

POLITICS WITH SCANDALS. GERMANY AND BRITAIN
IN TRANSNATIONAL PERSPECTIVE (1880-1914)

Política con escándalos. Alemania y Gran Bretaña
en perspectiva transnacional (1880-1914)

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Abstract

The end of the 19th century saw a lot of spectacular scandals throughout Western Europe. There were revelations of corruption and colonial violence, of adultery and homosexuality, and of abuse of power in politics and the conduct of members of the elite. By analyzing two dozen scandals in Great Britain and Germany, this article asks who initiated these scandals and how they were communicated. Furthermore, it discusses the consequences of different types of scandals. It reveals that it was often not the new popular press but rather politicians who actually initiated scandals. Influenced by the popular press, they chose new forms of communication that changed political culture. Tabloids were less significant in respect to political press than it has been assumed. Moreover, this article shows that scandals shaped norms and influenced political actions. The scandals were an expression of contemporary political culture and were at the same time transforming it.

Keywords

Scandals; media; sexuality; Great Britain; Germany.

Resumen

El final del siglo XIX asistió a una gran cantidad de escándalos en toda Europa occidental. Fueron revelaciones de corrupción y violencia colonial, adulterio y homosexualidad, abuso de poder en política y conducta de los miembros de la élite. Este artículo analiza en torno a dos docenas de escándalos en Gran Bretaña y Alemania, trazándolos hasta sus orígenes, revelando que estaban comunicados entre sí y exponiendo sus consecuencias. El estudio revela que los políticos, más que la prensa popular, fueron los que frecuentemente iniciaron los escándalos. Esos políticos, reaccionando ante el ascenso de la prensa popular, buscaron nuevas formas de comunicación que cambiaron la cultura política. Frente a lo que frecuentemente se ha asumido, los tabloides fueron mucho menos significativos que la prensa política en la emergencia y desarrollo de unos escándalos que fueron expresión de la cultura política contemporánea, y al mismo tiempo la transformaron.

Palabras clave

Escándalos; medios de comunicación; sexualidad; Gran Bretaña; Alemania.

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I. INTRODUCTION

The decades before 1914 brought many structural changes in political, social and cultural life which deeply influenced the development of the 20th century. Two major transformations are apparent in the Western public sphere. On the one hand, the foundations of a modern media system emerged — with mass audience, a professional journalism, powerful publishers, printed photos and global news agencies¹. On the other hand, the political culture underwent transformation in these years: Democratisation progressed, political parties developed, and society itself became much more politicised. Although suffrage increased only for men, this led to a process known as the “political mass market”. The two developments were closely connected and this connection had ambivalent consequences. The rising number of scandals is one of them.

This article researches such interactions between politics and the media by analysing political scandals in Germany and Britain. These countries were chosen because they obviously had quite distinct national political and cultural traditions. While Britain had developed parliamentarianism, press freedom and the press’s perception of itself as a “fourth estate” rather early on in its national history, in Germany censorship and unelected governments lasted much longer². This paper analyses, first of all, the mechanisms of scandal within a comparative approach, and then studies the interactions and transfers between the two countries. This should indicate how press reports about political scandals were transmitted across the borders. This transnational dimension of scandals is discussed for the fields of corruption, homosexuality, colonial scandals and scandals about monarchs. Going beyond the comparative view, we ask how scandals were perceived and transferred across borders.

¹ Chapman (2005): 69-141; Bösch (2015): 77-102.

² Barker and Burrows (2002).

The analysis of political scandals is a helpful way to suggest some answers to these questions. Scandals reveal actions and reactions of journalists, politicians and the wider public at the same time. Scandals are by their very nature media events which create a broad public and international political discussion. To this end, we analysed about 25 major political scandals in Germany and Britain between 1880 and 1914, concerning different topics and norms. The cases that were chosen were those that were perceived as major scandals by the public at the time. Beyond this historical perception, scandals can be defined in an analytical way as public revelations of a supposed breach of cultural norms which lead to broad public indignation³. Therefore, scandalous events that remained secret or did not raise attention and emotions should not be called scandals. The scandals studied here were political. They were inherent in political discourse, in parliament or between politicians, and they led to debates on collective norms. Consequently, this study not only analyses newspaper articles across the political spectrum but also explores archival sources of journalists and politicians involved in these scandals, as well as parliamentary debates and court reports. Transcripts of conversations in pubs taken by police informants in Germany are also examined, to find out how the scandals were perceived in ordinary conversations⁴.

This article argues that the transformation of politics and the media was interconnected, which can be shown for both countries. This interconnection led to “politics of sensation” which changed norms of political communication. Characteristic for this “politics of sensation” was a new political language, an agenda set by the media and the transfer of moral questions from the private to the public sphere. A comparative perspective helps to show the role which journalists *and* politicians played in these transformations.

