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# When Private Life Became Political: German Politicians, Sex Scandals, and Mass Media, 1880–1914

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Frank BÖSCH (University of Potsdam)

## I. Introduction

In December 1908, German newspapers were once again discussing two affairs among the highest circles of society. For one, they reported on the love life of Ambassador Alfred von Kiderlen-Wächter, who at the time was replacing Prime Minister Wilhelm von Schoen in office. Almost all the newspapers informed their readers that Kiderlen-Wächter had long entertained an affair with his house keeper, a former circus artist. She had reportedly been seen by his side in official receptions.<sup>1</sup> At the same time, the newspapers reported on the press relations officer in the Department for Foreign Affairs, Otto Hammann, who was also the right hand of Reichskanzler Bernhard von Bülow. Hammann had supposedly seduced his friend Professor Bruno Schmitz's wife a few years earlier. In turn, Schmitz had rented the apartment beneath the two, drilled holes in the ceiling and kept exact records of when and how Hammann had sex with her. Now, he was publicly accusing Hammann of having committed perjury because Hammann had denied in court having sexual intercourse.<sup>2</sup> Some newspapers added further information to these reports about how Hammann had been a rake ever since he was a university

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1. Cf. *Berliner Tageblatt* 12 Dec. 1908; *Tägliche Rundschau* 15 Dec. 1908; *Vorwärts* 15 Dec. 1908. Many references of these articles refer to German newspapers, which had never mentioned the author. As many of these articles were found in press clippings in archives, only the date of their publication and (as far as possible) the number of issue are mentioned.
  2. Cf. *Berliner Morgenpost* 6 Dec. 1908; *Berliner Tageblatt* 10 Dec. 1908; *Berliner Lokalanzeiger* 10 Dec. 1908.

student.<sup>3</sup>

At first glance, these random articles seem to be merely banal pieces of gossip that are not worth mentioning. And yet, there are a number of reasons in favour of attaching the same importance to them as contemporary editors, politicians, and readers did, because these articles offer a variety of tracks towards different aspects concerning the history of media, culture, and politics. From the short examples mentioned, one can deduce five observations: First of all, they show that in Germany, too, evidently the media did report on the most intimate private issues of politicians long before the age of television. The assessment that for German media, statesmen's sexuality had always been a public taboo and had only been an issue since the 1960s would appear unable to be upheld without change. However, international comparative studies usually delineate the occurrence of political "sex scandals" with examples from England, the United States, and France.<sup>4</sup> Secondly, the timing of said disclosures indicates that publicizing the private was becoming part of a new form of debate inside the political field as well as between the spheres of the media and politics. Kiderlen-Wächter had unexpectedly just taken up the position as deputy Secretary of State and had thus become a candidate for succession (Ralf 237, 314). Chief press officer Hammann, like Kiderlen-Wächter, had not exactly gained popularity with his poor management of the *Daily Telegraph* affair a few weeks earlier. Conversely, one even could follow the then-doyen of foreign politics, Friedrich von Holstein, when he stated that Hammann's poor management of the *Daily Telegraph* affair was attributable to the fact that Hammann "isn't winning back the necessary authority over the press because any angry journalist can be a thorn in his side in this messy affair by publishing allusions and articles" (Holstein qtd. in Rogge, *Holstein* 413).<sup>5</sup> Unveiling the private therefore corresponds to the course of governmental policy.

Thirdly, the cases document the apparent impracticality of preventing or controlling such media reports, for there was without a doubt hardly anyone who had as much influence on the media in the German Empire as Hammann.<sup>6</sup> He

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3. Cf. *BZ* 9 Sept. 1908; *Leipziger Neueste Nachrichten* 11 Nov. 1908.

4. Cf. Thompson 119–58.

5. Cf. Rich, Norman, and M. H. Fisher, eds. *Die geheimen Papiere Friedrich von Holsteins*. Göttingen: Musterschmidt, 1963. 532.

6. Cf. Jungblut, Peter. "Unter vier Reichskanzlern: Otto Hammann und die Pressepolitik der deutschen Reichsleitung 1890 bis 1916." *Propaganda. Meinungskampf. Verführung*

was in charge of all of the government's public relations, was Reichskanzler Bülow's closest friend, and also was in a position to send favourable instructions to judiciary bodies in this particular case of scandal. Accordingly, Hammann's estate documents Reichskanzler Bülow's sub-secretary Friedrich Wilhelm von Loebell as advocating reasons for preventing publication as well as the prosecution rejecting the requested trial for a long time.<sup>7</sup> But despite these interventions the affair finally became public.

