

# The German Media's Portrayal of Ethnic Organised Crime and Its Implications

*Research note*

## The German Media's Portrayal of Ethnic Organised Crime and Its Implications

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**Abstract:** The media have played an important role in the portrayal of ethnic organised crime (OC). This research note is based on a content analysis on the framing of the emergence and continued existence of ethnic OC in German media, for which 163 news magazine articles were examined from 1999 until 2013. The results of this analysis show that the media under review tends to externalise ethnic OC and portray it within the rational choice and alien conspiracy frames. This research note outlines some implications of this analysis. In this regard, the depiction of ethnic OC might fuel stereotypes, serve populists aims in exploiting the issue, and criminalise entire ethnic minorities in the eyes of the public and some policy-makers. Thus, we suggest that the category of ethnicity in OC portrayal and research should undergo a reevaluation due to these possible implications.

**Keywords:** Organised Crime; Media; Ethnicity; Framing; Public Opinion; Germany

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## Introduction

In Germany, with the rather recent exception of motorcycle gangs, the media have arguably portrayed organised crime (OC) as a phenomenon more along ethnic lines than one made in Germany, which might render the country an interesting case to elaborate on. Examples are manifold and often follow a narrative line such as Calabrian *'Ndrangheta* clans engaging in a

bloody feud that escalated in the 2007-shootings in the city of Duisburg that left six men dead; Turkish OC groups ruling the heroin market with fear and intimidation (Gülay and Kuhn, 2009); or the tough, hard-boned Russian *Mafiya* bringing Gulag-attitudes to the German underground (Bayrischer Rundfunk, 2011). For many, the media represents the main channel for obtaining information on OC, since the public usually do not access open source police data to the same extent that they consume media publications. In the realm of crime, “narratives and representations are, and have always been, a prominent part of the content of all mass media” (Reiner, 2002: 380). The media may construct a narrative along frames that allow the audience to perceive the story through a familiar and simplified lens without the need to comprehend an initially complex and multi-faceted phenomenon. In fact, narratives construct a certain reality and in the case of crime, for instance, they may ferment fear and disorder (Hall et al., 1978). Hence, linguistic components in general, and the media’s use of language in particular play significant roles in the construction of OC. This stance is somewhat related to assumptions of critical criminology (Coyle, 2010).

Another linguistic concept, the official definition of OC in Germany as issued by the Federal Police (Bundeskriminalamt, henceforth BKA) reads as follows: “Organised crime is the planned commission of criminal offences determined by the pursuit of profit and power which, individually or as a whole, are of considerable importance and involve more than two persons, each with his/her own assigned tasks, who collaborate for a prolonged or indefinite period of time

1. by using commercial or business-like structures,
2. by using force or other means of intimidation or
3. by exerting influence on politics, the media, public administration, judicial

authorities or the business sector” (see e.g. BKA NSROC, 2004: 15).

The BKA definition has been criticised for both its conceptual vagueness and broadness (Albrecht, 1998; Heinold, 1995; Pütter, 1998). Since the early 1990s, the BKA have reported on OC in their annual National Situation Reports on Organised Crime (NSROC), which also provide statistical figures on OC groups dominated by foreign individuals. The BKA consider an OC group as dominated by a certain ethnicity if an individual from this nation occupies a position of relative power within the group (BKA NSROC, 2004).

However, police data have been criticised as not accurately reflecting the entire OC phenomenon (cf. Coleman and Moynihan: 1996). Hence by studying OC from a media perspective, some vital insights might emerge into how the German media portray ethnic OC. To date, some valuable research projects have been conducted, e. g. a comparative analysis of press coverage on OC in Germany and Britain (Young and Allum, 2012), the media’s portrayal of Cosa Nostra, Camorra clans, and 'Ndrangheta in

Spain, Germany, and the Netherlands (Sarno, 2014) as well as that of Russian OC in Russian and

Western publications (Rawlinson, 1998). Other than the aforementioned studies, this research note attempts to focus on identifying and categorising media frames of the emergence and continued existence of ethnic OC in Germany. Furthermore, the portrayal of ethnic OC in the media might help draw out some potential implications on the individual and society.