II. SCANDALS AND INTERACTIONS BETWEEN JOURNALISTS AND POLITICIANS

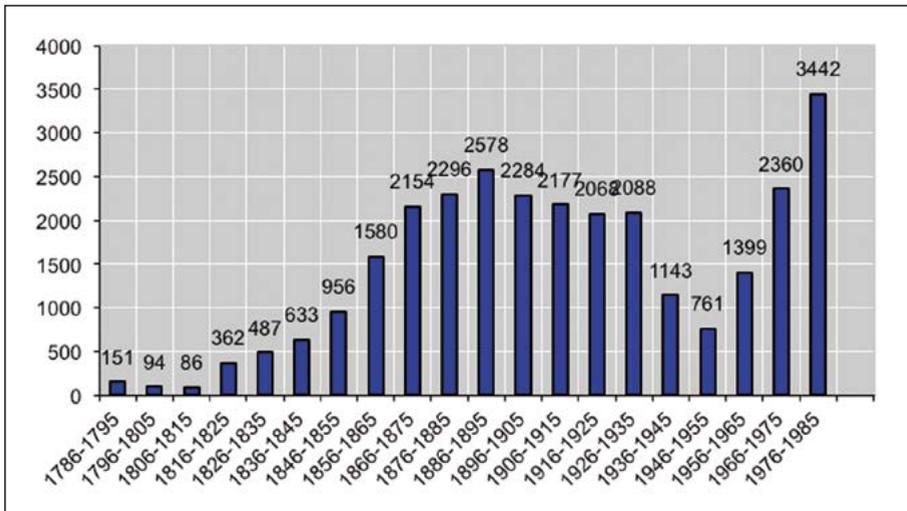
Scandals are fundamental to these changes within the media and the political culture. First of all, we can observe a massive increase in scandals all over the Western world in the decades around 1900. The growing number of events that were conceived as scandals can be proved quantitatively. An electronic search of the entire article content of a newspaper published over a long

³ See also the definitions in: Hondrich (2002): 40; Thompson (2000a).

⁴ This article takes up findings of my book, which contains more detailed sources: Bösch (2009).

period such as *The Times* shows, for instance, that usage of the word “scandal” reached its peak in the late nineteenth century. The number of pages of each newspaper increased in the following decades and the use of the word “scandal” was very similar. This also suggests that the number of scandals did not rise continuously, but reached its first peak around 1900. Not until the beginning of the 1960s do we see a considerable increase in scandals once again, when the public sphere and the political culture again underwent reconstruction. A connection between the growing number of scandals and the changing structure of the mass media, of politics and the public becomes apparent.

TABLE 1. *Mention of the word scandal in The Times 1786-1985*



Source: *Times* Digital Archive.

Apart from these quantitative observations, it is even more important that the increasing incidence of scandal can also be proved qualitatively. During the decades between 1885 and 1914 numerous great scandals were discussed for months and years all over the Western world. Many of them blended into the collective memory. One has only to recall cases such as Dreyfus and Panama scandals in France, the scandals concerning Wilde, Parnell or Marconi in Britain, or those of Eulenburg or Zabern or the *Daily Telegraph* affair in Germany. Furthermore, one finds many other similar scandals in now-forgotten contemporary sources which aroused substantial public excitement.

How can the growing number of scandals around 1900 be explained? One could interpret them as a result of the new tabloids whose journalists peddled sensation to increase sales and income. As it was shown in a recent book about sexuality in the German media between 1890-1914, the press presented nudeness and sexuality in many cases⁵. In this explanation the scandals indicate a decline of a critical public sphere. If one takes a look at today's British media landscape, this pessimistic explanation sounds familiar and convincing. Alternately, one could also explain the scandals as a result of a new "fourth estate" which challenged the politicians and started to control them.

I would argue that in both countries the scandals were neither the direct result of the new tabloid journalism and commercialisation of the media nor a sign of a new independent "fourth estate". Rather, they reveal in both countries a close interaction between press and politics to achieve political goals. At least, the political scandals were usually not brought up by journalists of the new independent tabloid newspapers such as the *Daily Mail* or the *Berliner Lokalanzeiger*. Instead, in both countries journalists of politically orientated quality papers, such as *The Times* or the *Berliner Tageblatt*, and minor papers closely connected to certain parties were the main actors. In Britain, papers including the *North London Press*, *United Ireland* or the *Daily News* started the scandals; in Germany, political papers such as *Der Vorwärts*, *Kreuzzeitung* or *Die Zukunft* engaged in similar cultivation of scandal. Politicians often wrote for these papers, or the papers were even owned by them. Politics and media worked hand in hand.

If we look at the individuals who brought scandal to light, additional similarities between Britain and Germany emerge. In both countries these individuals were often involved in the media as well as in politics. They can be divided into two types. On the one hand there were politicians who acted as journalists. An English example of this type of "politician as journalist" was the radical MP Henry Labouchere who initiated several scandals⁶. In his newspaper *The Truth* he raised scandalous charges and in the House of Commons he demanded justifications and explanation from the government. Irish Members of Parliament such as William O'Brien or Tim Healy, who still worked as journalists, acted similarly. They made scandalous accusations in papers such as *United Ireland* or *Freeman Journal* only a few days later to confront the government directly with these articles⁷.

⁵ Templin (2016).

⁶ Notes on his biography in Weber (1993): 36-43; Hind (1972).

⁷ Notes on their biography in Callanan (1996); Warwick-Haller (1990).

In Germany, this type of “politician as journalist” could be found particularly among the Social Democrats. About half of their Members of Parliament had a journalistic background. This made it easier for them to understand the inner workings of the media and reduced distances. This media-orientated type of politician also existed in other parties. A good example is Matthias Erzberger from the Centre Party, who continued to work as a journalist after he became a member of the Reichstag⁸. He dredged up many colonial scandals using investigative methods in 1906. He also used the parliament to attack scandalous behaviour in the colonies. At the same time he wrote articles for various newspapers (especially for the *Kölnische Volkszeitung*) in which he argued his case⁹. As a result, he became a media sensation and a subject for gossip. Caricatures even presented him as a keyhole journalist who spied into the “colonial kitchen” of Chancellor Bülow¹⁰.