Fourthly, the example underlines that in the German Empire, morals proved surprisingly liberal also in the case of the publication of non-compliance with sexual norms—at least if it did not surpass heterosexual boundaries. Though causing a temporary loss of reputation, these articles—in contrast to the “sex-scandals” in England—did not lead to permanent disadvantages or dismissals. Neither of the two politicians lost their position: one year later, Kiderlen-Wächter became foreign minister, and Hammann remained in office until 1916. The level of tolerance was surprisingly high internally as well as publicly. It turned out that the Department of Foreign Affairs had long known about Kiderlen-Wächter's illegitimate relationship. As early as 1906, a Legation Councillor denounced him to the authorities—only to be himself forced to resign (*Welt am Montag* 14 Dec. 1908). While conservative newspapers stated concerns, the more liberal key media like the *Vossische Zeitung* commented on the Kiderlen-case: “But how does it bother the German Nation if one of its emissaries is married or unmarried, if a valet or a housekeeper is head of his household, if he is a solitary or bon vivant?” (*Vossische Zeitung* 14 Nov. 1908). Thus, at least from the liberal point of view, the male heterosexual politician should not be subject to any reprimands as long as the Nation's honour was not at stake.

Fifthly, the articles reveal that the journalists also were part of the momentum of the media, constantly transcending the boundaries between “private” and “public.” Even though almost all newspapers unanimously stressed that they opposed reports on private life and called them “dirty laundry,” they would write about it regularly. While demanding the separation of private and public spheres, the newspapers at the same time undermined this

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*und politische Sinnstiftung 1789–1989*. Ed. Ute Daniel and Wolfram Siemann. Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 1994. Especially pages 101–16.

7. Cf. BAB/L. Correspondence Loebell-Hammann, 28 Nov. 1908; GStA. The Prosecutor's correspondence. 26 Nov. 1908.

very separation through their respective reports, thus turning the private into a public political issue and thereby ultimately deconstructing a fundamental pillar of the bourgeoisie, which had shaped the self-concepts of members of parliament and statesmen at least during the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

## II. Public and Privacy: Methodological Remarks

The reports on Kiderlen-Wächter and Hammann were not isolated cases. Compared to other revelations that occurred within the decades around 1900, they were virtually unspectacular.<sup>8</sup> For example, during the same period, influential advisers to the Kaiser such as August Graf zu Eulenburg, Kuno Graf von Moltke, and Wilhelm Graf von Hohenau, military officers such as Count Rochus Graf Lynar, and the industrialist Friedrich Alfred Krupp had to resist the public allegation of being homosexual. Only a few months after the reports on Kiderlen-Wächter and Hammann, Reichstag member Wilhelm Schack resigned after he placed advertisements in search of a female lover for him and his wife, and the following detailed reproduction of his letters of courtship by the press. Furthermore, the increasing disclosure of private matters was not an exclusively German phenomenon. In late 19<sup>th</sup> century England, high-ranking politicians such as Charles Stewart Parnell and Charles Dilke were openly accused of having committed adultery,<sup>9</sup> and in 1884, American candidates for the presidency conducted the supposedly first-ever election campaign in which a candidate was accused in a widespread campaign of having an extra-marital relationship (Ross 91).

Obviously, the establishment of the popular press since the 1880s had led to a crucial shift in what could be expressed publicly. Until then, only members of the royal court or higher nobility were concerned by the publication of such private affairs, since the bourgeois distinction between “public” and “private” was not of comparable significance to them as it was to persons from the sphere of bourgeois politics. My article will examine this shift of boundaries. In doing so, it will not focus so much on the unveiling articles themselves, but rather

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8. To compare the broad comparative view, see Bösch.

9. Cf. Fisher, Bösch. “Massenmedien im Alltagsgespräch: Mediennutzung, Medienwirkung und Kommunikation im Kaiserreich.” *Publizistik. Vierteljahreshefte für Kommunikationsforschung* 49.3 (2004): 319–36.

on the genealogical question, *how* and *in which ways*, this remarkable change in the reporting of the popular press was implemented. The question is by what means and through which topics the hitherto existing borders of privacy (and by that also that of the public) were remapped and what kind of new public knowledge about sexuality was created by the media. Sexuality seems to stand out distinctively in this respect, for it is thought of as the most private domain imaginable within the constructed frame of “public/private”—and now had been transferred into the public sphere of politics (Rössler 16). Yet, the increasing disclosure of private matters formed but a sub-process of the increasing abandonment of secrecy that can be observed in other areas around 1900 as well. Accordingly, the late 19<sup>th</sup> century saw various exposures dealing with serious shortcomings in fields classically considered as arcane realms, such as the military, police, administration, and newspapers themselves.

It seems problematic, of course, to speak of the terms “public” and “private” in the first place. Since Helke Sander’s legendary lecture “The Private Is the Political,” the objection was raised, especially from the feminist standpoint, that both categories construct artificial spheres that particularly encoded gender roles, allocating the private sector of the home to women (Sander).<sup>10</sup> Those widely discussed objections will not be challenged here. This investigation will also discuss “the private” and “the public” or “the political” as constructions that cannot be understood in an essentialist way, but rather as being constructed by contemporaries. If acknowledging the (paternalistically influenced) nature of their construction and usage, there are still good reasons for working with those historical categories and for investigating the negotiations of their boundaries, for this binary opposition affected the perception of society, particularly that of bourgeois contemporaries of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, in such a strong way that articles and public speeches breaching the respective allocations-to-date caused quite a furore. Preceding Sander’s lecture by seven decades, they did their part in a way in accepting the private as being more political than before. It was not coincidental that the feminist movement promoted and valued revelations in the sexual sphere because such scandals revealed taboos, most of which suppressed women.<sup>11</sup>

10. Cf. Hausen, Karin. “Öffentlichkeit und Privatheit. Gesellschaftspolitische Konstruktionen und die Geschichte der Geschlechterbeziehungen.” *Frauengeschichte—Geschlechtergeschichte*. Ed. Karin Hausen and Heide Wunder. Frankfurt: Campus, 1992. 81–88.

