

Goodies and Baddies: The Presentation of German Police and Criminals in East and West Television Drama

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A. Introduction

Criminal Justice is never only about identifying and sentencing unwanted and thus, outlawed behaviour. As one of the closest contacts between state and citizens, Criminal Justice implies also a system of values and more or less subtle messages which the state wants to transmit to the people. In all modern legal systems, Criminal Law is about society as a whole being deterred from crime, educated and moreover ensured of the state's power, its efficiency and above all its benevolence. In other words, Criminal Justice does not only deal with offenders and victims but additionally with its own presentation in public and the citizens' perception of it.

In the 20th century, the mass media developed its full capacity for influencing the public, and is today one of the main means to inform as well as to manipulate people. Thus, in order to obtain a picture of a Criminal Justice system and its public image, state produced media can offer an important insight.¹ In this paper I would like to present the East German police programme '*Polizeiruf 110*' that has been broadcast from 1971 until now, showing how the state used the entertainment media to promote particular perspectives about crime, police, society and the state.

For this work, I analysed 20 out of the 153 episodes² that were broadcast in the former GDR, i.e. 25 hours and 49 minutes. These episodes were chosen randomly, as I had no free access to the archives. There are also some analyses of this TV

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¹ Steve Greenfield & Guy Osborn, *Film, Law and the Delivery of Justice: The case of Judge Dredd and the disappearing courtroom*, 6 JOURNAL OF CRIMINAL JUSTICE AND POPULAR CULTURE, 35 (1999).

² Some of these 153 episodes are lost today but I could not find out which ones and how many in total.

drama in academic literature, particularly the valuable work of the Institut für Medien- und Kommunikationswissenschaften in Halle.

B. The Notion of Crime in the Former GDR

In the first years after the founding of the German Democratic Republic in 1949 it was believed according to Socialist ideology that crime was bound to die out in the GDR, since the new social order would delete any need for or inducement to crime. With full employment, free education, a sound health system, the possibility of political participation and equality of opportunities, the modern rational citizen – so it was thought – would not make the irrational decision to commit a crime. Indeed, compared to Western legal systems, the GDR had incredibly low crime rates³. Factors underlying crime such as unemployment, homelessness, poverty, or drug taking were nearly non-existent⁴. Furthermore, intensive interest and consideration of young people and their occupation and employment took adolescents from the street and reduced juvenile crime.

Existing crime was explained as a remnant from the old bourgeois society that would disappear as soon as Socialism was thoroughly established. In television police drama this historic explanation of crime was reflected by the programme '*Fernsehtribunal*', which presented trials from the Kaiser Reich and the Weimar Republic. When in the Sixties crime had still not disappeared the explanations turned westwards. Crime was now believed to be initiated or at least influenced by the imperialistic West, particularly West Germany. The new police drama '*Blaulicht*'⁵ dealt with cross border crime in Berlin and presented West Berlin criminals operating in the East sector (and being detected by the Eastern police, while the West Berlin law enforcers turned out to be quite useless). But after the construction of the Berlin Wall, when crime still continued to be committed, this explanation lost its credibility and *Blaulicht* ran out of stories.

The new criminological theory was based on a distinction between political and non-political crime, what Markovits calls 'friend-enemy-theory'⁶. According to this division the offender was either an 'enemy of the state' who deliberately tried to damage society (political crime), or they committed the crime not understanding

³ Erwin Lautsch & Frank von der Heide, *Entwicklung der Straftaten und der Aufklärungsquote in der DDR von 1985-1989*, NEUE JUSTIZ, 12 (1991).

⁴ Interviews with former GDR lawyers

⁵ Broadcast 1959-1968

⁶ Inga Markovits, *Last Days*, 80 CALIFORNIA LAW REVIEW, 73, 98 (1992).

that in the benevolent socialist society there was no need nor advantage in crime and that they would harm themselves most of all. This kind of offender was seen as the 'mistaken friend'. Whereas the former one would be punished harshly and locked away, the latter had to be educated and then re-integrated in society. Law and particularly criminal law was a tool for the development of society towards a better community, i.e. communist society. Thus, in socialist countries law had an important educational role to play building and strengthening the citizens' socialist conscience. The new police drama *Polizeiruf 110* still stressed that crime was foreign to the nature of socialism, but it acknowledged that there were still unsolved conflict and thus crime in the GDR. However, it was clearly shown that crime could be overcome.

The aim to put the 'enemy', i.e. the political criminal, out of sight of the people was not only achieved by separating his or her prosecution and conviction from the ordinary criminal procedure⁷ but as well by excluding him or her from any coverage in the media. Subsequently, *Polizeiruf 110* dealt only with the second form, the 'mistaken friend' who committed only non-political crime.

Since crime in a socialist society was bound to die out, it was presented much more harmless and less violent in *Polizeiruf 110* than in its West German counterpart, *Tatort*. Instead of only homicides, the team in East Germany had also to deal with break-ins, alcohol abuse, embezzlement, fraud, and forgery. Interestingly for the viewer today, there were also crimes that are not labelled as such in West Germany, such as skiving off work, hooliganism or neglecting one's children.⁸ Environmental crime or crime at higher social and political levels (such as tax evasion or other white-collar crime⁹) was a taboo, and of course corruption or even attempt of corruption was never shown on screen. In only very few cases were there any planned cold-blooded murder. In most cases of killing, there was an unexpected argument or fight, when the victim was beaten and fell awkwardly. Usually, crime was shown as self-breeding, i.e. one crime was only committed to cover up another. The presentation of smaller crime taught the viewers that every criminal act violated the socialist society even if the results were not horrendous.¹⁰ Another

⁷ There was a separate police investigating, a separate prosecutor charging, a separate court trying with separate defence lawyers, and a separate prison executing; Markovits, *supra*, at 97.