In both countries, scandal was also exposed by journalists who wished to attain political goals. They were not members of parliament or parties, but maintained strong and informal contacts with politicians. William Thomas Stead was a prototype of this “journalist as politician” in Britain. Stead is well known as the editor of the *Pall Mall Gazette* and founder of the investigative and emotional New Journalism¹¹. His programmatic articles such as “Government by Journalism” characterised the journalist as an independent “uncrowned king”¹². However, Stead’s correspondence shows that he established a close, informal communication network and interacted with leading politicians. Through these means he acquired the knowledge he required for his campaigns. From his letters it is also clear that he often met with particular politicians¹³. He discussed his ideas with them before and after publication. Similar developments are also evident in Germany. The most famous journalist of the German Kaiserreich, and perhaps a counterpart to Stead, was Maximilian Harden. He also achieved stardom as a leading German journalist after he had initiated several scandals from the 1890s onwards¹⁴. Like Stead, he was a fairly independent journalist. However, he also kept close and regular informal contacts with the political sphere which influenced and

⁸ Leitzbach (1998).

⁹ See as a printed result of his speeches and articles: Erzberger (1906).

¹⁰ *Kladderadatsch* 33 (19.8.1906), 482.

¹¹ Schults (1972); Wiener (1988).

¹² Stead (1886): 653-674, quote 657.

¹³ The papers of Stead in the Cambridge University/Churchill Archives Centre proved this. See also: Joseph O. Baylen in Wiener (1988): 107-141.

¹⁴ Young (1971); Weller (1970).

enabled his campaigns¹⁵. And, like his British counterpart, Stead, Harden started scandals to achieve political goals.

The accumulation of scandals from the 1880s onwards was not only a result of the triumph of the mass media, but also of changes in the political culture. The transformation and polarisation of the political parties bore special responsibility. In Britain, scandal began to emerge after the Irish Parliamentary Party was established and the division of the Liberals during the Home Rule split¹⁶. In Germany, scandal increased from the beginning of the 1890s when the SPD reorganised itself following the *Sozialistengesetz*, and the Conservatives had become divided after the dismissal of Bismarck. In this perspective, scandal was a result of the polarisation of the party system, an increased electorate and the struggle for the votes of the “masses”. For these reasons, politicians and political journalists revised their practice and started to reveal scandalous secrets.

Although the new mass press seldom started scandal, it was responsible for its increase and intensity in both countries. Politicians and political journalists published scandalous accusations because they believed that the political interest of the “masses” and their press could only be aroused by juicy revelations. Politics quickly adjusted to the supposed sensational interests. Indeed, the mass press took up these charges after they had been presented in political journals, in parliament or in the courts. Also, the illustrated press, which started to publish photos in the 1890s, intensified the dynamic of these scandals with their reports.

Documented by the secret police, pub talk in Germany affirms that the scandals of the day were indeed broadly discussed events. In these conversations the entertaining gossip of the scandal reports was connected with political questions. It seems that the scandals increased interest in politics. Even quite apolitical scandals, such as those concerning incidents of homosexuality in the elite classes or adultery, led to public discussion of topics that were of political importance. The scandal about the homosexuality of General Moltke, for instance, led to debates about homosexuality in the military; scandal concerning the homosexuality of the industrialist Friedrich Alfred Krupp led to discussion about the working conditions in Krupp’s company; scandal about black prostitutes and corporal punishment in Africa prompted arguments about the legitimacy of punishment in the colonies¹⁷.

¹⁵ Famous are his contacts with Friedrich von Holstein; see Rogge (1959).

¹⁶ Cook and Vincent (1974).

¹⁷ Police Reports Bestand Politische Polizei 331-3, in: Hauptstaatsarchiv Hamburg.

Many scandals set off new scandals with similar charges within each country. If, for instance, a scandal concerning homosexuality was successful, other scandals about homosexuality followed. A similar pattern is evident concerning scandals of adultery, corruption or violence within the colonies. Once a taboo was broken, other journalists moved in for the kill. The readers of the papers gave pieces of information on similar cases to the journalists and the journalists themselves started to investigate those questions. At this stage of the scandals, the new mass press and the courts enforced this reciprocal dynamic. There was also an element of political struggle for moral superiority. If a political group was successfully attacked for moral misconduct, it tried to hit back with similar charges, while others tried to generalise the first accusations with new disclosures.

It is well known that the personal relationship between politicians and journalists was different in Germany and Britain. In Britain, the informal contacts between journalists and politicians were already closer in the late nineteenth century¹⁸. German politicians talked to journalists of their own party. Furthermore, they regarded the press merely as a mouthpiece of politics. On closer inspection, however, these differences between the two countries appear to have lessened. In Great Britain, the relationship between parties and the press increased from 1900 onwards. Liberal papers such as *Reynolds's Newspaper*, the *Pall Mall Gazette* or the *Daily News*, which had reported critically about liberal politics before, followed the party line during the scandals up to 1914. Even during the big Marconi scandal in 1912 they defended the accused liberal Secretaries of State¹⁹.

The conservative campaigns of those years also show a closer cooperation of journalists and politicians. For instance, the editor of the *National Review*, Leopold Maxse, systematically organised campaigns for conservative politicians and gave them pieces of advice for their speeches. He collected information about the private lives of liberal politicians, which could help to create scandals, through questionnaires²⁰. Even a publisher such as Lord Northcliffe joined the campaigns against liberal entrepreneurs like Cadbury or Lever²¹. The increasing connection between party politics and the press in Britain, in some respects, meant an approximation to the German model.

¹⁸ Brown (1985).

¹⁹ *Pall Mall Gazette* 12.10.1912, 3, 6; *Reynolds's Newspaper* 13.10.1912, 1; *Daily News* 11.10.1912, 5 and 12.10.1912, 1.

²⁰ West Sussex Record Office, Maxse Papers 467.

²¹ Taylor (1996): 111; Thompson (2000b): 137.