11. Cf. Walkowitz, Judith R. *City of Dreadful Delight: Narratives of Sexual Danger in Late-Victorian London*. London: Virago Press, 1994. 132–34.

What exactly was conceived as part of the private sphere may be hard to grasp in terms of a conceptual history, for it was defined by contemporaries merely as an antonym to “public.” For example, the 1898 edition of the German Brockhaus dictionary paraphrased the term “private” scarcely as being “opposed to the public; homely, referring to a single person, being in their possession,” thus referring to the legal tradition of the term.<sup>12</sup> Yet, the analysed conflicts show that “private” was not merely an abstract judicial category. There existed a consensus that at least home, family, and sexuality cover a private sphere that without consent could not be incorporated into public communication. On the other hand, contemporaries viewed the political sphere predominantly as an interaction with the public. The Brockhaus dictionary in 1898 defined it as “active participation in public life,” thus contrasting it with privacy as well.

The historic relevance of this shift in boundaries is obvious. It allows us to examine the transformation of the public, whose significance has recently been highlighted by a number of conceptual texts but which has not been examined in depth.<sup>13</sup> Since Jürgen Habermas’s groundwork study, a number of texts dealing with the construction of the public in the 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries have been published, and yet the postulated “decline” was hardly an issue (Requate, *Journalismus* 5). Does the publicization of the private really embody the decline of political debate and the rise of passive media consumption? Another interesting question is: how did politics react to such a media mass market that undermined prior notions of control? The publicization can be used to show the change in society’s norms, for scandals often arise in situations when society’s norms are challenged by fighting isolated cases. In this sense, scandals can be defined as public outrage due to a broken norm (Hondrich 15), committed normally by an individual who stands for the upholding of said norms. These debates over a scandal allow an in-depth examination of what Foucault called the “archaeology of knowledge” and the creation of power structures. As the examples mentioned in the beginning show, scandals

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12. Cf. Hölscher, Lucian. *Öffentlichkeit und Geheimnis. Eine begriffsgeschichtliche Untersuchung zur Entstehung der Öffentlichkeit in der frühen Neuzeit*. Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1979.

13. Cf. Requate, Jörg. *Journalismus als Beruf. Entstehung und Entwicklung des Journalistenberufs im 19. Jahrhundert. Deutschland im internationalen Vergleich*. Göttingen: V&R, 1995. 5–32; Führer, Karl Christian, Knut Hickethier, and Axel Schildt. “Öffentlichkeit–Medien–Geschichte. Konzepte der modernen Öffentlichkeit und Zugänge zu ihrer Erforschung.” *AfS* 41 (2001): 1–38.

strengthened official norms, but also challenge them—especially in the sexuality discourse (Foucault). Especially the scandals mentioned show that sexuality in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century was not at all a tabooed issue; on the contrary, it was constantly debated, thus creating what had been unthinkable before, public discussions and “confessions” on topics such as homosexuality, love affairs, and prostitution. The scandals now targeted those who in their position as legislative authority or public speakers had in Foucault’s understanding been part of the Establishment.

### III. Vice Trials as Openers of Privacy

A first series of events that led to the publication of politicians’ sexuality in the 19<sup>th</sup> century surely was the media coverage of vice trials. Generally, newspaper articles about court trials were an essential catalyst accelerating the publication of the private in the media.<sup>14</sup> The seemingly objective relation of witness accounts, charges, and verdicts offered a legitimation for publishing sexual violations of the norm that otherwise could not have been printed. Newspapers could defend this by claiming they were only repeating public statements. A stenographic style of writing and the newspapers’ comments underlined the apparent distance from the statements.

The publicity of the trials was enhanced and transformed by the formation and differentiation of the popular press. In late 19<sup>th</sup> century Germany, numerous newly created newspapers often followed the English role models and concentrated on reporting such “sensational trials,” illustrated by drawn pictures of the deed in question. Like their English predecessors, they bore names like *Illustrierte-Gerichts-Zeitung* (*Illustrated Court News*) or *Reporter* and had a preference to write on homicides, suicides, and dramatic love-stories.<sup>15</sup> “Sensational trials” also found their place in reputable newspapers. As my press-analysis shows, the often multiple-paged articles of the “quality papers” (such as the *Vossische Zeitung* or the *Berliner Tageblatt*) not seldom

14. Cf. Requate, Jörg. “Die Lebedame und der Querulant. Zu Grenzverschiebungen zwischen Öffentlichem und Privatem in der Gerichtsberichterstattung der 60er Jahre.” *Die Veröffentlichung des Privaten—die Privatisierung des Öffentlichen*. Ed. Kurt Imhof and Peter Schulz. Opladen: Weststd. Verlag, 1998. 55–66.

