about a children trafficking network. Romanian

children (7-12 years) are trained by German criminals with the help of a Romanian middleman. The Romanian girlfriend of the head of the gang, a former nurse in her country, is also about to be forced into prostitution. The police manage to bring down the network and save the victims. It is not clear from which Romanian region the children and the middleman come. The nurse claims to be from Braşov. The criminals speak a broken Romanian; the mother tongue is used to impress the children. While Elena Popescu is a frequent name, the only other mentioned name among the pickpockets is Mirko, which is not Romanian. The Romanian grown-ups are depicted as very temperamental and emotional; Elena Popescu shoots a prosecutor by accident while trying to commit suicide. She is played by a Russian actress; all other performers are Germans.

Das große Schweigen (*The Big Silence* 2003) from the series *Ein starkes Team* (*A Strong/Tough Team*) begins with an authentic piece of news from Romania about the increased country rating, to which a protected witness is listening. The witness was supposed to testify against an Albanian pimp dealing with under-aged Romanian girls, but gets killed right at the beginning of the film. The story is built around another Romanian victim with a memory loss, named Adriana. It is not clear from which Romanian region she comes, the only memory she has from home are "mititei", a Romanian dish. As in the film from 2001, the Romanians are young victims of human trafficking; the heads of the gangs and the worse criminals are Germans.

Probably the most shattering story in the present selection is *Operation Zucker* (*Operation sugar*, 2013), about the fight of

a female police officer and a female prosecutor against the trafficking of Romanian children to Germany to the benefit of a ring of paedophiles. The film non-compliantly exposes the helplessness of police and the judicial system, due to the fact that the paedophile “clients” are to be found in the very heart of judicial system, among prosecutors and judges. The victims (children) speak Romanian, the lead actress (a child victim) is Paraschiva Dragus of Romanian origin. The other trafficked children have traditional Romanian names: Toma, Florin, Andrei, just the main characters among the victims are oddly named Fee and Bran. While the main setting of the plot is in Berlin, relevant scenes of the film – the “procurement” of the children – is shown to happen in a poor Romanian village, where a favoured pastime of the children is watching the bears at play.

In 2016 five crime thrillers with Romanian characters are aired among which two from the *Tatort* series, both with the Munich Team – Batic and Leimeyr. In *Mia san jetzt da wo's weh tut* (*We are now there where it hurts* – 9,12 million viewers), the story is about the cover-up of the murder of a Romanian prostitute committed by a German student, the world of human trafficking and forced prostitution. *Klingelingeling* counted 6,73 million viewers. By means of a reversed Christmas story – the dead baby and his mother Tida are brought by the two German policemen back to Romania, so that the baby can be buried in time for Christmas in his mother's poor village –, the film introduces the viewers to the world of the Romanian beggar mafia. Romanians are either criminals (the clan boss Radu Stelică and his brother Călin treat the beggars as slaves

or animals) or victims (the sisters Tida and Anuscha Dablinka, Liana, and all the other beggars). Part of the action is set in Romania and the film is mostly spoken in standard Romanian. The roles are played by the well-known Romanian actors Florin Piersic Jr., Cosmina Stratan, Alexandru Cîrneală and Oana Solomon.⁵ (*Klingelingeling* – 2016)

In 2020, in the *Tatort* episode *Die Goldene Zeit* (*The Golden Times*), set in Hamburg and in the surroundings, the criminal is shown during the execution of the murder in the very beginning of the film. The hitman is an underage drug addict, Matei Dimescu – especially flown in from Bucharest to kill a brothel owner. He has nothing to do with the victim; he just needs a TV set for his father, who had thrown him out of the house, and hopes that the device would buy him his way back. The criminal investigation is around the identification of the person who had order the hit (who will prove to be the sister of victim). The only thing Matei can say is that he had been paid by one Radu from Romania, who was also constantly supplying the red-light district of Hamburg with girls from Romania. Matei himself had come disguised as a girl together with Voica Barbu, Valentina Bălan and Andreea Dinu who were immediately sold to a brothel. Matei speaks mostly Romanian and is played by the Romanian actor Bogdan Iancu.