At the same time, Germany developed similarities to Britain. As the scandals show, censorship declined from 1900 onwards and the relationship between German journalists and politicians improved. For instance, the Leckert-Lützow scandal in 1896 made public that individual Secretaries of State, such as Marshall von Bieberstein, regularly talked to critical liberal journalists. In this scandal the chancellor and the foreign secretary both defended those talks against charges by the conservatives in parliament²². Though Social-Democratic journalists were still excluded from such meetings, already Chancellor Hohenlohe and especially his successor Bülow showed a growing willingness to speak with chosen journalists, even during their holidays or at home²³. In general, requests for interviews increased in Germany from 1906 onwards and were also granted, a behaviour which had been more typical for Britain and the United States. Journalists from Britain and the USA were the first to be granted such interviews.

III. FRANCE AS A MODEL: THE CHARGE OF CORRUPTION

News of scandal was quick to jump national borders. Newspapers in European countries reported broadly on scandals abroad. These international reports were already expected when the scandals came into the public light. Foreign comments were reprinted immediately in domestic papers. The mutual reports about the scandals often created decisive perceptions and stereotypes about the other country. Scandal established ideas about the typical morality in each country, which was connected to political assumptions. The foreign comments were broadly taken as arguments to underline the importance of the revelations, to demand reactions and reforms or to call for an end to public discussion. Cartoons from foreign newspapers were sometimes also reprinted to reach political goals.

In general, the German public was much more anxious about foreign reports on scandals than the British. The German right-wing press stressed especially that one should not discuss scandal because it reduced the

²² Verhandlungen des Reichstags 5.2.1897, IX. Legislaturperiode, 168. Sitz, IV. Session 1895/97, Bd. 6, 4476.

²³ *Berliner Illustrierte Zeitung (BIZ)* Nr. 13, 26.3.1898 and 30.7.1899; similarly politicians such as the Secretary of the Railway Budde (*BIZ* Nr. 33, 14.8.1904), the president of the Reichstag Graf von Ballestrem (*BIZ* Nr. 35, 29.8.1904) or the Secretary of the Interior Graf von Posabowsky-Wehner (*BIZ* Nr. 36, 4.8.1904).

reputation of the government abroad and strengthened the arguments of the enemies. This underlines the lack of national self-confidence in Germany, but also the German claim to be a morally superior nation.

How such scandals were transferred across borders depended on the type of accusation. Corruption might be taken as the first example for these transfers and differences. After the famous campaigns against the “old corruption” in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, scandals concerning corruption in a more narrow sense increased again around 1900 in Western Europe and North America. Obviously, not only an increase in corrupt practices was responsible for this, but also the rise of professional journalism, political polarisation and imaginative conspiracies directed at Jews and capitalists²⁴. All these elements were brought up in great scandals and then transferred to other countries. France, especially, played a major role in these cultural transfers.

Up to 1900, Britain and Germany saw themselves as cultures with a superior administration where corruption had no place. They distinguished themselves from France, which was seen as a morally and financially corrupt society. The Panama scandal in 1892 renewed this British and German self-perception especially because it revealed a great network of corruption in France which implicated several senior politicians and journalists²⁵. Anti-Semitic attacks which were brought up by the right wing journalist Édouard Drumont owing to the involvement of Jewish financiers were important elements of this French scandal. The countless international reports about the French scandal were taken as examples to create similar scandals at home. In the following years, analogous anti-Semitic accusations about the existence of a corrupt conspiracy surfaced in Germany and Britain. In Germany, especially, the anti-Semitic journalist and politician Hermann Ahlwardt brought up similar charges immediately after the Panama scandal. In his right-wing journals and in the Reichstag Ahlwardt claimed, with explicit reference to the Panama scandal in France, that Jewish financiers had taken 100 million marks from the “Reichs-Invalidenfonds” by corrupting several politicians²⁶. None of these charges could be proven. In Britain, especially, the campaigns against the colonial engagement in South Africa showed similarities. Not only was Colonial Secretary Joseph Chamberlain accused by liberal papers and politicians of mixing political

²⁴ Dard *et al.* (2015).

²⁵ Bourson (2000).

²⁶ *Verhandlungen des Reichstags* 18.3.1893, 8. Leg. Per., 2 Sess., 70. Sitz. 1736; 20.3.1893, id., 1745-1750; *Vossische Zeitung* 22.3.1893.

and private interests, but also anti-Semitic undertones were articulated against corrupt capitalist interests in “Jewburg”²⁷.

While these early campaigns directly following the Panama scandal were less successful, this changed later on. In Germany, the Social Democrats started a scandal by exposing corrupt connections between the administration of the army and Friedr. Krupp AG, the biggest steel company in Germany. It is astonishing that during this whole scandal in 1913 there was discussion about whether one could call it a “Panama” or not. The Social Democrat Karl Liebknecht had started his revelations in the Reichstag with the words: “It is a Panama, even worse than Panama”²⁸. Both the press and the courts argued during the following month about this comparison. The court martial, which was responsible for this case in the first trial, stated that the goal of the trial was to discuss and “to eliminate, if possible, the word Panama”²⁹. Similarly, the defence counsel declared that there was no “Panama”, because “Panama meant the venality of senior persons”³⁰. Finally, the prosecutor and the conservative press also felt relieved that a “Panama” had not occurred, for this would have meant “corruption of the worst case”³¹.

These lasting references to and comparisons with the French scandals served two purposes. On the one hand, the reference to the Panama scandal inspired the imagination of those who wanted to believe in a great corrupt conspiracy between the “capitalists” of heavy industry and the traditional government elite. French corruption showed the depths to which Germany could fall. On the other hand, the conservative elite responded to this comparison frequently, because it hit a sensitive point. The self-perception of the German elite relied on the assumption that the German administration was highly effective, loyal and immune to bribery. Any comparison with France seemed to endanger the reputation of the German Kaiserreich. Consequently, the conservative journalists, politicians and lawyers tried especially to re-establish this difference from France and reinforce its image as an exceptionally scandalous and corrupt country. However, the scandal was a great success for the Social Democrats, because at least regular corrupt interactions between Krupp and the Army were proved.