15. Cf. Gebhart.

proved to be longer than in the General Advertisers, which were mocked as the “Scandal Advertisers.” The court reports were regular columns in the liberal quality papers as well and helped to institutionalize the genre and consolidated corresponding expectations of the readers.

General political debates on sexuality were sparked by different cases of vice negotiated in court in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, brought forward by spectacular media reports. Especially the question as to which legal consequences should be drawn from the respective cases transferred the topic into politics and called for a constant positioning of politicians on sexuality. In Germany, this momentum was revealed particularly clear in the Heinze-homicide case. The court reports, which had publicized countless details on prostitution, had sparked an ongoing debate in the Reichstag about different issues of morality.<sup>16</sup> In this process, the sexuality-discourse was closely connected with the political. Politicians tried to establish standards and norms that they had to adhere to publicly, thus creating a certain moral and social height of fall for themselves. These discourses also yielded discussions on the boundaries of the publicly negotiable and the public itself. Thus, a tightening of censorship and the exclusion of the public and the press from such trials was demanded in the course of the Heinze debate, for their presence would cause morally “abominable details [to be] depicted in the daily press.” (BAB/L, Reasons for draft law 22 Nov. 1892). It became apparent, however, that neither the exclusion of the public could contain individual media reports nor that a respective censorship law was feasible anymore.

The rise in court reports did not just create images of the underworld. They unsettled the claim of moral leadership upheld by nobility and bourgeoisie because the popular press now reported more often and in more detail on lawsuits concerning social elites, forcing their sexual life out in the open. In this respect, the case of August Sternberg is an exemplary one. The bank director and millionaire from Berlin had been charged with “illicit sexual relations” with minors several times, but he was acquitted in every single case (GStA, Urteil Staatsanwalt 21 Dec. 1900). In 1900, he was accused of having sexually abused several underage girls of 13 years. Sternberg’s attempts to silence witnesses, policemen, and journalists by bribing them increased the outrage (Kerchner).

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16. Cf. Evans, Richard J. “Prostitution, State and Society in Imperial Germany.” *Past and Present* 70 (1976): 106–29.

The Sternberg case shows, on different levels, how the private shifted towards the political and the public through the act of criminal litigation. First of all, the media played an important role throughout the whole process. A newspaper article on the vanishing of an abused girl even inspired the investigations in the first place (*Berliner Morgenpost* 4 Nov. 1899). During the trial, newspapers reported corrupt offerings of Sternberg's representatives (*Die Post* 16 Nov. 1900), and printed detailed articles for eight weeks. Though earlier trials on child abuse such as the Zastrow case in 1869 generated countless articles and public anger as well, the offense itself remained relatively vague.<sup>17</sup> Three decades later, the media took up taboos like prostitution and child abuse more explicitly, thus turning them into political issues and topics of manifold discussions, which led to a much harsher sentence for Sternberg. Secondly, it is remarkable, that such cases created a widespread outrage in different sub-publics. While the Social-Democratic press was addressing the bourgeoisie's double standards, conservative papers like *Die Post* complained that "the terrorism exerted on a civilized state by Sternberg's millions has to be broken!" (*Die Post* 16 Nov. 1900).<sup>18</sup> In spite of the fragmented structure of society, the media were not only discussing similar topics, but also finding a common tenor of their argumentation. The articles functioned as a warning signal that even prominent personalities were no longer safe from being publicly accused of sexual deviance. The legal punishments often might have been mild. However, their publicizing by the popular press now represented a much harsher punishment, for it could destroy the defendant's reputation.

Thirdly, the media reports on vice trials established a crossover to the medical, criminological, and juridical discourses on sexuality, which normally did not reach such a large readership. As many studies have shown, sexologist studies were established around 1900, too. One of the leading experts worldwide, the medical doctor Magnus Hirschfeld, was doing his research in Berlin and organized campaigns there (Herzer). For instance, he sent questionnaires to thousands of students to research (homo)sexual practices there. Hirschfeld's expert knowledge was thus given a large forum in the following scandals.

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17. Cf. Herzer, Manfred. "Zastrow-Ulrichs-Kertbeny. Erfundene Identitäten im 19. Jahrhundert." *Männerliebe im alten Deutschland. Sozialgeschichtliche Abhandlungen*. Ed. Rüdiger Lautmann and Angela Taeger. Berlin: Rosa Winkel, 1992. 61–80.

18. *Neue Preussische Zeitung* 5 Nov. 1900.