In *Unbroken* (2021) an important part of the story is developed around Danu, the child of a Romanian prostitute, and the prostitute's pimp, Gabor, a Romanian surrogate mother, Irina, and a middleman with an equally Romanian name, Motrescu. As in *Klingelingelingeling* (2016)

Romanians are identified with the Roma population. The family of the Romanian criminal is described by the policeman in charge as a “typische Zigeunerehe” – typical Gypsy marriage.

4.2. Workers

Starting with 2010, Romanian characters are occupying other social positions in the economy of the plot than that of victims of human trafficking and low of mid-level members of extended criminal networks. That year, *Spargelzeit (Asparagus Time)* – located at an asparagus farm nearby Muenster, with a team made of detective Thiel and the pathologist Boerne) offers a telling example of this transformation. The suspects in the investigated cases of murder and rape are Romanian and Polish harvesters, represented by native spokespersons, who also translate for the Romanians and Poles. The dialogues are authentic, and the Romanian spoken is also authentic, the Romanian foreman’s name is Radu Isărescu, played by Alexandru Mihăiescu from Timișoara. When being questioned by the police, Isărescu replies: “nicht jeder Rumaene ist Dieb, nicht jeder Deutsche ist Nazi” (neither every Romanian is a thief, nor is every German a Nazi) in the attempt to dismantle the stereotype of the Romanian as a “vocational” delinquent. In the end, the Romanian workers team appears in a positive light, as hard-working and essential to the success of the asparagus farm. There is no indication of their exact place of origin, but they sing authentic Romanian folk songs. In the end, the criminal and the rapist turn out to be both Germans.

Romanian workers, such as truck or taxi drivers, also appear in crime films

as extras, being identified as such just by speaking Romanian to each other (as in *Tatort – Unklare Lage*, from 2020, in which one can distinguish the Romanian words “Nu trage, mă!” – Do not fire, man!).

4.3. Others

A special place in the typology of Romanian characters is held by the lead female character Olga Iliescu, the Romanian hacker from Timișoara, in the series *Denkmal*, released on ZDF in 2015. A former *Zielfahnder* (man hunter), now working as a private detective, solves cases with Olga’s help. Even though officially followed by the BKA, Olga is rather a positive character, a Robin Hood-type who helps to uncover criminal actions perpetrated at the highest level of German politics and industry. The fact that she is a Romanian has no further relevance for the story.

In the same year ARD airs the film *Zielfahnder – Flucht in den Karpaten (Manhunt – Escape to the Carpathians)* (2015). Half of the plot of this production is set in Romania, in Bucharest and in a remote village in the Carpathians. The main character is the Romanian smuggler Liviu Car-amitru, who escapes from the prison and flees back to his native country. The film shows Romanian criminals, Romanian policemen and normal people interacting with the German police in an authentic way. A more detailed analysis follows under 4.5.

4.4. The Good Guy

The following years witness a further shift in the representation of Romanians in German crime films. Romanians

are shown as well-integrated professionals, as a mark of diversity. There is no special meaning of them being Romanians, other than giving an image of the former “other” being now part of “we”. In the Stuttgart-located *Tatort* episode *Der Mann der lügt* (*The Man Who Lies* – 2018), the alibi of the main character unjustly suspected for murder provided by his dentist Radu. Only the name shows the Romanian origin of the character, whose ethnic identity is of no further importance for the development of the plot.

Der gute Bulle – nur Tote reden nicht (*The Good Cop – Only Dead People Don't Talk* – 2020) located in Berlin, with 5,32 million viewers, features the Romanian policeman Radu Lupescu (interpreted by Sabin Tambrea) as the counterpart to his somehow corrupt colleague Fredo Schulze. Here the Romanian origin is only meant to signal political correctness and ethnical equilibrium; the Romanian cop sets the ethical standards, while the German one is not exactly a choir-boy.