⁸ §§ 142, 215, 216 StGB-DDR

⁹ Exception episode "Holzwege" ("Wrong Tracks") episode no. 51

¹⁰ PETER HOFF, *POLIZEIRUF 110 - FILME, FÄLLE, FAKTEN*, 76 (2001)..

reason for presenting smaller rather than violent crime was the aim to be realistic and authentic.¹¹

Interestingly, many offences that were shown in *Polizeiruf 110* were hardly seen elsewhere on GDR television, such as rape, child abuse, sexual perversion, juvenile crime, alcoholism or suicide. However, *Polizeiruf 110* showed that these were problems of individuals and parental education, not of society, ideology, state or Party.

C. 30 YEARS *POLIZEIRUF 110*

Research at the end of the 1960s revealed that the audience of GDR television wished to have more police dramas broadcast. In spite of the popular crime series such as *Blaulich* and the *Fernsehpitaval*, many viewers would switch over to West German media.¹² When on the 29th November 1970 the famous and popular West police drama *Tatort* broadcast its first episode, most of the GDR viewers watched this programme, too. At the following SED Party conference Erich Honecker urged the need to overcome 'a certain boredom' of GDR television and to take the need for entertainment into account¹³. Only eight months after *Tatort* started, on the 27th of June 1971 the first episode of *Polizeiruf 110* was broadcast on GDR television. Until 1989 the series was produced by the 'Fernsehen der DDR'¹⁴, resulting inevitably in strict political control, especially regarding the presentation of crime and the police force.¹⁵

Genuine detectives¹⁶ would advise not only the authors but also the directors and the dramatic advisors on legal and political issues 'at every stage of the

¹¹ It was stressed that many stories were based on real cases. Guder, *supra*, note 15 at 6

¹² Andrea Guder & Karin Wehn, *Polizeiruf 110: the Transition from Socialism to Capitalism*, 8 HALMA. HALLISCHE MEDIENARBEITEN, 12, (1998) available at: <http://www.medienkomm.uni-halle.de/forschung/publikationen/halma8.pdf>

¹³ Peter Hoff, *GDR-TV meets USA, Die vereinigten Staaten von Amerika im unterhaltenden DDR-Fernsehspiel und - Film der fünfziger bis siebziger Jahre*, in JEANS, ROCK & VIETNAM. AMERIKANISCHE KULTUR IN DER DDR. (THERESE HÖRNIG/ALEXANDER STEPHAN EDS., 2002)

¹⁴ Television of the GDR

¹⁵ For example, they did not want the police shown having a cake and coffee break on duty, which would be quite normal in real life but would undermine the official picture of the hard-working never-resting police.

production'.¹⁷ The director's department on the other hand would check political and technical questions (for example forensic methods) with 'social partners', i.e. organs of state such as the Criminal Investigation Department in the Ministry of Home Affairs.¹⁸

Like *Tatort* the episodes for *Polizeiruf 110* were written, directed, filmed and acted by a variety of artists. The resulting diversity of stories, and additionally artistic devices (for example the experimental use of light, music, and perspective), prevented the boredom of repetitive uniformity and probably was one of the key factors for the decade-long success of *Polizeiruf 110*, which became the public's 'darling' right from the beginning. The viewing figures rated typically far above 50% until 1986 and still very high afterwards. Even when *Tatort* and *Polizeiruf 110* were broadcast at the same time *Polizeiruf 110* would not lose audience figures.¹⁹ *Polizeiruf 110* was broadcast not only on the regional channels in West Germany but also abroad in Afghanistan, Mongolia and Vietnam. In some countries of the Soviet Union the episodes were even shown in cinemas. Due to its permanent competition with the West German programmes, *Polizeiruf 110* became excitingly 'Western' itself in the eyes of viewers in Siberia and Ukraine.²⁰

At the end of 1989 the 'Fernsehn der DDR' was transformed into the Deutsche Fernsehfunk²¹ which was dissolved only two years later. The two new regional channels in the East ORB and MDR²² continued to produce and broadcast further *Polizeiruf 110* episodes. In 1994 the national public channel ARD²³ decided to keep the programme because the drama bore valuable witness to the past and contributed to the East German sense of identity. Another reason was probably that between 1991 and 1993 the series had good viewing figures among West German

¹⁶ The police superiors liked the programme (and one actor remembers drinking vodka with the police chief, who also offered him protection in small offences, like speeding).

¹⁷ Guder & Wehn, (note 12), 13.

¹⁸ Andrea Guder, *Das Kriminlggenre im Fernseh der DDR: Aktueller Forschungsstand und auswahlbiographie*, 3 HALMA. HALLISCHE MEDIENARBEITEN, 6 (1996) available at: <http://www.medienkomm.uni-halle.de/forschung/publikationen/halma3.pdf>

¹⁹ Guder, (note 18), 18.

²⁰ Hoff, (note 10), 93.