Fourthly, the media created a new sense of alertness and cooperation among the citizens. Many criminal cases show that readers of the mass press were highly willing to cooperate with both the police and the press by denunciation.<sup>19</sup> Thus, in the wake of court reports, new control and power structures were formed that enhanced the opening of the private sphere. In conclusion, we can state that the vice trials produced a public language for the violation of sexual norms and established acceptable techniques for the exposure of the private sphere. The trials connected the issues of sexuality and parliamentarianism and created a space of imagination that made the violations of sexual norms by bourgeois dignitaries thinkable and sayable. Additionally, the court reports transferred the medical, judicial, and criminological knowledge about sexuality that had been developed in expert publications in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, into a broader media public and into the parliamentary space.

#### IV. Colonial Imagination and Sexual Disclosures

Another area in which issues such as sexuality or violence against women were transferred into politics even more directly was the colonial discourse. It helped in a way to ease the path to the publication of politicians' sexual life. Since the moral standards for the colonies differed, news reports from the colonies served to alter the boundaries of what could be said and shown in the home country. Photographs of half-naked women in magazines that had been unthinkable before could now be printed in the case of indigenous people.<sup>20</sup> Reports on the allegedly uninhibited and excessive sexual behaviour of Africans, explained by the tropical climate, seemed to be legitimate due to an ethnological-enlightening and seemingly scientific angle. Colonial imagination thus had been connected with sexual phantasies from the beginning and created a "code for sexual dreams" (Radkau 407).<sup>21</sup>

These perceptions were taken up by the opponents of colonial policy when in their attempt to fight colonialism altogether they publicized the sexual life

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19. Cf. Müller, Phillip. *Auf der Suche nach dem Täter. Die Öffentliche Dramatisierung von Verbrechen im Berlin des Kaiserreichs*. Frankfurt: Campus, 2005.

20. Cf. *BIZ* 16 Jan. 1898; 14 May 1899; 5 Jan. 1896.

21. Cf. Stoler, Ann Laura. *Race and the Education of Desire: Foucault's History of Sexuality and the Colonial Order of Things*. Durham: Duke UP, 1995.

of high-ranking colonial officials since the 1890s. This proved to be utterly successful. When connected with sexual allegations, reports of violent felony reached far more media attention leading to harsher sanctions than those cases that “only” involved the illegal killing of Africans. This observation can be verified by the three early colonial scandals that involved Heinrich Leist, Karl Wehlan, and Carl Peters between 1894 and 1896. In the case of Leist, who was vice governor and chancellor of Cameroon, only to a small extent did the public outrage center around his brutal practices against the natives. There was more excitement about the fact that he had African women be whipped publicly on the naked bottom. There was also a public discussion of Leist and other officials keeping African women as prostitutes (Bösch 225–329; Nuhn 140; Kaeselitz 21).<sup>22</sup>

This scandalization was not pushed by dubious scandal sheets but rather by the liberal *Berliner Tageblatt*, which had its own Africa correspondent, Eugen Wolf, since 1890. The beginning professionalization in journalism thus became one of the motors in the preparation of disclosures (Requate, “Öffentlichkeit”).<sup>23</sup> The *Berliner Tageblatt* employed the genre of the journal in order to make the allegations authentically sayable without a trial. Similar to the court testimonies, they would print excerpts from the notebook of a Cameroon government official whose name initially remained anonymous (*Berliner Tageblatt* 5 Feb. 1894). The newspaper in 1895 justified its role as whistle blower in the following manner:

The goings-on of the First official in one of the largest colonies of the German Empire, the immoral public whipping of naked women, and the secret orgies with African prostitutes would surely still be a secret today, a public secret at best, maybe even an official one (!), had not the *Berliner Tageblatt* by publishing [...] unveiled the scandalous goings-on in this colony in the best interest of the public morality. (*Berliner Tageblatt* 9 Apr. 1895)

This self-legitimization unmistakably shows the self-confidence of a fourth power that publicizes violations in arcane spheres. At the same time, it shows

22. Press-clippings from Bundesarchiv Koblenz (BAK).

23. About Eugen Wolf’s work see: BAB/L. Korrespondenz mit dem Kolonialamt 1890 bis 1893.

the ambivalence that the initial example had indicated: immoral actions were unveiled in order to preserve morality.

It is noteworthy to take a look at how in the course of the publications, language norms shifted as well. The first reports of the *Berliner Tageblatt* avoided detailed information on the sexual allegations about “naked women” even though the editors knew about them.<sup>24</sup> Especially Catholic newspapers had to tiptoe around for a long time before being able to articulate the allegations. Initially, they only talked about “outrageous offenses” that could not be printed because “they were connected with the Sixth Commandment” (*Der Westfale* 14 Apr. 1894; *Kölnische Volkszeitung* 13 Apr. 1894). Yet in the course of the unfolding scandal, even the Catholic and conservative newspapers described in more and more detail how Leist had ordered women to his home “abusing them to commit fornication” (*Reichsbote* 19 Sept. 1894). Evidently, the newspapers needed a phase of transition and habituation that was accelerated by the relatively more explicit reports by their competitors. Remarkably, in these articles, there were hardly any racist arguments claiming sexual intercourse with coloured women to be illegitimate *per se*. In contrast, the media rather unanimously demanded that Leist resign from office. The mild disciplinary measures in the resulting trials against the officials fuelled the public outrage. Leist publicly justified himself by claiming that his behaviour was common conduct among all Germans in Africa and only corresponded to prostitution in Europe (*Berliner Lokal-Anzeiger* 9 Nov. 1894). In this, Leist confirmed the allegations, at the same time transferring them to the conduct of domestic politicians.