A similar function seems to have been attributed to the character of the coroner dr. Buda in *Schmerzgrenze* (*Pain Limit* 2020, *Der Usedom-Krimi* series), played by the Romanian actor Axel Moustache. His only reference to ethnic origin is that at some point he mocks his own family name as meaning „toilet” in his native language. Otherwise, he seems perfectly integrated in his German environment.

The newest film in the present selection is *Verspottung* (*Mockery*), from the series *Der Alte* (*The Old Man* – 2021). Ion Bărbulescu (also Axel Moustache) is an IT specialist, his Romanian origin is not specifically mentioned: it is the name and the accent that suggests it. The character is

meant as a standard representative of the reasonably integrated migrant, and the fact that he is of Romanian origin makes no difference to the development of the story. His profile is the one of the generic, not especially the Romanian, computer geek – shy, secretly supporting the woman he loves.

4.5. Romanians – Central Characters to the Development of the Plot

In the following we will look at three of the crime films where the Romanian origin of the characters (be they victims or perpetrators), is relevant for the unfolding of the plot: *Operation Zucker* (*Operation Sugar* – 2013), *Klingelklingeling* (2016), and *Zielfahnder* (2016).

4.5.1. *Operation Zucker*

Operation Zucker is one of the films in which the Romanian origin of the child victims is relevant for the plot. Even if the exact region of origin of the children is not named, in the end the public gets a hint. The main character, Fee, starts speaking German which she knows from her grandmother, indicating that the origin might be in the central or western part of the country.

One of the middlemen in the criminal organisation is also a Romanian, presented as extremely affected by the obnoxious nature of the activities he is intermediating. He gets sick knowing what would happen to the children and sings a sensitive, well-known Romanian folk song entitled *Cine iubeste și lasă* (*He Who Loves and Abandons*). The Romanian origin of the children is suggested by different means such as: the

use of Romanian vernacular, including typical swearwords; the Romanian songs indirectly expressing the children's need for protection; or the Carpathian bear that appears as a savior in the dreams of the little girl who is the main child character. Another stereotypical fact is that at least one of the trafficked children is said to come from an orphanage, described by a middleman in the child porn network as "der Hauptumschlagplatz Europas für kleine Jungs" (*the main European trade market for small boys*).

4.5.2. *Klingelingeling*

As mentioned under 3., this *Munich Tatort* is about the Romanian beggar mafia, about extremely cruel Romanian criminals, leaders of human trafficking gangs forcing poor people into begging for their benefit. The beggars are drugged in order to resist the tough winter conditions and to make them dependent, and kept in cages like animals in a deserted factory in the vicinity of Munich. When, out of different reasons they cannot work, they are simply disposed of. Factual evidence seems to support the story of the film since such networks were identified by the Munich police, according to an interview given in 2016, at the release of *Klingelingeling*.⁶ The story is developed around the beggar Anouschka Dablinka's dead baby, Lucian, found in a cemetery with a note asking for anyone to give him a burial. In the end, Anouschka and her dead son are taken home to Romania by the two German detectives who are the lead characters of the *Tatort München*.

A large number of Romanian actors were hired for the Christmas *Tatort* (crime

scene) *Klingelingeling* by the Bavarian Radio, including the Romanian film star Florin Piersic Jr., who plays convincingly the seedy, unscrupulous boss of the beggar group, Radu Stelică, and Cosmina Stratan (awarded for her acting achievements in *Beyond the Hills* in Cannes in 2012⁷ and at the Berlinale in 2014 with the Shooting Stars trophy⁸), Oana Solomon, Liana and Alexandru Cîrneală, Călin Stelică, and, in other roles, Ioan Pascu and Bogdan Alexandru Pirnau. The shootings took place mainly in Munich and the surroundings. The television premiere of the crime scene episode 1005 "Klingelingeling" was on the second Christmas Day of 2016. Except for the family name and the surnames of the two Dablinka sisters, all the other names are authentic Romanian ones.