## **The Media's Framing of Ethnic Organised Crime**

Arguably, the mass media do not reflect the factual reality, if there is any, but construct narratives that contribute to the creation of a reality among many others. Their use of language in socially constructing the phenomenon of crime and OC might be considered vital from the perspective of critical (postmodern) criminology (cf. Schwartz and Hatty, 2003). The media present information in a "condensed and abbreviated manner that requires operations of selection, summarisation, and generalisation" (Maneri and Ter Wal, 2005: 27). Through the reporting of events and developments the media may contribute to agenda setting as well as the framing of phenomena. The term *frame* means an interpretation pattern that allows individuals "to locate, perceive, identify, and label the diverse phenomena" such as issues, events, and topics (Goffman, 1974: 21). Not only does framing help the audience make sense of the subject but also leads it to a specific way of interpretation by reducing complexity of an issue and resonating "with existing underlying schemas among their audience" (Scheufele and Tewksbury, 2007: 12). With regards to the emergence and continued existence of ethnic OC, one might identify the following journalistic frames based on theoretical approaches within the criminology-migration paradigm:

The *Socio-economic approach* (sometimes referred to as Positivism) figures prominently among the theories for OC emergence since blocked opportunities have frequently been identified as a crucial component in this regard (Mallory, 2012; Layman and Potter, 2007). Immigrants to a new country may encounter unfavourable socioeconomic conditions that represent hindrances on their way to acquiring socio-economic goals such as wealth and status. Albanese outlined this theoretical approach based on the work on delinquent gangs conducted by Cloward and Ohlin (*Delinquency and Opportunity*, 1960). He considered a combination of blocked opportunities, opportunities to form relationships with criminal subcultures, and the personal ability to gain status in this milieu as the crucial causes because he viewed external socio-economic factors alone not sufficient to determine OC behaviour (Albanese, 1996: 64). This approach is closely related to the Anomie theory, which assumes that societal strains hinder immigrants from achieving their goals because equal opportunities are absent (Merton, 1949). Hence, only illegal means provide them with a way to achieve what they term "success" by "innovation", which is "defined as success by organised, planned, and strategic activity" (Mallory, 2012: 38). Due to their high degree of resemblance, both Anomie and Positivism might be combined to construct the socio-economic frame for the purpose of this analysis. Hence, solely socio-economic inferiority encountered by

aliens that results in blocked opportunities to achieve socio-economic goals will be considered as variables for a corresponding journalistic frame here. In more concrete terms, this approach may be assessed according to unfavourable variables that migrants may find in their country of destination such as discrimination, marginalisation, relatively elevated levels of unemployment and poverty, poor housing situations, and low levels of education.

*Rational Choice* has long occupied a prominent position among the theoretical approaches in the classical school of criminology. It goes back to the 18<sup>th</sup> century and views OC as the result of a rational risk-reward assessment because it assumes that each individual is free in his/her choices (Mallory, 2012). Thus crime as well as OC is understood as a cost-benefit analysis measured in potential punishment and expected profit. Hence, if material or other benefits outweigh expected bodily harm, death or imprisonment, people will conduct OC activities (Lyman and Potter, 2007). Changing conditions on internal, external, and market levels are the variables subsumed under the paradigm of Rational Choice because it is assumed that, for instance, shifts in policy measures ensue alterations in the risk-reward assessment of OC entities. Thus changing conditions may render OC less risky and more rewarding, or the opposite. They may also not have any impact at all in terms of the relation between risk and reward.

Another popular yet disputable approach, *Alien Conspiracy* emerged as an explanation for the presence of *La Cosa Nostra* in the United States. The reasoning was that Sicilian immigrants organised themselves around each other and formed OC groups to accumulate wealth and power, all of which simultaneously harmed American society. Not only did some authorities and the Kefauver Committee promote this view (Paoli, 2002), but also influential academics like Donald Cressey in his book *The Theft of the Nation* (1969) established and maintained this perspective. According to the Alien Conspiracy theory, “outsider and outside influences” are considered responsible for the emergence of ethnic OC (Lyman and Potter, 2007: 60). Thus, particular importance is placed on ethnicity and real or perceived seclusion of ethnic communities. There is a certain degree of mystique attributed to these external forces, which might also be a reason why OC is understood as impossible to eliminate. Moreover, the approach emphasises the importance that territory plays for some OC groups. This theory, however, falls short of explaining why non-ethnic OC exists, and why they even preceded ethnic OC (Mallory, 2012: 36). Nevertheless, Alien Conspiracy has remained relevant due to its real or ascribed explanatory power (Lyman and Potter, 2007) and will therefore be categorised as a frame here.

The *Social Control Theory* suggests that effectively organised community life prevents the emergence of OC. Usually, fear of embarrassment, shame, or threats of punishment are factors that prevent the emergence of criminal behaviour. Thus, even when the opportunity of engaging in OC behaviour arises, social control thwarts the actual engagement (Mallory, 2012). Thus the lack of social control might build the basis for a theoretical understanding why individuals or an ethnic minority as a whole might be more susceptible to OC. This is because a poor community and weak family ties as well as deteriorating norms fail to prevent people from becoming criminals.