²¹ German Television and Radio

²² Ostdeutscher Rundfunk (East German Broadcasting); Mitteldeutscher Rundfunk (Middle German Broadcasting)

²³ Allgemeiner Rundfunk Deutschland (General Broadcasting Germany)

viewers, too.²⁴ Today other regional channels, even West German ones, are broadcasting their own episodes of *Polizeiruf 110*. After 153 episodes produced in East Germany between 1971 and 1991 *Polizeiruf 110*²⁵ is the only television production that has survived the reunification.²⁶

D. The Police Officers

The name '*Polizeiruf 110*' means 'police call 110'. This is the number to be called in an emergency (like 999 in the UK). The name not only made every child memorise this number but in addition demonstrated that all crime was dealt with by the 'ordinary' police force rather than special departments, such as a homicide department.

Since the police force represented the socialist state, the police characters were based on the socialist conception of ideal man.²⁷ The consultants from the Investigation Department of the Ministry for Interior made sure that in each episode the police were portrayed as correct, law abiding, strict but not unjust, intelligent, self-controlled, and unemotional. Committed, hard working, strict but also caring, they convey correctness and security. All police were presented exclusively in their function as members of the police force without personal conflicts or private problems²⁸. Thus, their characters were quite flat and without any ambivalence.²⁹

Oberleutnant³⁰ Peter Fuchs, for example, the undisputed leader, represented the father role, being rather paternal towards colleagues, criminals, witnesses and suspects, regularly giving advice and reprimands. He showed compassion but was

²⁴ Guder & Wehn, (note 12), 13.

²⁵ Besides the children series *Sandmännchen*

²⁶ Guder & Wehn, (note 12), 12.

²⁷ Guder, (note 18), 6.

²⁸ Sometimes there are even contradictions, i.e. a detective has a family in one episode and is single in the next one.

²⁹ Another reason why the characters remained often superficial is that frequently when the authors wrote an episode they did not know yet which policeman would take the main part.; Guder, (note 18), 17.

³⁰ Lieutenant. Whereas in the FRG the detectives have administrative ranks (inspector) the GDR used military ranks, because the police was an armed state force, too.

strict and fairly moralising; at least once per episode he had a serious talk with somebody, and the wagging finger was his trademark. His work showed experience, strategy and organisation and – as his name³¹ suggests – he was of course very intelligent. Only occasionally, he allowed himself to show his dry humour. He was firm but fair and without prejudices. For example in *'Vorurteil?'*³² Fuchs was the only one who did not prejudge and suspect the victim's husband and thus made it possible to find out the truth.

The woman in the team was Leutnant Vera Arndt. She was married and a mother of two, but combining job and family was never a problem. She presented 'the incarnation of the self-confident, working woman'³³ and mother, and was an idol for many female viewers. Arndt had received psychological training and it was often her who listened to confessions of both criminals and witnesses. She brought some emotions into the case and often had the final (intuitive) hint for the solution. But showing more human emotion and less professional competence, her role was far from emancipated or equal to her male colleagues. This distribution of functions that reflected the common role play between male and female colleagues, i.e. the man is led by logic and the woman by 'female intuition', was presented as them completing each other. Women made important contributions to the team but men played the main part and always had the final say.

Each case was solved by one main inspector who was the head of the investigation team for the specific case. However, police work was always done in a collective. Even though one police officer had to take on the planning and direction there was never one single hero. All police persons are extremely kind and respectful towards each other. The few women were recognised and there was no sexual tension between any of the characters.³⁴ There was hardly any competition or tension among the team and the very few (harmless) arguments were usually rooted in problems related to the case, not in personal issues or animosities. The detectives were one hundred percent dedicated to the case and refrained voluntarily from their long-planned cinema visit or even willingly interrupted their holidays. And in

³¹ "Fuchs" means fox

³² "Prejudice?" episode no. 42

³³ Guder & Wehn, (note 12), 15.

³⁴ Only in one episode, no. 107 ('Kein Tag wie jeder andere' 'Not a day like any other'), a policeman has a crush on a female colleague and the police work is endangered. This is one of the very rare cases where a detective is strongly criticised by his superior, but this incident is presented as an absolute exception.

every case, the detectives cared not only about witnesses and victims but about the criminals as well.³⁵

E. Police Work in Fiction and Reality

The starting point of the investigation was forensic evidence. The scientific work of police was strongly emphasised and elaborately presented. Sometimes long scenes showed nothing but scientists in laboratories examining the smallest evidence in detail. The findings of forensic examinations were often rather unrealistic. Not only that the criminals tended to 'lose' unbelievably many items, and leave fingerprints³⁶ and other traces, but what is more, the specialists obtained incredible amounts of information out of the research. In '*Der zersprungene Spiegel*'³⁷ for example the police found a button at the crime scene. Not only could the forensic specialists determine that the button had been lost just recently, but also that the rest of the thread that happened to have remained in the button is of new production, so that the police could identify the kind of jacket and even the date when it was bought. Thus, from the three suspects, who all had worn this kind of jacket on the day of crime, the guilty one could be identified. In reality some findings might indeed have been easier than in the West because of the much smaller variety of available products³⁸, but all in all the amount of information that could be gained by forensic analysis was not plausible. The forensic work was supposed to stress the scientific methods and the scientific power of the police and to demonstrate that no criminal had a chance to remain undetected, no matter how careful they were³⁹.