²⁷ Holmes (1979): 67-69.

²⁸ Reichstag, XIII. Leg., I. Sess., 144 Sitz., 19.4.1913, 4926.

²⁹ See the reports of the proceedings in: *Vossische Zeitung* 4.8.1913, 2; 6.8.1913, 4; *Norddeutsche Allgemeine Zeitung* 6.8.1913, 3.

³⁰ Reports of the proceedings in: *Vossische Zeitung* 5.8.1913, 2.

³¹ Quote from the report of the proceedings in: *Norddeutsche Allgemeine Zeitung* 7.8.1913, 3.

Corruption scandals related to the Panama scandal came up simultaneously in Britain. In particular, the famous Marconi scandal in 1912-13 was connected to the cases in France. Those who started the Marconi scandal — two small conservative papers called *Outlook* and *Eye-Witness* — raised similar anti-Semitic charges. They called the Postmaster General Herbert Samuel and the managing director of Marconi “two financiers of the same nationality”, who were stealing money from the taxpayers³². The journalist and author Hilaire Belloc, who was one of the authors of these anti-Semitic accusations, had grown up in France and had done his military service there when the Panama scandal started³³. His fantasy about a Jewish conspiracy probably relied on his personal relationship to France. The charges were merely based on the Jewish background of politicians and businessmen and excluded them as foreigners: “Like the other eminent recipient of public money he [Samuel, F.B.] is not of our blood or tradition and owns no real allegiance to the foreign state which has very unwisely hired him to serve it”³⁴. In general, the Liberals were charged with corrupting society and being the marionettes of corrupt Jews: “We know that they [the Liberals, F.B.] sell peerages, that they sell places on the Front-Bench, that they sell policies. We know that a rich financier, though an alien and an unsavoury one at that, can get hold of a politician just as he gets hold of a racehorse”³⁵.

In contrast to France, where many bribes were paid, the charges were completely unfounded. There was no proof for the existence of a Jewish conspiracy between Marconi’s company and the Postmaster General³⁶. However, the debate revealed other improper business connections between the Chancellor of Exchequer Lloyd George, the Attorney General Rufus Isaacs and his brother from the Marconi Company, because the latter gave tips for speculations with shares of the company. This led to a genuine scandal and almost to the resignation of Lloyd George. The emotional debate which divided the British public suggested that the moral politics against corruption had now reached Britain, too. As in Germany, opposition journalists and politicians fought hand in hand to bring down the government with such emotional accusations concerning moral standards. British and German politicians and officials were indeed not as corrupt as those in France. However, the transfer

³² *Outlook* 20.7.1912.

³³ Notes on the anti-Semitism of the famous author in: Wilson (1984).

³⁴ *Eye-Witness* 15.8.1912, 257; similar *Eye-Witness* 8.8.1912, 227-230.

³⁵ *Eye-Witness* 17.10.1912, 545.

³⁶ See the files in: British Telecommunications Archives London POST 88/34. Comp. already: Donaldson (1962); Bentley Brinkhoff (1989).

of the scandals intensified the imagination that a similar corruption could happen — and this led to scandals, too.

IV. TRANSFERRING TABOOS: SCANDALS ABOUT HOMOSEXUALITY

In Britain and Germany, France was also seen as a country without any moral standards in questions of sexuality. However, sexual scandals occurred rather rarely in France in the decades around 1900, but very often in Britain and Germany³⁷. In particular, the number of scandals concerning homosexuality increased in Britain from the 1880s onwards and in Germany from 1900. At least in certain aspects German journalists took up the British scandals and the German debate went back to Britain.

Scandals concerning homosexuality were connected with political debates and conflicts about class structures. In Britain, for instance, Irish journalists and politicians brought up such charges against members of the English administration in Dublin in 1883. The scandal, which developed quickly, was part of their fight for Irish independence. When the accusations were discussed in court, the so-called “Dublin Castle Scandal” created offending stereotypes of the moral degeneration of the English elite in Ireland³⁸. In 1889, journalists from radical papers and the radical politician Henry Labouchere brought up a scandal concerning the homosexuality of aristocrats in London who had visited a male brothel. The aim of this scandal was to sully the reputation of the upper classes³⁹. Further similar scandals followed in subsequent years, which revealed the homosexuality of Edward Samuel Wesley de Cobain MP, of the colonial hero Hector MacDonald or of Oscar Wilde. Consequently, homosexuality became a theme widely discussed in the media, although this debate was still characterised by taboo and guarded insinuation.

The famous scandal of Oscar Wilde might be taken as an example of how these disclosures in Britain were transferred to Germany by journalists and politicians. During the trial of Oscar Wilde the German journalist

³⁷ An important exception in France is the scandalous campaign of the *Figaro* against the love affairs of Caillaux; see Berenson (1992).

³⁸ Cf. for detailed sources: Bösch (2009), Chapter 2.

³⁹ Excellent sources about this scandal can be found in The National Archive (TNA), especially in: TNA HO 144/477/X24427 and DPP 1/95. For its development, but with less interest in the interaction of media and politics, Hyde (1976); Chester *et al.* (1976); Kaplan in Erber and Robb (1999): 78-99.

Eduard Bernstein reported from London for the press of the Social Democrats. His articles in *Die Neue Zeit* discussed the Social Democratic attitudes towards homosexuality in public for the first time⁴⁰. The articles demanded that these men not be punished, but at the same time condemned a “decadent” kind of homosexuality such as Wilde’s: “One has to judge in each single case whether there are wild excesses or an insuperable love for the same sex, which should not be valued as a moral judgement, but pathologically”⁴¹. Consequently, the Social Democrats did not support the rights of homosexuals in general, but constructed a critical distance from cases such as Oscar Wilde.