The next frame is grounded in Bell's theory of *Queer Ladder of Mobility* (1953) that attributes the origins of OC to blocked opportunities that render immigrants unable to acquiring wealth and power. However, in contrast to the socio-economic frame there is an explicit emphasis on the variable of greed, while Barnes and Teeters preferred the term "acquisitive urge" (quoted by Finckenauer and Waring, 1998: 30). Thus OC is understood as a means available to accumulate money and power, first and foremost for immigrants who are deprived of them. As a consequence, they perceive OC as the only way from *rags to riches*. This approach can be associated with another frame, namely the one based on *Ethnic Succession Theory*. As new immigrants to a country encounter hindrances on their way to wealth and prosperity, they get involved in OC activities. However, once they have achieved their aims, they abandon criminal involvement, engage in more legitimate competition for power and wealth, and are replaced by another ethnic minority (Bell, 1953; Ianni, 1973; O'Kane, 1992). It is claimed that the different phases of OC in America can be explained with this theory, e.g. Italian OC supplanted Jewish OC, which had replaced Irish-dominated OC before. It is argued that nowadays "Hispanics, Asians, Russians, Albanians and others" have largely superseded Italian OC (Arsovska, 2012: 310; O'Kane, 1992). Hence, indicators of transition of power between different OC groups—either peaceful or violent—constitute the operationalised variables for this frame. This theoretical assumption, however, does not provide sufficient evidence to explain why, for example, black American OC exist in the United States and more importantly why, for instance, Italian or Russian OC still operate in some countries despite their initial 'success' in acquiring power and wealth.

The *Differential Association* frame focuses on the assumption that knowledge and behavioural traits are passed down from one generation to another that share the same set of values and beliefs (Sutherland, 1973: 5). Learning takes place in an intimate environment and may vary in content, duration, and frequency (Lyman and Potter, 2007). Moreover, Mallory has noted that *hotspot theories* share some of the basic prerequisites of differential association—i.e., a crime-prone environment, frequent contact between role models and followers, and disrespect for law (2012). While the lines between the variables of the Social Control frame and the Differential Association frame are blurry, it should be mentioned that in contrast to the Social Control frame, Differential Association zooms in on the activity of learning which passes knowhow from one to another, rather than on the conditions that enable such a situation. Whereas the significance of learning ought not to be neglected, there appears to be a chicken-and-egg paradox. Can OC emerge from knowledge being passed down to younger generations or must OC exist in the first place for learning processes to occur? Nevertheless, the examination of the Differential Association frame might proffer some noteworthy insights into framing OC by the mass media.

Another frame is based on the notion that *Culture Conflicts* lead to organised criminal behaviour. This approach follows the reasoning that conflicts between different ethnicities with different norms, values, and beliefs might occur when they encounter each other (Mallory, 2012). When applied to the German context, however, this was called into question (Kaiser, 1974). Additionally, Albrecht (1997) and Kubnik (1993) have rightly pointed to the fact that norm conflicts cannot sufficiently explain ethnic (organised) crime because these activities "do not differ among different cultures to

such an extent that conflicting expectations can be produced” (Albrecht, 1997: 67). However, cultural conflicts might be an appropriate frame of the infamous *us-versus-them* thinking, which is arguably present when a society feels vulnerable to real or perceived threats from “the outside”.

Lastly, the *Biological Theory frame* claims that OC behaviour is caused by factors such as physical, physiological or morphological characteristics, or mental deficiency (Mallory, 2012). However inappropriate or scientifically flawed this approach might appear, analysing whether the mass media use this frame may offer some intriguing insights.

Furthermore, the media might externalise or internalise ethnic OC in the sense that the former strategy considers ethnic OC as an alien, organised, conspiratorial danger that forces “its way on the innocent public” (Smith, 1976 quoted by Arsovska, 2012: 313). Thus the externalisation frame considers ethnic OC as an outside threat to the inside of the society (Jäger, 2000) such as:

?Conditions of and developments in other nations or supra-state organisations;

?OC group structures identified as subcultures along family or ethnic lines, and whose arrival to or remaining in Germany are portrayed as outside Germany’s sphere of influence;

?Connections between ethnic OC members/groups in Germany and actors outside the country’s borders that are portrayed as supportive of or reluctant to thwart OC activities in Germany.