In addition, case reconstructions were standard procedures devices. Whereas for example, today computers calculate how fast a car must have been going to produce certain long skid marks, in the former GDR the police would have to try out various speeds in the street. In '*Schnelles Geld*'⁴⁰, a witness who had seen the robbers escaping by car could not recall the type of the car but remembered the sound it made. Hence, the police start a number of cars until the witness could

³⁵ Hoff, (note 10), 52.

³⁶ Even when they use gloves, they take them off at one point in time and touch something.

³⁷ "The broken Mirror" episode no. 101

³⁸ So it might be realistic that in this episode three colleagues were all wearing the same kind of jacket.

³⁹ Of course scientific excellence also contributes to the entertainment of the audience, who has always been fascinated by this since *Sherlock Holmes* until *CSI*.

⁴⁰ "Quick Money" episode no. 87

identify the correct model. This effort would be unthinkable today. However, besides the old equipment used, the police behaved quite unprofessionally, for example handling objects of evidence without gloves or not sealing off the crime scene.

The second source of information was intensive inquiry of witnesses and suspects. Using psychology the detectives managed very often to make criminals accidentally reveal too much information or witnesses to mention details that happen to be the clue for the case. The questionings were usually very strict: nobody could play smart with the police. Somehow the detectives always knew when they were lied to, even if there was no apparent reason to distrust the statement. On the other hand many witnesses trusted the police and confessed small and large mistakes, and always found an open ear for private problems. In one episode a young girl even talked in detail about her sex life with the perverted offender, saying that she could not have had disclosed this to anybody else before. The message was important: 'The police care about you and all aspects of your life, because the state cares about you and all aspects of your life.' Interestingly, the police not only asked eyewitnesses about the crime but always also friends, colleagues and neighbours in order to get a picture of the suspect. Fuchs seldom failed to ask 'What kind of person is this?' Crime was not rooted in external circumstances, but in the personality of the criminal.

The true police work, so it was implied, was the deduction of bits and pieces of information. Whereas the forensic specialist and the inquiring assistants collected all the evidence, it was the task of the leading detective to combine the facts and arrive at the right conclusions. However, many cases were solved by painstaking work rather than by intelligent brainwork. The most extreme example of this (although there are many) is '*Der Kreuzworträtsel Fall*'.⁴¹ The criminal who had tortured, sexually abused, and killed a small boy, had disposed of the corpse in a suitcase. The newspaper found in the suitcase, consisting only of crossword sheets filled in by a single writer, was the only hint the police had. Therefore they spent several months trying to find this person by comparing the handwritings of any handwritten piece they could find in a large Berlin neighbourhood. They not only scanned all personal files of the residents of this housing estate⁴², but also all the old newspapers for more crosswords (more than 30 tons of waste paper). As in all of the old *Polizeiruf 110* episodes, all this work is done without computers. In other cases the police scanned the files of all known bank robbers (up to thirty years

⁴¹ "The Crossword Case" episode no. 123

⁴² That shows that there is information collected about where people work and the police had access to their files.

before, again without computer), or questioned hundreds of people. There never seemed to be a limit to personal or material resources. The interesting point is that this was not based on an idealised or even propagandist picture of the police but rather reflected reality. Interviews I conducted with former GDR police officers revealed that because of the low crime rate and the relatively good funding of the police, they could afford to investigate each case thoroughly.

The police investigation, in reality merely the first step of the criminal procedure, is presented as the whole case. What Dominick found for American police dramas is true for *Polizeiruf 110* as well:

A significant part of the legal process is invisible in the TV world. While track down and capture are common, arraignments, indictments, pre-trial hearings, jury selection, and plea-bargaining are rarely shown.⁴³

But in contrast to Western stories, here reality was portrayed fairly accurately. Because of the highly intensive investigation there were hardly any cases without confessions⁴⁴ in the former GDR, and the prosecutor usually had a very strong case whereas the defence's function was in the first place to mitigate the sentence rather than to challenge the charge. Thus, the audience's expectations that the uncovered criminal was tried and convicted would not have been disappointed in real life, in contrast to Western countries where the high level of procedural safeguards and the limited investigation of an under-funded police force make cases much weaker than they are presented in Western television police dramas.

What is not realistic, however, is the small role the prosecutor played in the police investigation. In both German states the public prosecutor is officially the head of the investigation and in the former GDR the co-operation between police and prosecutor was very close. She or he was not only responsible for procedural questions such as granting a search warrant⁴⁵, but additionally for the organising and conducting of the actual investigation⁴⁶. There would be no serious crime without the prosecutor coming personally to the scene of crime. However, in *Polizeiruf 110* the prosecutor is hardly ever mentioned and never shown.

⁴³ Joseph R. Dominick, *Crime and Law Enforcement on Prime-Time television*, 37 PUBLIC OPINION QUARTERLY, 241, 246 (1973).

⁴⁴ One of my interviewees said that he would not bring a charge as long as he had no confession by the accused.