The film tends to stereotype Romanians as Roma. It is a known fact that beggar networks in Germany generally have a Roma ethnic background, but in *Klingelingeling* they are not identified as such, while being tacitly assimilated with Romanians in general.

4.5.3. *Zielfabnder – Flucht in den Karpaten*

In this film, the Romanian origin of the main character is of central importance. The Romanian dangerous gangster Liviu Caramitru (interpreted by Dragoș Bucur) breaks out of a German prison and a duo of German investigators (male and female) specialized in manhunt chase him to the capital city and to a Carpathian village, experiencing the everyday work of the Romanian police, underground entertainment in Bucharest, a traditional country wedding, and the idyllic version of life in a

sheepfold. An important part of the movie is spoken in Romanian and the movie was filmed in Romania – Bucharest. In this part of the film, the whole cast, except for the couple of federal “manhunters”, is Romanian. The first local encountered by the German investigators is the police officer Florin (played by the same Axel Moustache) who, while driving them from the airport to the police station where they are expected, uses self-directed irony to give maybe the most detailed description of Romanians in a crime movie:

“As you can see, we have here many beautiful women, but the men are all ugly like me, and they say I’m the handsome one in the department. That’s why they sent me to pick you up, so you can get used to us.”

Hanna: “Are you married?”

Florin: “Why are you asking? Are you looking?”

Hanna: “I have a soft spot for intelligent and funny men.”

Florin: “You Germans are damn quick!”

Hanna: “We heard that about you, too.”

Florin: “But you know, you can’t trust us. We Romanians, we are usually lying”.

Sven: “Is this your police department?” (pointing to the Parliament).

Florin: “Is that what it looks like where you come from?”

Florin: “We prefer to look in obscurity. They call that the *People’s House*. Ceaușescu. If you care to know, a woman designed it. And she was only 20 when she did it.”

Hanna: “So your women are smart, too. It won’t be easy for me here.”

Florin: “We will see that, right?” (*Florin’s mobile rings*.) “My boss” (*conversation in Romanian*: yeah, I got the stuff. They are both here with me. He’s big and she is... horny. Okay, we’re coming.) They are waiting already, eager to see you. I told him, you sexually harassed me.”

Sven: “So?”

Florin: “He thinks either I’m crazy, or you are perverted”.⁹

In his attempt to entertain the German guests, Florin manages to produce the most positive characterisation of Romanians in all German crime films of the present selection. Another element of identification is the music in the car – a Dacia station wagon – *manele* (a type of Balkan music preferred mostly by Roma people), the location of Liviu Caramitru is identified by the music played by a well-known *manele* singer, Adi Minune, also belonging to the Roma minority. The spots showed in Bucharest are the building of the Parliament, Calea Victoriei, the old city centre with authentic clubbing and night life, and a real police station (Secția 1). It is notable that none of the Romanian characters are victims.

Even if it is not explicitly mentioned, the connection with the Roma world of organized crime is obvious and seems to nurture the stereotype of Roma being vocational criminals.

4.5.4. *Soko Leipzig – Verschollen*

In the episode 18 of season 21 of *Soko Leipzig – Verschollen* (*Missed* - 2021), the story is built around Romanians characters. A debt collecting company is owned by a person with Romanian ancestry, who

officially hires Romanians and trains them in German language and legislation. Later, the Romanians are fired and have to accept to work as debt collectors that use illegal, brutal means of extortion. Thus, the same characters are both criminals and victims. The Romanian characters are identified by language and by their own statements. The names sound rather Slavic, Pavel is the Romanian henchman, the company owner's name is Grigorevici, and the only name that sounds genuinely Romanian belongs to their Bulgarian gypsy victim, Petcu.