?In contrast, the internalisation frame as developed in this research note is considered to portray ethnic OC as a part of society that emerged because of the one or more of the following reasons:

?Structural, unequal socio-economic conditions encountered by foreigners coming to Germany;

?Executive, legislative or judicial measures by and incompetence of German authorities that facilitate OC;

?Illegal and/or illicit behaviour of German officials;

?Attitudes of the public and policy circles such as the lack of OC awareness, the failed acknowledgement of OC, ignorance or negligence towards the issue.

Thus, the variables that nurture the eleven aforementioned frames constitute the units of analysis of this research note.

## **Data and Methodology**

In order to identify the variables of the frames outlined in the introduction, the content of journalistic articles was analysed. The corpus stemmed from the three main weekly news magazines in Germany, namely *Der Spiegel*, *Focus*, and *Stern*. It was retrieved with the help of the database LexisNexis. The data corpus is based over a 15-year period from 1.1.1999 (earliest date available for all the publications combined) to 31.12.2013, inclusive. All magazine articles containing at least one of the following three keywords were included: “Mafia\*” OR “Organisiert\* Kriminalität” OR “Organisierte\* Verbrechen”. The corpus of articles numbered 3.097 and was made up as follows: *Der Spiegel* 1.636, *Focus* 885, and *Stern* 576.

All three magazines, *Der Spiegel*, *Focus*, and *Stern* claim to deliver analytical and investigative news through their weekly print publications, and they are considered competitors in their respective journalistic genre (Winterbauer, 2014). It is assumed that these three publications could offer insights into the research question due to their ascribed relevance and reach in general (IWV, 2014), and their self-proclaimed investigative and analytical approach towards news in particular. While the selection of the three main news magazines can perhaps be viewed as a good starting point, it cannot be considered an accurate representation of the German media landscape for the small number of news magazines, their status as established publications, and their limited and unrepresentative audience. While an inclusion of further media publications would perhaps have been a fruitful endeavour, it might have distorted the attempt to achieve representation as well due to different publication cycles and formats. Furthermore, in terms of feasibility, a large number of publications would have substantially increased the workload.

In the next step, book and movie reviews, editorials, letters to the editor and readers’ comments were excluded. Then, the corpus was scanned for relevance and manually narrowed down according to the three criteria reflected by the following question: Does the article address (1) ethnic OC (2) in Germany (3) according to the BKA definition of OC? A number of 163 articles did fulfil *all* three necessary criteria. The rest were not included in the sample for this research.

Before the analysis, the corpus (N=163) was read and coded. The unit of analysis of the coding was identified as logical textual sequences to “identify key discursive cues associated with the different frames” (Kitzinger, 2007: 140) that could be on word, phrase, or sentence levels. The variables, considered here as operationalised reasons for the emergence and/or continued existence of ethnic OC, were identified according to the eleven frames outlined above. Moreover, the following sources that provided variables were identified and categorised:

- Law enforcement community (police, customs, prosecutors, and the intelligence community)
- Authors and Journalists
- Suspected OC members
- Social Scientists
- Politicians
- Judicial personnel (impartial)

- Others

## Some Results and Discussion

Our analysis yielded some interesting findings. The majority of the articles provided at least one variable for ethnic OC emergence/continued existence; on average, these articles tend to refer to 1.47 variables per article. The fact that 64.4 per cent of the articles consisted of variables for ethnic OC emergence and/or continued existence arguably does not offer sufficient insights into the framing question; however, this ascertainment coupled with the finding that 48.1 per cent of those articles stated only one variable might suggest that the issue was not particularly thoroughly addressed in the articles. Thus in nearly half of the articles with variables, framing was established on one variable only, and another 36.2 per cent mentioned two or three variables. Another interesting finding is that 42.9 per cent of the articles developed one coherent frame, which leaves some 21.5 per cent of articles with variables to nurture conflicting frames (35.6 per cent without any reference to frames).

The sources as providers for variables offer an intriguing category to elaborate on: 48 articles with variables did not mention any concrete sources; from the total number of 84 sources 48 were attributed to the law enforcement community; 6 to authors and journalists; 5 to suspected OC members. Furthermore, 5 sources originated from social scientists and researchers; another 5 from politicians, 3 from judicial personnel (and 12 others). This ascertainment suggests three implications. Firstly, the question emerges, where did reasons for ethnic OC emergence and/or continued existence originate from if they were not attributed to a concrete source? Two potential answers to this question appear likely. On the one hand, the journalist—for whatever reason—failed to name the corresponding source, which would constitute a rather grave error of journalistic practice in terms of transparency and “objectivity”, or as “the most loathsome, most shameful” journalistic malpractice (Harrower, 2007: 147; Lewis and Zhong, 2012). On the other hand, journalists might have included reasons derived from their own understanding. The second potential explanation would have an interesting ramification because it could mean that a broad range of different perceptions could influence the construction of frames such as stereotypes, the popular image of OC, the views provided by various actors, and the perception of what OC is considered to be, all of which might gain influence on the reporting style.