Those German articles about the scandal of Oscar Wilde had two consequences. On the one hand, they led to a broad German reform movement for the repeal of paragraph 175⁴². The first gay associations were founded, signatures for the repeal were collected, and August Bebel brought up the topic in the Reichstag in 1898. In his Reichstag speech, Bebel used references to homosexuality in the upper classes to threaten his opponents with scandals immanent in Germany: “If the police in Berlin would do their duty in this field, I just want to speak of this city, there would be a scandal compared to which the Panama scandal, the Dreyfus affair, the Lützow-Leckert affair and the Tausch-Normann-Schumann scandal are a cakewalk”⁴³. Although Bebel did not explicitly refer to British scandals in this speech, the charge itself and belief in the political power of scandals were transferred from abroad.

Only a few years later, the German Social Democrats started to attack the elite of the Kaiserreich with accusations of homosexuality similar to those that the Irish and Radicals in Britain had made before. In 1902 their major newspaper, *Vorwärts*, launched a big scandal by accusing the famous entrepreneur Friedrich Alfred Krupp of homosexual intercourse with young boys in Capri⁴⁴. Here, the article used the same distinctions as those that were developed in the German reception of the Oscar Wilde scandal. The charges in the articles distinguished between legal “homosexual love” and decadent orgies with young boys, which should be punished. The information about Krupp’s supposed sexual behaviour was taken from socialist newspapers in Italy,

⁴⁰ The most important Social Democratic ideas on moral questions before that were published in the several (revised) editions of: August Bebel, *Die Frau und der Sozialismus* (Stuttgart: Dietz, 1878).

⁴¹ Bernstein, “Die Beurtheilung”, in: *Die Neue Zeit* (1895), 231.

⁴² General notes on this movement in: Lautmann and Taeger (1992): 239-268, here 243.

⁴³ Verhandlungen des Reichstages 13.1.1898, Bd. 159, 16. Sitz., 410.

⁴⁴ *Vorwärts* 15.11.1902, 2.

which were then reprinted in Austria⁴⁵. This transfer of charges led not only to a great scandal but also to the death of one of the biggest industrialists in Europe. Only one week after the article Krupp died — most likely by committing suicide. Other scandals concerning homosexuality followed, especially the scandals in 1907/08 of Eulenburg and Moltke, who were close friends of the Emperor⁴⁶.

The scandals about homosexuality were taken up by the international press. The articles revealed differences within public discourse when one looks at the national provenance and the political slant of those papers. While the majority of the international press was talking about Krupp's homosexuality quite directly, the majority of the British press stayed silent about the charge. *The Daily Telegraph*, *The Times* and the *Daily Express* wrote about Krupp's life, but mentioned only "libels" which had contributed to his death⁴⁷. Still, a radical paper such as *Reynolds's Newspaper*, which had also discussed the British homosexual scandal directly, called the Krupp scandal the most important event in Germany since Bismarck's death and reported about Krupp's contacts with boys in Capri and the "mania homosexualis"⁴⁸. Later on, the charge of homosexuality against a close friend and adviser of Emperor Kaiser Wilhelm II, Graf Eulenburg, was received broadly in the European press and contributed to the impression that the German elite was homosexual⁴⁹.

However, the mutual reports showed difficulties for British journalists who wrote about such scandals from Berlin. In general, homosexuality was discussed much more openly and directly in Germany. In Britain, these cases helped to reduce taboos and construct new knowledge about homosexuals, too, but with a greater distance. Consequently, the Berlin correspondent of *The Times* started his article about a trial concerning homosexuality, which was connected with the scandal of Eulenburg, with the helpless words: "It is really difficult to know how to report a case of this kind in *The Times*. It is impossible to transmit the evidence verbatim [...]"⁵⁰. However, the journalist tried in the following lines with many details. Even the word "homosexual" was used for the first time in *The Times* in this article. So one can conclude that such reports about scandals helped to create cross-border knowledge and

⁴⁵ See *Propaganda* 18.9.1902, 15.10.1902; 20.10.1912; in Austria: *Arbeiter-Zeitung* 27.10.1902.

⁴⁶ As a recent investigation of these cases comp.: Kohlrausch (2005): 186-243.

⁴⁷ See *Times*, *Daily Telegraph* and *Daily Express* 24.11.1902.

⁴⁸ *Reynolds's Newspaper* 30.11.1902, 1.

⁴⁹ Domeier (2015).

⁵⁰ *Times* 7.11.1907, 3.

supported the creation of similar scandals. However, they were not always used for systematic campaigns against another country.

V. TRANSNATIONAL COMPETITION: SCANDALS CONCERNING COLONIALISM AND THE MONARCHIES

The “scramble for Africa” heightened political and cultural competition between Germany and Britain — especially from the German perspective. During the African land grab colonial scandal gave rise to important imaginative constructions of the other country. The numerous German articles about the violent deeds of Stanley’s Rear Column in 1890, for instance, led to a scandal with an international debate and biting commentary in Germany. The mockery of Stanley’s hypocrisy, selfishness and profiteering was obviously directed at English colonialism in general⁵¹. Similarly, the German colonial project was also subjected to scandalmongering: the brutal behaviour of colonial officers such as Heinrich von Leist, Alwin Wehlan and Carl Peters led to comments in the British press which questioned whether Germany should have colonies at all. The conservative newspaper *The Spectator* concluded on the Peters scandal: “This is the third case and yet German officials wonder why, even when they have acquired colonies, German settlers prefer to immigrate to America or to the British colonies”⁵².