Leist’s case shows the dynamics this sort of scandal could develop. Further revelations of other cases that went into more explicit details much more quickly followed immediately. Readers learned about high-ranking trade organization officers who were accused of committing “wild orgies” and cases of rape (*Germania* 28 July 1896). Next to the newspaper reports, brochures and books were published in which travellers forthrightly reported on the sexual conduct of officials. Lieutenant Rudolf Hofmeister for example stressed in his brochure “that most of the whites, once used to the habits in East-Africa after living there for some time, were bedding a black girl they had bought for about 100 to 140 rupees from a slave trader” (Hofmeister 20). The scandals thus developed a strong attraction and created both an offer and a demand for

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24. Cf. *Berliner Tageblatt* 5 Feb.–7 Feb. 1894.

reports on similar cases.

The Social Democrats in particular began to carry such revelations into parliamentary debate. So far, they only had used dry statistics as an argument in the colonial debates before, stating that the colonies were economically unprofitable and costing more than they yielded.<sup>25</sup> Now, they decried the atrocities and sexual lives of leading colonialists, using a number of comprehensive individual cases. This assured them a whole new level of attention on the part of the parliament, the media, and the public as well. Especially deputy Georg von Vollmar tried to use this technique to make his mark on the debate in 1895 (Reichstag 18 Mar. 1895, 1569 ff).<sup>26</sup> To demonstrate the whole issue in a way most accommodating to the media, the Social Democrats even brought a whip made from hippo leather, as used by colonialists against the natives, to parliament, as if it were an exhibit in a legal case. August Bebel's famous speech against the colonialist Carl Peters functioned in a similar way. Bebel accused the hero of the colonial movement of 1896 to have hanged his "concubine" out of jealousy. With this public exposure of Peters's sexual life, he also questioned Peters's masculinity: "The enforced caresses of Dr. Peters might not have exactly satisfied Gidschagga [Peters's concubine, F.B.], so she began an intimate relationship with one of his servants, named Mabrucki." (Reichstag 13 Mar. 1896, 1432). Not only did these allegations keep the Reichstag busy for three days in a row, they also kept the German public engaged in the topic for over a year, again giving rise to countless articles on the moral behaviour of colonial officials. An utterly explicit discussion of sexuality was used notably by the Social Democrats both in parliament and their own press to unveil the bourgeoisie's double standards (Reichstag 14 Mar. 1896, 1457).

The Social Democrats were actually successful using this strategy. The situational public picked up the allegations uttered in convention and media public. My analysis of around 2,500 conversations in bars secretly recorded by the Hamburg police department found that newspaper readers led emotional debates centring on all of the cases.<sup>27</sup> The bar visitors did not view the Peters

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25. Cf. Schwarz, Maria-Theresia. *'Je weniger Afrika, desto besser.'* *Die deutsche Kolonialkritik am Ende des 19. Jahrhunderts. Eine Untersuchung zur kolonialen Haltungen von Linkliberalismus und Sozialdemokratie.* Frankfurt: P. Lange, 1999.

26. See also: *ibid.* pages 1312–18.

27. Cf. Bösch.

case as an isolated event, but rather connected it with the other scandals. At one bar, a customer said this about Bebel according to secret police reports: “When reading B. notes I find myself thinking that it should not be possible for any German to act like this, but one must believe it nonetheless because these are not the first cases of cruelty” (StAH 17 Mar. 1896). At a different bar, a customer remarked that Bebel had “exposed an image of Dr. Peters’s morality that is far worse than that of the oppressors Wehlan and Leist” (StAH 16 Mar. 1896).<sup>28</sup> Later colonial scandals, such as the numerous cases reported by Matthias Erzberger in 1906, oftentimes were propelled by the connection of the violation of law and the publication of sexual conduct. For instance, readers learned about Governor Jesko von Puttkamer’s German lover, who he claimed to be his “cousin,” or about other high-ranking officials who had bought African women.<sup>29</sup>

While up until this time, journalists could not imagine writing about the prostitutes who visited high-ranking politicians and officials in Germany, such writing was already possible where officials in the colonies were concerned. Why? First of all, the connection with violations of the law offered a legitimation for the publication of sexual misconduct. This connection with a criminal offence remained a constitutive element in all sex scandals afterwards and has continued so into the present, serving as a justification for publication. This is true even for cases of post-WWII history, and not only in Germany, as with the British Profumo scandal (betrayal of state secrets, 1962) and the Clinton-Lewinsky-affair (perjury, 1998), but certainly in Germany, as with Michel Friedmann (cocaine and prostitutes, 2003). Secondly, the crime site was charged with intensive imagination and so far away that a quick verification was hardly possible. When the first articles were published, neither the Government nor the press close to the government was able to quickly research exonerating material or to contradict the allegations by words of honor. In June 1906, the *National-Zeitung* printed Matthias Erzberger’s allegations with the somewhat helpless comment: “We are unable to verify or falsify these new allegations Representative Erzberger is bringing forward at this point” (*National-Zeitung*

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28. For other conversations see: *ibid.*, 17 Mar. and 19 Mar.; StAH. *Vigilanzbericht Schutzmänn Graumann*. 19 Mar. 1896.