Another relevant finding constitutes the over-reliance on police sources and the overrepresentation thereof compared with other relevant sources. This supports Reiner’s understanding that “the media present[s] viewpoints on crime and criminal justice policy which—though not monolithic—are loaded towards official perspectives” (Reiner, 2002: 408). Hypothetically, if the police pursued an externalisation strategy, which cannot be claimed here, the media would provide the law enforcement community with a considerable platform to promote their agenda and contribute to shaping public perception. Nevertheless, the police arguably construct their own narrative around



ethnic OC (Roth, 2009), whatever this narrative might look like. The media outlets— perhaps driven by the daily pressures of 24 hour news production (Levi, 2008: 368)— rely on official police sources to such an extent that they considerably outnumber and outweigh all other sources in terms of frequency and ultimately influence.

Thirdly, it appears striking that the research community is substantially underrepresented as a source for variables. One would expect that balanced reporting not only confronts good (police) and evil (OC)—another intriguing frame to assess the topic—but also to include a somewhat ‘neutral’ position (Harrower, 2007; Killenberg and Anderson, 1993). Understandably, the task of obtaining quotes from OC suspects faces considerable hindrances that may only be overcome from time to time. Researchers and ‘independent’ experts on OC could significantly contribute to the understanding of ethnic OC in general, and the factors that led to its emergence in particular. Thus, the over-reliance on law enforcement experts and the underrepresentation of researchers perhaps constitutes a failure to reconcile theory and practice, which may have direct consequences on the characteristics and manifestations of the frames.

With regards to frames, the rational choice frame was used most often out of the total number of 217 frames (33.2%), and it also constituted most often the predominate frame if more than one frame was present in an article (31.9%). The Alien Conspiracy frame ranked second with regards to predominance (22.1%). The socio-economic frame was rather frequently referred to as well (7.8%); however, it was repeatedly outweighed by other persisting frames which results in the finding that the socio-economic frame was only predominant in 2.5% of the cases. Two main arguments might advance explanations for the prominence of the rational choice frame. First, the popular perception of what OC is considered to be might inform the notion how the media, the police and others perceive it (Dörmann et al., 1990). Hence, perception creates a reality and this reality, in turn, influences perception. Second, one might to some extent explain the prevalence of the rational choice frame by the large number of sources from the law enforcement field that also perceive OC to be mainly linked to rational choice considerations. Out of the 52 articles in which this frame predominates, 19 are provided from the law enforcement community. While this figure might be relatively modest, the law enforcement sources arguably still contribute to some extent to the popularity of the rational choice frame. Here, rational choice is nearly an all-encompassing approach given the broad variety of conditions it includes. At the same time, however, it is nothing new to argue that humans are not always rational beings. Thus, while degrees of rationality arguably play a role, reducing the complexity of the issue to rationality might unduly simplify the matter since at least the internal conditions within Germany would also apply to non-ethnic OC.

Furthermore, promoting rational choice considerations inherently neglects the fact that the vast majority of people from the same background to whom the same conditions apply are not involved in OC. In relativising the impact of rationality, Wessel has argued that OC behaviour is the outcome of a rational process but only if opportunities are blocked in the first place (2001: 39). This position arguably merits consideration; it emphasises the importance to address the underlying factors that put individuals in the position to think about whether or not to get involved in OC. However, the

predominance of the rational choice frame might shape the public debate on OC and ensue a counter-approach along the lines of deterrence theory; i.e. the harsher the potential punishment, the higher the risk, and the lower the likelihood of engaging in OC (Akers, 1990). However, the effectiveness of the deterrence approach has been called into question in a number of empirical studies (Lyman and Potter, 2007: 62). Furthermore, deterrence strategies are arguably a rather limited approach. Instead of holistically tackling the root causes of the complex and dynamic OC issue, they merely address its symptoms by adapting punishments to crimes and offences. Hence, if the rational choice frame formed the basis of the ways ethnic OC is conceptualised in the public, policy-makers might be driven to propose more severe sentences for organised criminals rather than seeking to address the problem in an all-inclusive manner.