⁴⁵ § 109 Criminal Procedure Code of the GDR

⁴⁶ § 87 Criminal Procedure Code of the GDR

Another interesting point is that the detectives in *Polizeiruf 110* never found themselves in the tension between law and case-solving, in contrast to Western police series, where it is exactly this conflict that gives the story more thrill. In Western television programmes the police frequently use illegal ways and tricks to catch the guilty. Of course there is no doubt who the guilty person is and that the committed crime and the demanded justice justify these illegal means.⁴⁷ If a prosecutor denies a search warrant for example, he or she is presented as an obstacle in the course of justice, standing in the way of the good detective who has to fight on two fronts. Often we learn in Western police and court dramas that the heroes are “prepared to go beyond the law if justice were best served in this way”.⁴⁸ It is never suggested to the audience that the police officers should accept that the guilty get off free because this is what modern democratic procedural safeguards require. In the GDR police dramas, these illegal tricks were never necessary because the police always get all the support they needed from their superiors. Both law and executive forces were presented as efficient and without any loopholes for the criminal.

Obviously, there was no other illegal behaviour among police officers either, such as corruption, gambling or drinking on service, not even morally questionable behaviour such as smoking or having affairs. Furthermore, the police never engaged in violence. There is no shooting during manhunts and no slapping at inquiries: a loud word was the strongest a stubborn criminal or lying witness can expect⁴⁹. One never saw resistance to arrests and only in very few cases an armed policeman.

Of course, like all police dramas in East and West all criminals were caught and the universal message ‘Crime does not pay’ was perpetuated each episode.

F. The Criminals

In the first years, *Polizeiruf 110* followed the ‘who-dunnit?’ scheme, i.e. the police investigation was shown without the audience knowing who the criminal was. But more and more the criminal was presented to the audience quite early and, instead

⁴⁷ Greenfield and Osborn, (note 1), 38.

⁴⁸ Greenfield and Osborn, (note 1), 40.

⁴⁹ The case “Der Mann im Baum” ends in a manhunt for a rapist; when the police finally get him the police woman who had been attacked earlier (as part of the trap to catch him) indeed slaps him. But this was a spontaneous reaction by the actress who had identified too much with the role. However, the scene was not cut.

of solving the mystery, the audience was asked to reflect on the offender's motivations and the circumstances leading to the offence.⁵⁰ Not 'Who is the criminal?' but rather 'Why did a member of our (good) society become a criminal?' became the central question. Besides this educational reason the "who-dunnit" scheme was disapproved of (particularly by member of the Ministry of Interior⁵¹) because it required the appearance of a number of plausible suspects which meant that too many citizens had to be presented with possible motives for committing a crime.

The criminals in *Polizeiruf 110* were 'Mr. and Mrs Everybody'⁵², normal people with normal professions, like workers, shop assistants or hairdressers. The stories were usually set in small towns or in the countryside, so the audience could identify with the characters, since in the GDR about two thirds of the population lived in towns and villages under 10,000 habitants.⁵³ The crime happened in the heart of society, not at its margin⁵⁴, in contrast to many US series where the criminals are often rootless with little identification with society.⁵⁵

For most Western police series it can be said that the ...one dimensional representation of the criminal and his motives apparently has the function to construct an unambiguous position for the police, which is also constructed rather clearly.⁵⁶

The contrary is true for *Polizeiruf 110*: not the detectives but the criminals are portrayed in depth. The process of deciding to commit a crime, the planning and preparation and finally the crime itself were shown in such detail that often the episode was halfway through before the police made their first appearance. Likewise the offenders' attempts to cover up their crime were shown as intensely as the police's effort to detect it. The description of the criminal was used to illustrate

⁵⁰ Guder, (note 18), 15.

⁵¹ Guder, (note 18), 16.

⁵² Ingrid Brück & Reinhold Viehoff *Crime genre and television. From Stahlnetz to Tatort: a realistic tradition* .8 HALMA HALLISCHE MEDIENARBEITEN, 3, 6 (1998), available at: <http://www.medienkomm.uni-halle.de/forschung/publikationen/halma8.pdf>

⁵³ Hoff, (note 10), 43.

⁵⁴ However, often criminals in *Polizeiruf 110* have not finished their school education; Hoff, (note 10), 74.

⁵⁵ Dominick, (note 43), 250.

⁵⁶ Brück & Viehoff, (note 47), 7.

how easy it could be to slide into crime. The lesson was not simply: 'Do not commit a crime' but above and beyond: 'Be a good socialist person'.

Another difference from the West was the in-depth depiction of the motives of the offenders. In Western crime stories "a TV criminal is a function, not a person"⁵⁷ with quite shallow motivations (the offender is usually greedy, jealous or simply evil). In contrast *Polizeiruf 110* gives profound explanations. For example the motive for robbery is explained by the emotional dependency of the husband on his demanding wife, and his failed attempts to provide her with the required luxury articles. In another episode a young man commits a crime to finance his own house to get away from an authoritarian stepfather. The criminals are not looking for a grand life at the side of a swimming pool, rather they need money for a specific object to improve their (quite simple) everyday life.

Also the social environment of the offender was portrayed in detail. Regularly family members were criticised for lack of caring, and victims for encouraging or at least not preventing the crime. Working colleagues in contrast were often presented as trying to help the offender with his problems but failing only because of his stubbornness. In this part of the story lied one of the strongest educational functions. In the first place everybody had to take responsibility for his own actions, but at the same time one was responsible for fellow members in society as well.