29. Cf. *Frankfurter Zeitung* 4 Feb. 1906; 6 Feb. 1906; *Berliner Tageblatt* 25 Apr. 1906; Erzberger, Matthias. *Die Kolonial-Bilanz. Bilder aus der deutschen Kolonialpolitik auf Grund der Verhandlungen des Reichstags im Sessionsabschnitt 1905/06*. Berlin: Germania, 1906.

28 June 1906). This allowed further speculations. Thirdly, the officials in the colonies did not seem to have had a private sphere in the bourgeois sense. Their life was a public mission to embody the nation's superiority. Their violations of the norms even in the private sphere were thus viewed as disgrace for the nation that endangered the standing and the authority of Germans and the "white race." This was not a purely German phenomenon, but rather could be observed in other Western countries as well (Stoler).

The disclosures from the colonies were not only a media phenomenon. In fact, they initiated intensive debate in parliament and caused radical consequences for political and social practice. They led to the dismissal of several officials, to reforms of the Colonial Administration Agency (*Kolonialamt*), and to the passing of new laws that re-arranged the conduct against the African natives and excluded women from corporal punishment (Stoecker 185).<sup>30</sup> The *Kolonialverein's* (colonial association) initiative of sending German women to Africa for free, of installing brothels, and eventually of prohibiting "mixed marriages" in some colonies were connected with these sexual revelations (Wildenthal; Essner). Finally, these scandals triggered the *Zentrums*partei's renunciation of colonial policy and the dissolution of the German parliament at the end of 1906. Thus, publication of the violation of sexual norms did not just serve as a form of entertainment, it altered political practice. The same development can be observed in Great Britain during same time period. Here, the disclosures of the *Times* about the Kenyan Commander Hubert Silberrad's concubines after a number of parliamentary debates led to the prohibition of sexual intercourse with native women, the punishment being expulsion from office.<sup>31</sup>

The colonial sex scandals led to a discussion about what was morally legitimate and what could be published. Few journalists defended the colonial official's conduct, but Maximilian Harden, one of the most influential journalists of his time, justified the affairs in 1906, remarking about the Puttkamer case that "one should not use monks as role models for our colonists" (*Die Zukunft* 17 Mar. 1906: 398) "The wife is far away and the satisfaction of fleshly desires has nothing to do with true loyalty" (*Die Zukunft* 31 Mar. 1906:

30. Cf. BAK. *Reichs-Anzeiger* 29 Feb. 1896.

31. Cf. *Times* 3 Dec. 1908; 8 Dec. 1908; 11 Dec. 1908; 26. Dec. 1908; 10 Aug. 1909; Hyam, Ronald. *Empire and Sexuality: The British Experience*. Manchester: Manchester UP, 1990. 160–68.

479). This, he claimed, was common practice among the representatives in Berlin. Moreover, he defended himself against the publication of the private: “The publicly controllable sense of honor reaches only down to the navel; what happens below that point is of no concern to any stranger [to anyone else?]” (*Die Zukunft* 31 Mar. 1906: 479). Six months after that, even Harden had to peek below the navel when he disclosed the homosexuality of various aides to the Kaiser (Weller 175–95; Young). The enormous impact of the disclosures in the colonies must surely have been his incentive

## V. The Court as Public Arcane Sphere

A third factor initiating the increase in publication of the private sphere comprises the media reports on the Kaiser’s Court and the higher nobility. Since the Enlightenment of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, sexual excesses of the absolutistic court were the subject of narratives that formed the moral dissociation from the aristocrats and workers and a self-legitimation of the bourgeoisie (Habermas 108). Plays such as Gotthold Ephraim Lessing’s *Emilia Galotti* consolidated the image of the uninhibited aristocratic charmer. Accordingly, the affairs and lifestyle of the high nobility led to early isolated scandals and public outcries with far-reaching consequences, such as the Danish Queen’s Struensee affair, the neckband-affair in France, the Queen Caroline scandal in England, and Ludwig I’s Lola-Montez affair (Keitsch; Clark; Stadler 183–241). This new visibility of the high nobility with the media reporting their private lives on a daily basis in many mass-circulation papers eased the way to the publication of violations of norms in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century (Thompson 34–40). The sexual private sphere of the German Emperor, however, who had been in contact with prostitutes and been blackmailed because of this, remained a taboo for the press (Röhl, *Die Jugend* 461–67; *Der Aufbau* 232–37). Emperor Wilhelm II’s private life was at best satirically hinted at, for instance in Ludwig Quidde’s 1894 Caligula biography, in which he suggested that Wilhelm suffered from megalomania (Holl et al.). In this case, along the lines of later disclosures, the analogy to the decadent Roman Empire evoked associations.