Furthermore, it appears striking that out of the 38 articles that presented the Alien Conspiracy frame as their predominant approach, 20 people or documents from the law enforcement realm (police, customs, prosecutors, intelligence agencies) were directly or indirectly referred to. While not all these sources unambiguously contributed to fermenting the Alien Conspiracy frame, the potential impact the law enforcement community may have on shaping the construction of frames ought not to be underestimated. Perhaps an explanation for the persistence of Alien Conspiracy assumptions, especially when provided by official sources, might be that the media could utilise the frame without questioning their applicability since “the media are commonly accused of exaggerating the risks of crime, cultivating an image of the world that is ‘scary’ and ‘mean’” (Gerbner and Gross, 1976; Carlson, 1985; Howitt, 1998 referred to by Reiner, 2002). In the United States, for instance, not only did some authorities and the Kefauver Committee promoted this view (Paoli, 2002), but also influential academics like Donald Cressey in his book *The Theft of the Nation* (1969) established and maintained this perspective. Putting the blame on intangible outside forces and exacerbating feelings of fear and anxiety in the public towards the ‘other’ could have severe effects on society. Thus “xenophobic feelings in public opinion, undermining the tolerance and capacity of coexistence that our increasingly multi-ethnic societies desperately need” (Castells, 1998) might be an intended or accidental long-term outcome of the Alien Conspiracy reasoning.

As a result, misperceptions of entire nations and ethnicities could stem from the Alien Conspiracy frame due to generalisation and simplification. If outsiders were made responsible for the presence of OC, ethnic communities might be subject to generalisation and stereotypes, which can be channelled into xenophobic feelings among the public. Populist actors might find it useful to exploit these emotions for their political cause (Chambliss, 1999; Marsh, 2009). Despite its conceptualised conspiratorial *us-versus-them* thinking, or perhaps because of that, the Alien Conspiracy frame ought to be viewed as a politically constructed theory targeting the unknown (cf. Reuter, 1983: 3-6).

With regards to internalisation and externalisation of ethnic OC it can be noted that while 97 of the articles consisted of neither an element of internalisation nor externalisation, a substantial number provided an externalisation frame over one of internalisation (65.2 percent and 34.8 percent respectively). When perceived as an internal phenomenon, resolving ethnic OC requires a holistic

approach that overarches all realms of society; for instance, the legal frameworks around the migration and asylum system would require alteration to reconsider the number and classifications of legal statuses and consequently make the sectors of education, labour, and housing more inclusive to all foreigners. Moreover, all laws whether related to fighting OC or not would need to be evaluated on the implications they might have on OC behaviour and activities. Furthermore, the issue of how these laws might be exploited and what risks this might pose should be addressed. Potential ramifications would be complex, in the sense that the whole of society including the media would need to change their attitudes towards acknowledging ethnic OC as an element embedded into and originating from German society rather than as an infiltrating force. This would constitute an active step towards thwarting the discrimination and marginalisation of foreigners (Albrecht, 1997), for they might sometimes be misperceived as OC participants in public opinion. Furthermore, it would be necessary to address underlying roots of illicit behaviour among German officials, which, in turn, would require a considerable set of measures. This strategy, as outlined above, constitute only a few measures necessary for such an overwhelming societal change to tackle the phenomenon in an all-encompassing manner if ethnic OC were considered an internal issue to German society.

These findings suggest, however, that the opposite might be the case. The prevalence of the externalisation frame may result in the victimisation of Germany, in the sense that the German society is portrayed as the target of ethnically secluded and impenetrable ethnic subcultures. For instance, ethnic OC is portrayed as a “locus infestation”<sup>[1]</sup> or a secluded entity that is “nearly impossible to penetrate” or dismantle by the police<sup>[2]</sup>. Furthermore, the failure to determine the identities and citizenships of some foreigners make deportation legally impossible.<sup>[3]</sup> Once the externalisation thinking gains popularity in public opinion and policy circles via media frames, several considerable implications might ensue. It might lead to an oversimplification of the actual causes of ethnic OC and ultimately to an overgeneralisation, stigmatisation, and scapegoating under which all members of a certain ethnicity may be associated with OC (see e.g. Albrecht, 1991; Antonopoulos, 2009; Finckenauer and Waring, 1998; Tonry, 1997). The consequence would arguably be the fuelling of stereotypes and fear, which, in turn, could result in increases of xenophobic tendencies. Moreover, some kind of misperception or emotionally grounded perception towards entire nations, ethnicities, or supra-national entities such as the European Union could also emerge. This would constitute another version of the *us-against-them* thinking because xenophobic feelings would not only be directed towards a group of immigrants living in Germany, instead this form of externalisation would ascribe accountability and responsibility to a *third entity* rather than to German society or an immigrant community. Consequently, countries that undergo changes in law or policies would be made responsible for ‘exporting’ their OC problem.