But although in most cases the criminal's friends or family had some share of the blame or at least the bad influence, it was made clear that the offender alone was responsible for the crime. The viewer should understand the reasons for the crime happening, but not develop compassion or forgiveness. This was done very boldly in 'Die Abrechnung' where a prisoner reflected on his crime which he had stumbled into, and now came step by step to the conclusion that he alone was culpable and that he could not blame his criminal wife. The audience was meant to understand that the enlightened rational person in the socialist society had to take responsibility for their decisions and conduct.

Another important educational point promoted was that the socialist brotherhood could also be found in the relationship between victim and criminal. The victims or their family hardly ever showed any anger or hate towards the criminal. In 'Der zersprungene Spiegel'⁵⁸ for example, the victim's wife bandaged her husband's killer's wounds after he was beaten up.

⁵⁷ Dominick, (note 43), 250.

⁵⁸ "The Broken mirror" episode no. 101

A strong emphasis was placed on the impact of crime not only on the victim⁵⁹ but also on the criminal's family and partner. In most cases children were shown who lost a parent, either because they were the victim or because they were the offender who was going to be imprisoned before long.

As opposed to West German programmes, in *Polizeiruf 110* the killers (like the other perpetrators) always showed remorse. In most cases the homicide is an accident and the criminals stress that they did not intend the death. Violent crimes which indeed were intended (rape, child abuse) were explained with mental disabilities and childhood traumas of the offender.⁶⁰

Summarising, one can say that in most Western crime dramas the detectives have a relatively deep and interesting personality that is developed from episode to episode, whereas the criminals have only very flat characters, without convincing explanations for their behaviour.⁶¹ In East Germany it was quite the opposite. The police are presented only in their function as (perfect) members of the police force, whereas the criminals and their acquaintances (and often the victims as well) have deep characters that demonstrate the reasons for as well as the consequences of crime. Throughout the series, it became clear that crime was an exception, either based on mental defects of the criminal (crime as a disease) or because people are too greedy, in spite of the fact that in a socialist society based on equality they have no reason for this (crime as moral deficiency).

G. Conflicting Messages

The criminal drama in the GDR had several functions: first, there was always a more or less subtle moral lesson for the audience to learn, i.e. to be modest, honest and caring⁶². Second, it informed about crime and thus, contributed to crime prevention and detection. The viewer was shown how important the social environment of the potential criminal was and how a person should react when they learned anything about a planned or committed crime. Also voluntary support

⁵⁹ For example "Der Mann in Baum", where the problems and prejudices, which a rape victim has to face, are shown.

⁶⁰ "Minutes too late" episode no. 9 for example the extremely oppressive education by the child abuser's mother.

⁶¹ For example, jealousy or greed has to be sufficient for the viewer to explain, why somebody commits a murder.

⁶² The high number of episodes in which at some point in time somebody is blackmailed implied the message that one should always be 'clean'

of the police (police helpers) was promoted in some episodes. The third very important message was about following safety regulations. Many crimes in *Polizeiruf 110* would have been prevented if colleagues had followed the provisions of order and security at the workplace.⁶³ Additionally, frequently the ideal working colleagues were presented to the viewer. In *'Der Einzelgänger'* the stubborn and lonesome teenager was compared with a group of concerned trainees who visit their superior at the hospital. In *'Die Abrechnung'* it is the working colleagues (and not the police) who sit together to question a colleague who had found a corpse, but run away instead of trying to help or call the police. After severe critique of their colleague and obvious disappointment about his antisocial behaviour, Peter Fuchs comforts them, explaining

It is an old experience of police work that the failure of the individual does not automatically means the failure of the collective.

Regarding the characters who are not police officers, it is interesting to observe that there are two types of people who appeared very often throughout the series. Firstly, these were alcoholics. This was not only educational, demonstrating the bad effects that this condition had both on the addicted themselves and on their social environment but it also mirrored the reality of the GDR, with this widespread legal 'drug of the people'. For example, the episode *'Der Teufel hat den Schnaps gemacht'*⁶⁴ which dealt with the problem of alcoholism, attracted numerous letters from the audience; and alcoholics, relatives, doctors, and therapists praised the drama. This episode was even shown in therapy centres all over the GDR.⁶⁵ The second group were released prisoners. Usually, they were presented as completely re-socialised but still fighting with problems of prejudices in society. This showed the viewers that prison, in its function of rehabilitation of the offender, worked and that the only obstacle to the reintegration of the reformed prisoners were people's predispositions. Contemporary criticism of long-term prison sentences obviously were not addressed here.

Polizeiruf 110 also mirrored the role of women in the GDR. In the socialist society women were much more emancipated in professional life than in most Western states at the same time. For example, in the GDR women would work in all the

⁶³ For example, episodes no. 1 "Der Fall Lisa Murnau", no. 38 "Schwarze Ladung", or no. 43 "Bitte Zahlen".

⁶⁴ "The Devil made the Liquor" episode no. 69

⁶⁵ In the late 1980s, however, state control became much harsher and the unusually short length of some episodes strongly indicates that censorship cut out critical scenes.

typical male-dominated professions and the state encouraged and facilitated the combination of work or study and childcare. However, while she was allowed to work as much as the husband (and housewives disapproved of), it was still the woman who was additionally in charge of housework and child care. Moreover, the high profile positions were nearly exclusively occupied by men. Similarly, in *Polizeiruf 110* women could be clever offenders, observing witnesses and good policewomen, but no woman worked as superior, either in the police force or in other entities. They often had a strong position in private relationships, but it was the man who had the last word. Dominick's observation of the role of women in western police series,

Women [...] are more likely to be objects of victimisation than men and less likely to inflict violence, thus, emphasising their subordinate position⁶⁶ can be confirmed for *Polizeiruf 110*. Surprisingly, in many episodes one could see the woman being the 'good' person who wanted to behave morally correct whereas the unscrupulous man chose the 'bad' way. The woman has morality and law on her side but in the end she gave in to the man's decision.