The perception of colonial scandal abroad gave arguments for coping with scandal at home. In Germany, right-wing papers and politicians in particular argued that countries like England behaved worse than the Germans. The media, however, did not go public with the details or express any kind of apology. For instance the *Münchener Neueste Nachrichten* argued: “Neither England nor France nor any other colonising power makes much fuss about such attacks on natives”⁵³. The strength of the British Empire was not seen in its moral superiority, but in its power to ignore critical reports by using a patriotic self-censorship. On the other hand, the German Liberal, Catholic and Social Democratic journalists and politicians used the British cases as

⁵¹ See esp. the articles in *Neue Preussische Zeitung*, 25 Oct.-20 Nov. 1890, esp. 8 Nov. 1890, 2; also *Vossische Zeitung*, 31 Oct. 1890, 2. About Stanley in general: James J. Newman, *Imperial Footprints. Henry Morton Stanley’s African Journeys*, Washington, 2004.

⁵² *Spectator* 21.3.1896, 399.

⁵³ *Münchener Neueste Nachrichten*, 71, 13.1.1903; similar for instance: *Berliner Illustrirte Zeitung*, 12, 22.3.1896.

examples of how one could react to German scandal. Martin Spahn argued that the British prevented further scandal by punishing the guilty party, whereas the Germans did not undertake any investigations at all⁵⁴. Demands were made in Germany for the creation of parliamentary select committees, but they usually investigated British scandals. British practice was adopted, however, in meting out punishment.

Scandal usually transferred between nations through translation of the content of foreign papers. Some papers had their own foreign correspondents in London or Berlin. Other international actors were journalists reporting from the African colonies. They travelled between British and German colonies and reported rumours from both territories. Little is known about their work, for only a few papers could afford such journalists. The papers of Eugen Wolf, probably the most important German journalist in Africa in the 1890s, are excellent sources for this purpose⁵⁵. His articles for the *Berliner Tageblatt* helped to expose colonial violence. His work is also an example of journalistic cooperation between Britain and Germany. When the German authorities refused to grant him travel and telegraph permission because of his critical reports, the British helped him with his travels. Therefore the German foreign ministry spread the rumour that Wolf was a British spy⁵⁶. The work of the African correspondent thus became part of the German-British rivalry.

The competitive interaction between the public of the two countries was even more intense during scandals concerning the monarchies. The royal houses developed in connection with the extension of the media. Although the monarchs in Britain and Germany lost much of their direct political influence during the second half of the nineteenth century, the emergence of the mass media and the popular politics on the streets helped to increase the reputation and position of Queen Victoria and Wilhelm I from the 1880s onwards. While the papers tried to catch impressions of the royal household, the royals opened their doors to the media, presented their family life and participated in symbolic actions, which raised public attention⁵⁷. Both increased not only their reputation but also the incidence of scandal.

While Queen Victoria and Wilhelm I were rarely associated with scandal, their successors Edward VII and Wilhelm II had a different experience. Their character, particularly, became a popular topic. Prince Edward's moral

⁵⁴ *Times* 30.8.1906, 3.

⁵⁵ Cf. files in: Bundesarchiv Berlin/Lichterfelde R 1001-4694, and -4695.

⁵⁶ Report on 23.8.1892, in: BAB R1001-4694-121; cf. also newspaper articles in: *Hamburger Correspondent*, 13.8.1892.

⁵⁷ Plunkett (2002); Geisthövel and Knoch (2003): 59-80.

conduct was the source of much racy talk. With the Mordaunt scandal in 1870, he was charged with having had an affair with a married woman and was even questioned as a witness in a divorce trial⁵⁸. Although the Prince was not convicted, his image as a womaniser was cemented, and beyond Britain, as well. His passion for gambling led to another scandal in 1891 and precipitated a crisis of the royal house⁵⁹. The “Baccarat Scandal” revealed that the Prince used to play this illegal game of chance and even encouraged other aristocrats to join him. The public reactions during these British scandals were harsh. “Never perhaps during the present reign has there been such an outspoken criticism of one so near the Throne”, as the *Pall Mall Gazette* summed up its extensive review of press reactions on the Baccarat scandal⁶⁰. Other papers referred to the Necklace Affair of Marie Antoinette to stress the drama of the outrage⁶¹.

These British scandals led to high-paced international reports and reactions. The Germans, French and Americans made a laughing stock of the future British king. Their caricatures presented him as a gambler, drinker, debtor or in dubious company. Furthermore, foreign papers portrayed the Prince as a small boy next to his big mother. In this way the international media attacked the reputation of the future king of Britain. Several of these foreign caricatures published during the Baccarat scandal were reprinted in the British press⁶². They were taken as evidence for the need to educate the Prince. These stereotypes about the royal house went temporarily dormant in the following years, but were reactivated during times of crisis. Especially during the Boer War, when the German public became hostile to England, such accusations against King Edward VII were presented in an even more dramatic manner⁶³. Edward was called a “debauchee” in German papers, which attacked British morality in general.

Scandal concerning Wilhelm II discussed his character, too, but in general took a different direction. There was the usual questioning of sexual norms, but the attacks were directed at the entourage of the Emperor, not Wilhelm himself. The “Kotze Scandal” in 1894, for instance, revealed that a member of the high aristocracy was teasing members of the royal court with

⁵⁸ Reports of the proceedings in: *Times* 19.2.1870, 11; as a case study: Hamilton (1999). Notes on his moral conduct in general in Aronson (1988).

⁵⁹ Havers *et al.* (1977).

⁶⁰ *Pall Mall Gazette* 10.6.1891, 6.

⁶¹ *Daily Chronicle* 10.9.1891.

⁶² See the international collection in: *Review of Reviews* July 1891, 16-22.