Moreover, it should be considered that externalisation might be a rather convenient strategy to lift pressure off the police or politicians. The police might be portrayed or might present themselves as heroes in the fight against an invisible, intangible threat that comes from the outside and threatens the inside (Arsovska, 2012). Or as Reiner put it, the media tends to “promote policing and punishment as the antidote” to OC (2002: 408). Not only could this strategy bolster the image of

law enforcement and politicians in the public debate, it could also reduce the responsibility carried by the police. Moreover, the externalisation frame could create the perception of ethnic OC as an extraordinary threat; one that requires the implementation of extraordinary policy measures. For instance, during the long-discussed public debate on a controversial new Federal wiretap law in Germany (commonly referred to as '*der Große Lauschangriff*'; English: electronic eavesdropping operation in private residences) proponents arguably used a rather vague and externalised concept of OC in general to lobby for these legal changes (Gebauer, 2001; Vormbaum and Asholt, 2005).

The ensuing implications of externalisation, in turn, could result in a very limited number of ways to comprehend ethnic OC. As a potential consequence, the acceptance of the externalisation frame could arguably result in, for example, resignation, in the sense that one might draw the conclusion that ethnic OC issues are impossible to solve because alien OC comes to and operates in Germany regardless of the given conditions, structures, risks, and rewards, to name but a few factors. A feeling of helplessness and impotence could gain the upper hand not just among the public but also among the police and policy-makers. Arguably, these conditions are well suited for the conduct of OC activities. Perhaps none of these measures would be adequate to entirely stop ethnic OC behaviour. In fact they would presumably come to the detriment of many realms of society such as the economy in terms of trade, the labour market, technological exchange, international political relations, and others. Hence, it is suggested here that potential consequences of externalising ethnic OC would perhaps result in measures to the disadvantage of German society, while not addressing the actual OC problem in an adequate, holistic and promising manner.

Moreover, the considerable levels of cooperation between OC syndicates from various different ethnic backgrounds including ethnic Germans as stated in the NSROC indicate that the lines between OC groups get increasingly blurred against the backdrop of rapidly advancing developments in the transnationalisation of licit and illicit trade (BKA NSROC, 2000-2012; Williams, 1998). In this regard, the BKA's categorisation as outlined in the introduction according to which OC groups might be considered as dominated by a certain ethnicity draws some criticism. To develop this thinking somewhat further, it is argued here that the conceptual understanding of the categorisation of ethnicity warrants some elaboration. In fact, the criteria of ethnicity, nationality, and origin of OC play crucial roles in the media as was proven in this study. However, by referring to crime in general, Walter argued that crime of foreigners exists just like there are crimes committed by "atheists, office clerks, or rowers" (2001: 213).

In addition, Spalek supports this assessment and classified ethnicity as just another "socially constructed phenomenon" (2008: 439). In this regard, it might be worthwhile reconsidering the ascribed importance and subsequent over-reliance on the factor of ethnicity in data gathering, reporting, and OC research. While it should be stressed that abandoning the criterion of ethnicity is not proposed here, other important social and economic components should not be neglected either (Holdaway, 1997). Therefore, conducting research on the various and complex OC markets, activities, and facilitating cultural conditions in specific communities might offer valuable insights

into why markets emerge in the first place since these platforms are where different ethnicities collaborate. In illegal markets such as the drugs market just like in their legal counterparts, increased mobility, technological means, and interconnectedness might lead to a more diversified OC environment. This is also supported by the increasing figures of groups operating in more than one crime area (BKA NSROC, 2000-2012). In addition, this approach could then be enriched and complemented by considerations of ethnicity because this factor is arguably too significant to be ignored.

## Conclusion

The task of this research note was to discuss media frames and their potential consequences for society and policy-makers as well as possible ramification for research on OC. While the paper arguably yielded some intriguing findings, it should be discussed that research on OC is inherently marked by a lack of available data as well as by issues concerning their verisimilitude (Walter, 2001). Police data, which partly informs the media's coverage of OC as sources, reflects just one—although an arguably crucial—side of the phenomenon, but not the entire factual *reality*. Furthermore, the three selected news magazines represent only a snapshot rather than the entirety of the German media landscape. Another limitation concerns the choices of theories and their adaptations to frames for the fact that the process remains subjective. This is also the case with regard to the difficulties in operationalising the frames through variables, especially the decision how to differentiate specific variables as well as frames from others when their lines are blurry. Furthermore, one should take into account that it remains disputed whether and to which extent the media influences public opinion and thus how the audience interprets the media's portrayal of social phenomena (Livingstone, 1996; Maltz, 1999). Moreover, the assumption by postmodern criminology in which language determines reality remains disputed (Schwartz and Hatty, 2014). The results of this study merely represent one possible way of interpretation and cannot be generalised.