Relating to families it has to be mentioned that there was hardly any crime within the family or between wife and husband, but in nearly every episode there was at least one extra-marital affair.

Obviously, the police series could only inform and educate if it was watched by many citizens. Thus, the makers had to make sure that it was entertaining enough to attract as many viewers as possible. Despite the high popularity of exciting crime stories in general, from a contemporary point of view *Polizeiruf 110* was rather long-winded, if not boring. Since the programme always dissociated itself from being an action series⁶⁷ opportunities to contribute to the thrill of the audience through interesting pursuits (for example 'Der Fall Lisa Murnau'⁶⁸ where the police follow a man in a ghost train) were rarely used. Moreover, the story offered hardly any surprising twists.

The most important reason for its ongoing popularity was the presentation of explosive topics that could not be found elsewhere in the GDR media. Usually, television in the GDR was centralised state television with a long list of taboos. Showing serious daily problems of society was forbidden, and many critical television dramas were heavily censored. However, since it was realised that the

⁶⁶ Dominick, (note 43), 242.

⁶⁷ Hoff, (note 10), 94.

⁶⁸ "The Case Lisa Murnau" episode no. 1

police drama was tremendously popular with the GDR audience, state control had to make some concessions to the makers of *Polizeiruf 110*. This scope of freedom to express critical realism which the producers and authors had and which they extensively used to address explosive issues, I find the most fascinating about *Polizeiruf 110*. For example, it was none other than Erich Honecker himself who was in charge of youth work, so that any slight critique of this topic was extremely difficult.⁶⁹ In *Polizeiruf 110*, however, the stories often dealt with young offenders and victims and implied indirectly strong criticism of the treatment of the youth. In 'Fehlrechnung'⁷⁰ the case dealt with criminal cooperation between two state-owned companies. This subject was extremely explosive because it showed that crime was not only committed by alienated individuals but rather had a broad basis in the population.⁷¹ The episode 'Schuldig'⁷² exposed the shortage of living space that forced many divorced couples to live in small places together, because there was no housing available to move into. Again, that was a harsh critique of a state that could not manage to provide sufficient living space, even though public sector house building was one of its prestigious objectives. Another important taboo which was addressed in *Polizeiruf 110* quite early (before *Tatort* did on West German television) was rape and child abuse. Equally, prostitution, which officially did not exist in the former GDR, was presented. In another case even the Party itself was criticised when a promising scientist was unfairly obstructed in his research. Because of the freedom that the artists had in *Polizeiruf 110* there were many episodes that revealed social dramas under the disguise of a crime story. A topic that would not have been allowed in any other television drama was possible in *Polizeiruf 110*, as long as the crime itself was not politically motivated.⁷³ Political crime was the line that could never and was never crossed.

We find in *Polizeiruf 110* the fascinating hybrid situation that two contradicting voices wanted to transmit their messages to the audience. On the one hand the state promoted its benevolence in the form of a caring and successful police force that restores the perfect society. On the other hand the authors, directors, camerapersons, actors, etc. wanted to disclose the weak points of this state and society. Both voices found themselves in a symbiotic position because they were

⁶⁹ Episodes no. 21 "Per Anhalter" ("Per Hitchhiker"), no. 64 "Der Einzelgänger" ("The Loner"), no. 29 "Nachttaxi" ("Night Taxi"), no. 94 "Inklusive Risiko" ("Risk Inclusive")

⁷⁰ "Miscalculation" episode no. 25

⁷¹ Hoff, (note 10), 70.

⁷² "Guilty" episode no. 55

⁷³ Hoff, (note 10), 85.

dependent on the opponent's presentation to make their own message heard. Party line and social criticism both needed and used the medium of the police drama.

H. The New *Polizeiruf 110*

Today *Polizeiruf 110* is broadcast on the traditional Sunday evening ninety minute slot for crime, alternating with *Tatort* and another police drama (*Die Männer vom K3*). Whereas the old *Polizeiruf 110* was always produced in Berlin, now the way of production is adjusted to the West German *Tatort*. This means that each of the local channels produces a number of episodes (according to their financial abilities)⁷⁴ that take place in their local region and have their own special (for the audience identifiable) police teams. This decentralisation due to broadcasting politics has its explanation in the story, too, because crime is no longer presented as an exception, which can be dealt with by one team only for the whole country.

Despite of all similarities *Polizeiruf 110* managed to remain distinguished from *Tatort*. Its locations are usually small or middle-sized towns and rural areas as opposed to *Tatort* which mostly takes place in the big cities.⁷⁵ Criminals and other citizens are still normal, ordinary people and the cases still include smaller crimes. There are quite a few killings, but there are many cases without a dead body as well, dealing with crimes such as environmental pollution, theft, and robbery.⁷⁶ Compared to the old *Polizeiruf 110*, there are now more action scenes and less personal development of the criminal on screen.⁷⁷ This is due not least to the audience's new viewing practices: if a viewer can choose between 40 channels, all frequently interrupted by commercial breaks, each programme has to make sure that the zapping viewers are still able to understand the plot.