⁶³ Geppert (2007): 135-136.

exaggerated sexual disclosures⁶⁴. Also the charge of homosexuality against his friends Eulenburg and Moltke led to a scandal which threatened the role of the Emperor⁶⁵. However, the greatest scandal arising from Wilhelm II resulted from his public speeches and interviews. Despite his martial performances, Wilhelm II was not seen negatively per se in the British press⁶⁶. Nevertheless, his public interventions in the issue led to dramatic reactions among the British public. His telegram to the Transvaal President Ohm Krüger, in which Wilhelm congratulated him for his victory after the Jameson Raid, led not only to sneering and angry articles in the British press but also to demonstrations in the streets and fights with Germans in London's East End⁶⁷.

One of the most well-known scandals in imperial Germany, the “*Daily Telegraph* Affair”, was based on an interview of the Emperor with the British newspaper. Although the British public grew accustomed to Wilhelm's brutish rhetoric, this interview is a particularly illustrative example of how such scandal led to public cross-border interaction. While Wilhelm pretended to seek friendship with Britain in his boastful interview, the British press read it differently and became outraged⁶⁸. While the Germans were merely joking about the British king, the British public was not only laughing about the German Emperor but also interpreted his scandalous speeches as a sign of the incomprehensible German manner.

Interviews with Wilhelm II also illustrated how journalists and the press became transnational actors. As mentioned above, the role of interviews as a technique of foreign diplomacy increased in 1907-08. Several leading German statesmen received foreign journalists for interviews. In particular, Chancellor Bülow granted several extensive interviews with English journalists in which he stressed his wishes for a good German relationship with England⁶⁹. The two interviews with Wilhelm II in 1908 conveyed this in particular. The first interview, which was published in *The Daily Telegraph*,

⁶⁴ See the letters in: Geheimes Staatsarchiv Preußischer Kulturbesitz HA I, Rep. 89, Nr. 3307/4 and /10. Some notes in: Bringmann (1997): 152-201; Röhl (2001): 741-755.

⁶⁵ Kohlrausch (2005): 186-243.

⁶⁶ That at least parts of the British had a positive image of him or remained neutral is the central result of Reineremann (2001).

⁶⁷ *Id.*, 145-179.

⁶⁸ See *Daily Mail* 29.10.1908, 6; *Times* 29.10.1908, 9.

⁶⁹ See for instance the interview with Sydney Whitman, in: *Standard* 13.9.1908; WTB an Bülow 14.9.[1908], in: Bundesarchiv Koblenz N 1016-185-73; further interviews are mentioned in: Geppert, *Pressekriege*, 258-260.

emphasised his personal friendship with England. In a second interview, which was conducted by the American journalist William Bayard Hale, Wilhelm stressed the friendship with America and warned about the threat from England⁷⁰. Although the German government was able to prevent the printing of the second interview, at least the first one led to a major scandal which outraged all German parties. One could argue that the Emperor was simply inexperienced with interviews. He failed to consider the international reception or the alternative interpretation of his words. The *Daily Telegraph* affair showed that politicians took the initiative to use the press for their diplomatic goals, but were not able to control the outcome and interpretations of their interviews because they circulated in an international context. At the same time it becomes clear that the journalists were not only interested in printing spectacular stories. Furthermore they kept a lid on problematic interviews such as Hale's to protect the diplomatic interests of their states and to maintain a semblance of peace.

VI. CONCLUSION

The first aim of this article was to analyse the relationship between politics and the press through a study of scandal. The increasing number of scandals in the late nineteenth century was not only a result of the new yellow press and commercial interest or the result of an independent fourth estate. Rather, the growing interaction between the political press and the changing political culture led to polarised emotional disputes and scandalous charges. They were brought up by politicians, who acted as journalists, and journalists who had political goals. The belief that the masses could be directed by sensation influenced political and journalistic actions. Commercial interest were at least not the main goal of those, who brought up these political scandals. In both countries the results of the scandals showed the power of this changed political communication. They often led to amendments, resignations or changed norms. Scandal not only increased the power of journalists but also strengthened opposition parties and parliamentary groups which used the media to publicise sensational revelations. Despite all the historical differences between Germany and Britain, this development demonstrated how the British and German models of press and politics became more alike.

⁷⁰ A detailed analysis of the origin of these interviews in Winzen (2002); Menning and Menning (1983): 368-397.

The second aim of this article was to point out the international transfer of scandal. Scandal played an important role in the self-perception of each nation and the perception of the other. The mutual reports of the media helped to establish stereotypes and increased tensions between the different countries. In this perspective, journalists and politicians were actors who influenced politics and culture by transferring scandals from other countries. Foreign correspondents translated scandals like the cases of Oscar Wilde, Philipp Eulenburg or those about corruption in France. They were taken up by the domestic journalists and politicians. The transfers of scandals showed differences which depended on the subject under debate. Colonial scandals led to the strongest reactions. They fostered a general critique of the colonial practice of the other country, but also forced domestic reforms which were modelled on examples from abroad. Scandal about the monarchy led to a similarly intense interaction and debate, especially because the monarchs associated with scandal were taken to be representative of their respective nations. Scandals concerning homosexuality came up first in Britain and were indirectly transferred to Germany. A legal debate followed. These scandals also led to discussion of so-called “decadent” forms of homosexuality, which were attacked even by those who generally preferred exemption from punishment. Finally, a specific kind of transfer was shown for corruption scandals. France was the major reference point for Germany and Britain. The Panama scandal was an especially important event for both countries — as a model for anti-Semitic charges and imaginings of corrupt conspiracies, but also as a reference point to stress the moral superiority over France.

Consequently, one can conclude that the elite of each country was the subject of suspicion during the decades around 1900. A new kind of moral scrutiny entered the political realm. This was also a struggle in the international arena and scandals brought up national stereotypes about each nation. The international press watched and participated in the construction of those scandals. The competition for moral legitimacy and reputation anticipated the struggles on the real battlefield after 1914. Even on the battlefield, however, the moral denigration of the enemy through scandalous reports of atrocities remained a central element of politics *and* journalism.

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