Despite this paper's shortcomings, there are some concluding points to be made. The over-reliance for information and quotes on the law enforcement community suggested that their official agenda might have been promoted, and that a rather prominent platform was provided for their narratives (Levi, 2008). In contrast to this perspective, views from academia remained largely underrepresented. In this regard it should be noted that this assessment might have some implications on OC research as well. The comparatively small number of researchers as sources for variables point to the assumption that academic work and journalistic practice ought to be more effectively bridged when it comes to coverage of OC subjects. While the narrative provided by social scientists can only be regarded as one or perhaps several diverging realities among many others, the academic views propose some contrasting and meaningful contributions that are arguably too important to be ignored by the media, policy-makers, and the general public. Thus, attempts should be undertaken to render academic work more accessible to the greater public, particularly through the media.

An implication for research on OC might be that the category of ethnicity might need to be reconsidered. The redevelopment of ethnicity as a supplementing component in a more holistic approach along, for instance, the types of activities (Albanese, 1996), illegal markets (Smith, 1975; Von Lampe, 2003, 2005, 2006), enabling conditions in cultural environments, and organisational structures and relations might be warranted. In spite of the obvious significance of profit making in OC, defining crime groups as ‘essentially businesses’ according to Strickland et al. (2004: 7) is hardly a rewarding endeavour in the effort to fully comprehend OC. In general, complex social phenomena are difficult to disentangle “because different causally relevant conditions can combine in a variety of ways to produce a given outcome” (Ragin, 1987: 26). Some pieces of research that attempted to address, for instance, illicit markets were conducted as early as the 1970s (Smith, 1976; Haller, 1970). While many others followed since then, one should, however, be aware of the fact that the adoption of a market approach in its purity to the detriment of an ethnic approach might represent another oversimplification that cannot completely capture the phenomenon of the emergence/continued existence of ethnic OC. An interdisciplinary approach of research might be most appropriate here.

Nonetheless, the category of ethnicity in OC research should perhaps undergo a conceptual re-evaluation for two main reasons; firstly, “there has always been a local, not-so-exotic ethnic underworld” (Bovenkerk et al., 2003: 24), an ascertainment that has called the relevance of ethnicity as a category into question. Secondly, the increasing interconnectedness and collaboration between different ethnic groups suggest that against the backdrop of globalisation, the initially strict ethnic lines tend to become increasingly blurred and perhaps even less relevant in the future. “Ethnicity is not a cause of organized crime, but to deny or ignore a connection between the two is misguided” (Finckenauer, 1998: 25). Ethnicities and the stereotypes that persist about them can influence the perception on ethnic OC and are arguably exploited by some members of certain ethnicities to let their reputations work for them (Bovenkerk et al., 2003).

However, one should remain open to perceive the issue from multiple perspectives. A purely ethnically focussed understanding of OC seems out-dated at least when it comes to the aspect of continued existence. Not only have scholars in the arguably vaguely defined field of transnational OC drawn to increasing intercultural, international, and ultimately interethnic collaboration in OC, this trend appears also to manifest itself within a country’s borders (Albanese, 1996; Albini, 1971; Block, 1994; Galeotti, 2005). The BKA has argued that the durability of OC groups determines their levels of establishment within the OC environment, which, in turn, results in the diversification of their field of activities and inter-ethnic cooperation with other OC groups (BKA NSROC, 2001: 27). The rise of an ethnically blurred OC phenomenon poses considerable challenges to the established frames of ethnic OC as used by the mass media. Arguably, the academic remodelling of ethnicity as a unit of analysis in OC might—if effectively bridged from academia to the mass media—contribute to a revised understanding of OC as a subject not necessarily adherent to socially constructed phenomena of ethnicity or nationality. This endeavour appears particularly crucial given the apparent self-reinforcing information cycle that seems prevalent in researching and reporting OC as well as gathering and compiling related information. This indicates that the re-

evaluation of ethnicity needs to take place within the media, law enforcement, politics, and academia, and that it should be mutually incentivised, lest we fall into the 'ethnicity trap' from which it might be difficult to escape.

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