Just like the old series in the GDR, the new *Polizeiruf 110* is not a 'who-dunnit' story, but instead the case is told from the viewpoint of the offender or the victim. The stories still concentrate on exploring the motivations and reasons for the crime and the relation between criminals and victims.⁷⁸ The criminals are often congenial individuals with personal and understandable motivations which are usually

⁷⁴ Some channels produce for *Tatort* and *Polizeiruf*.

⁷⁵ Guder & Wehn, (note 12), 20.

⁷⁶ Karin Wehn, *Deutsche Krimitraktionen im Überblick: Der deutsche Fernsehkrimi im dualen Rundfunksystem*, 9 HALMA. HALLISCHE MEDIENARBEITEN, 1, 7 (1998) available at: <http://www.medienkomm.uni-halle.de/forschung/publikationen/halma9.pdf>

⁷⁷ Guder & Wehn, (note 12), 21.

⁷⁸ Guder & Wehn, (note 12), 20.

explained by their social environment (for example unemployment and economic insecurity). Often new episodes deal with the political, social and individual developments of the reunification reflecting the general problem of finding one's way in the new (Western) system.⁷⁹ Today the series is no longer didactic⁸⁰ but is still critical of society. In opposition to the old series, the new *Polizeiruf 110* understands the criminals and moreover has compassion for them. Sometimes the perpetrators get away with the crime, even with manslaughter, because the police understand and turn a blind eye. Fuchs might have understood that a defender just slips into crime, but he would never allow this to be an excuse for the smallest offence. The underlying lesson has always been that an honest rightful person would not slide into anything in the first place. The new *Polizeiruf 110* in contrast, acknowledges that crime is rooted in social problems.

The police characters in *Polizeiruf 110* have changed as well. The exceptionally correct, conscientious, ideologically and morally unassailable socialist police have been transformed into human inspectors with human errors.⁸¹ In contrast to the old episodes where on only a few occasions police are shown in bed with anyone (of course only with their marital or long-term partners) the new detectives are allowed to have an intensive sexual life, regularly including one-night stands (even with superiors⁸²). The police officers' private lives develop from episode to episode⁸³ like small soap stories. Another difference is that the detectives now show tension among themselves and open disagreement, as far as refusing to work together again.⁸⁴ Still, there is generally less focus on detectives⁸⁵ and more on the people involved.

In contrast to the old episodes where the evidence was overwhelming, now police regularly have the problem that they know the offender but are lacking sufficient evidence. In addition (reflecting reality very appropriately) the police have to face restrictions on staff and material resources. Furthermore, now detectives can make

⁷⁹ For example new technique, new products; Wehn, (note 78), 7.

⁸⁰ Guder & Wehn, (note 12), 22.

⁸¹ In "Unter Brüdern" (Between Brothers") Grawe and Fuchs are seen absolutely drunk.

⁸² "Roter Kaviar" ("Red Caviar") episode no. 177

⁸³ Wehn, (note 78), 35.

⁸⁴ "Mit dem Anruf kommt der Tod" ("The Death comes with the Call") episode no. 151

⁸⁵ Guder & Wehn, (note 12), 20.

mistakes: unthinkable in the old *Polizeiruf*. They might investigate in the wrong direction, and in one case this results even in the suicide of an innocent suspect. The police no longer represent the perfect state but 'they stand helpless in the face of the often desolate problems in their region'.⁸⁶

I. Conclusions

The analysis of the East German police television drama *Polizeiruf 110* bears witness to the Criminal Justice system in the former GDR in various respects. On the one hand, it shows how the police investigation worked in practice. Although many features are idealised, the presentation of the police work is fairly realistic. On the other hand, this programme is a witness of state control, and an illustrative example of how media can and indeed is used to transmit a certain image of state and society. One should not forget that, like the GDR, Western crime, too, has its underlying message. Besides the lesson that 'crimes does not pay' it is articulated again and again that crime is not rooted in problems of society but rather in alienation from society.⁸⁷

The threat to society comes not from people who are fundamentally dissatisfied with the existing system but from people who are fundamentally greedy.⁸⁸ The most interesting point is that, despite all state censorship in the former GDR, the makers of *Polizeiruf 110* were able to use more freedom than any other programme to address contemporary social problems. *Polizeiruf 110* is an impressive case study of how the public's notion of crime is formed. Even in the extreme situation of a powerful authoritarian state which controls the media, other forces of civil society can use the system's means to transmit their viewpoint. As much as Criminal Justice includes the public perception of crime, so does the public itself influence the presentation of crime.

This demonstrates what a powerful propaganda tool television can be while at the same time it opens unexpected opportunities for political criticism. The police drama always finds itself in the tension between explaining and condemning the offender, between entertainment and realism, between state censorship and social critique. In a fascinating hybrid relationship: both censors and artists used *Polizeiruf 110* to communicate their own messages. The lesson to be learnt for criminology is that Criminal Justice cannot be understood separately from the society in which it is functioning, nor can it promote itself without the influence of this society. As so often in criminology there are no clear lines between state and society.

⁸⁶ Guder & Wehn, (note 12), 9.

⁸⁷ A noteworthy exception is the post GDR *Polizeiruf 110*.

⁸⁸ Dominick, (note 43), 250.