5. Conclusions

The geographical documentation about Romanian and Romanians is quite accurate, with exception of *Herrenabend*, in which the leader of a humanitarian aid convoy states that Moldova shares a border with Bulgaria (*Tatort Köln - Herrenabend*). This applies also to the names of the characters. First names such as Aurelia, Adriana, Maria, Gloria, Olga, Voica, Liana, Călin, Liviu, Gabor, Florin, Lucian, Mihai Radu, or surnames such as Barbu, Caramitru, Dragomir, Isărescu, Mazilescu, Motrescu, Petrescu, Stelică, are common Romanian names. There are some exceptions like Tida or Anouschka which might bear the exotic connotations of Roma names, or Grigorevic, clearly a Slavic name. The language is authentic, and even when accent betrays that the characters are not played by Romanian actors, the sentences uttered in Romanian are correct and meaningful.

As far as the stereotypes are concerned, under 4.1.3. we argued that the stereotype that conflates the Romanians with the Roma population is the result of ambiguity. The beggars are never identified

as Roma people – which would rather correspond to reality –, and the viewers are left to believe that they are Romanians. In my view, this is due to the fact the German public TV, like German authorities in general, make special efforts to avoid any negative labelling not only of the Roma ethnic minority, but of all minorities of any kind.

With regard to the hierarchy of characters of non-German criminals Romanians are generally ascribed the roles of prostitutes and pickpockets, while most criminals are themselves the victims of human trafficking. The exceptions are the boss of the beggar group in *Kingelingeling*, a pimp in *Unbroken*, and the boss of a gang of pickpockets in *Verraten und verkauft* (*Betrayed and Sold* - 2003), but they are never at the top of the hierarchy. The filmic upper echelons of organised crime are usually populated with Albanians, extremely rich Russian mobsters, or gangsters of Arab or ex-Yugoslav origins. To the best of my knowledge, almost no cases of integrated Russians and Albanians are presented in the present selection of crime films. In fact, besides Romanians, the only other ethnic group represented not only as “criminals” are the Muslims, mostly of Turkish origin.

The main goal in representing criminals from other nationalities is not to give a characterisation of those nationalities, but rather to represent the Other, the alien and the foreign which influences to a certain extent the life and safety of Germans. Using authentic elements contributes to the plausibility of the stories.

When occupying other roles in society then those usually reserved to low-lives, the main motivation in representing Romanians is to produce a plausible model of the of integration capacity and

well-functioning of a multi-cultural society. This is actually an example of transposition of the mission statement of German public TV, of its leftish orientation and of its determination in pursuing the norms of political correctness. An interesting observation would also be that there is no connection or hint between the well-integrated Romanian professionals and Roma people.

With regard to the general perception of Romanians by the Western-European audience, we would risk the assumption, that their cultural perception of Romanians is reflected quite accurately by the stereotypical characters from the German crime films that we surveyed in the above – with, especially in the Anglo-Saxon case, a certain addition of Dracula mythology. The labels of congenial wrong-doers, rather rural, uneducated people, who probably became victims due to their apathy and lack of moral stamina, their resignation, beside the extreme poverty as result of endemic corruption are widely and vividly present.

The geographical identification of Romanians is related mainly to Bucharest, the Carpathians and Timișoara. The setting has a deeper connection to the characters and the plot only in *Zielfahnder*. There,

the cruelty paired with an implicit apology of manliness is connected to the mountain scenery and this rural, pastoral society is something which Romanians also identify themselves with.

The question whether there is a link between the German regions where the plots are located and the appearance of Romanians in the films can be answered with the following observation: Romanian characters appear most often in films linked to Southern regions of Germany, the next region in the order of frequency of occurrence of Romanian characters would be Berlin, whereas they appear only seldom in the Northern and in the North-Western regions of the country. Further investigation should test the hypothesis that this pattern is connected to the actual geographic distribution of Romanian migration to Germany.

The author's personal perception is that the image of Romanians in German crime films is much more positive (in terms of the social and psychological motivation of the crimes) than the general public's perception of Romanians and that it can be seen as a mirror of the social phenomena observed in the German reality.

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Series: *Ein starkes Team*

2001 *Verraten und Verkauft*, directed by Johannes Grieser

2003 *Das große Schweigen*, directed by Maris Pfeiffer

2011 *Gnadenlos*, directed by Peter Fratzscher

2017 *Wespennest*, directed by Martin Kinkel

Series: *Tatort*

2010 Münster: *Spargelzeit*, directed by Manfred Stelzer

2011 Münster: *Herrenabend*, directed by Matthias Tiefenbacher

2016 München: *Mia sand jetzt da wo's weh tut*, directed by Max Ferberböck

2016 München: *Klingelingelingeling*, directed by Markus Imboden

2018 Stuttgart: *Der Mann, der lügt* directed by Martin Eigler

2020 München: *Unklare Lage* directed by Pia Strietmann

2020 Hamburg und Umgebung: *Goldene Zeit*, directed by Mia Spengler

Series: *Polizeiruf 110*

2018 *Das Gespenst der Freiheit*, directed by Jan Bonny

Series *Dengler*

2015 *Die letzte Flucht*, directed by Lars Kraume

- 2016 *Am 12. Tag*, directed by Lars Kraume
 2017 *Die schützende Hand*, directed by Lars Kraume
 2018 *Fremde Wasser*, directed by Rick Ostermann
 2019 *Brennende Kälte*, directed by Rick Ostermann
 Series: *Unbroken* directed by Andreas Senn
 2021: *Chapter 1 – Chapter 6*
 2021 Series *Soko Leipzig: Verschollen*, directed by Patrik Winczewski
 2021 Series: *Der Alte: Verspottung*, directed by Matthias Kiefersauer

OTHERS

- 2012 *Operation Zucker*, directed by Reiner Kaufmann
 2016 *Operation Zucker – Jagtgesellschaft*, directed by Sherry Hormann
 2020 *Der gute Bulle: Nur Tote reden nicht*, directed by Lars Becker
 2020 *Der UsedomKrimi: Schmerzgrenze*, directed Maris Pfeiffer
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NOTES

1. <https://meedia.de/2018/03/11/ein-starkes-team-siegt-mit-fast-8-millionen-zuschauern-das-ding-des-jahres-endet-unspektakulaer>.
2. “As the IRES study realized in May 2013 shows, almost 60% of the Romanians consider that their country is negatively perceived in the EU, 42%, that in has “bad” image and 18% that its image is “very bad”. Only 38% of the respondents considered that the image of the country is “good”, and only 1 % that is is “very good” (<http://www.ires.com.ro/articol/231/dupasase-ani--ce-cred-romanii-despre-uniunea-europeana>.)” (Pop 2013:143)
3. <https://www.nzz.ch/international/ard-und-zdf-links-der-mitte-beliebter-ld.1508430>; <https://www.dasganzewerk.de/pdf/20070911-bverfg-urteilsbegruendung-rundfunkfreiheit-programmauftrag-kurzfassung.pdf>; <https://cdn.prod.www.spiegel.de/media/2e3c9394-0001-0014-0000-00000-0002917/media-2917.pdf>.
4. <https://www.nzz.ch/international/ard-und-zdf-links-der-mitte-beliebter-ld.1508430>.
5. <http://www.tittelbach.tv/programm/reihe/artikel-4352.html>.
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7. https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cosmina_Stratan.
8. <https://www.romania-insider.com/romanian-actress-cosmina-stratan-gets-shooting-stars-trophy-during-berlin-film-festival> and https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cosmina_Stratan.
9. The translation of the dialogue in this scene was taken from Axel Moustache’s internet profile page. <https://filmmakers.de/axel-moustache>.