Increasingly explicit media reports turned towards the private life of the nobility close to Wilhelm II, however, aiming their revelations without a doubt directly at the Kaiser. These publications were based on the intrigues among the nobility and the political leadership of the 1890s, which were now carried

into the media public. One example is the “Kladderadatsch affair” from 1894: for weeks Bismarck-devotees in the Foreign Office published internal matters about three counsellors of the Kaiser in a satirical magazine (Rogge, “Die Kladderadatschaffäre”). On a similar basis in the same year the so-called Kotze scandal developed.<sup>32</sup> Hundreds of anonymous letters from a member of the court were circulating among the high nobility, containing obscene and detailed descriptions of the promiscuous behavior of members of the court (Bringmann 164–68).<sup>33</sup> These cases also show the efforts of the government to protect the elite’s privacy. Police investigations were launched rather reluctantly and eventually dropped (GStA, Record of interrogation 29 Sept. 1894). Trials were avoided. The main suspect, Master of Ceremonies Leberecht von Kotze was not taken to a bourgeois court but as instructed by the Kaiser arrested and without charges brought up before a non-public military court. In the course of the Kotze scandal, the chief prosecutor issued the internal instruction to refrain from a public accusation, thus securing “that this trial will not be blown up into a tendentious show trial as possibly intended by some party” (GStA, Chief Prosecutor Drescher, 19 May 1895). The prosecutor indeed dismissed the lawsuit because of a cleverly identified formal mistake (GStA, Dismissal 15 Sept. 1895 and report 3 Oct. 1895). When Kotze’s innocence became public, Wilhelm II supported Kotze’s goal to restore his honour by challenging his adversaries to a duel. Likewise, Kiderlen-Wächter, who was ridiculed in the “Kladderadatsch affair” in 1894, challenged the editor of the satirical magazine to a duel. A duel was, in contrast to a trial, a form of restoring one’s honour without having to make any allegations public. The new virulent disclosure of the private life supported the continuation of duels, which had been prohibited in the 1890s, because only duels guaranteed the non-disclosure of privacy when facing this sort of allegations.

But despite these extreme measures, the scandals at court showed as well that the boundaries of the media could not be controlled. In the Kotze scandal, the newspaper readers admittedly did not come to know any obscene details of the circulating letters. However, they could infer from the journalists’ insinuations and from the increasingly explicit books and brochures that high-ranking members of the court close to the Kaiser were facing allegations of

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32. Cf. Wipperman, Wolfgang, *Skandal im Jagdschloss Grunewald. Männlichkeit und Ehre im deutschen Kaiserreich*. Darmstadt: Primus Verlag, 2010.

33. Cf. GStA. HA I. Rep. 89, Nr. 3307/3 and Nr. 3307/4.

sexual debauchery. The arrest and the duels had the effect that now the case was being followed by the entire media readership. Even the anonymous letter writer from the high nobility continued to play his game, but now even in the press. He sent letters to DER WESTFALE, a paper prevalent among the nobility, which printed facsimiles and thus stimulated the public to undertake investigations of the handwriting (*Das Kleine Journal* 28 June 1894).

In the following years, more and more revelations about the nobility's love lives were published and seemed—at first glance—rather unpolitical. Papers reported the affairs of Prince Joachim Albert of Prussia or the divorce of Crown Princess Luise of Saxony, who was accused of adultery with her young language teacher.<sup>34</sup> Again, the broadsheet newspapers, too, put leading articles on this case on their front pages (*Berliner Tageblatt* 14 Dec. 1903; *Münchener Neueste Nachrichten* 12 Dec. 1903), contributing with these reports to turning private matters into political issues. The revelations about Princess Luise led to a fundamental debate on the taboo issues divorce and adultery. Even conservative papers such as *Reichsbote* took a critical stand towards the unfavourable position of women: “As fair as the judgement on Princess Luise's disgraceful misconduct is, involuntarily, the thought comes up as to how easily we dismiss adultery committed by men and how easily we leave to their fate the miserable women suffering from the same without legal assistance” (*Reichsbote* 13 Feb. 1903). The leftist press, as expected, drew even clearer political conclusions from the case. The SPD-related press saw the woman as a victim being punished for wanting to liberate herself from the constraints of the court.<sup>35</sup> “Here in Europe, we hold true that the Prince's private life does not exert influence on the fate of the state anymore,” Maximilian Harden wrote at the beginning of his comment about the reports on the Luise of Saxony case (*Die Zukunft* 7 Feb. 1903: 219). The revelations about aristocrats thus did not just discredit nobility. At the same time, they raised arguments about the bourgeois forms of living together, in view of the fact that a public dissociation from the nobility's private life meant—most of all—a form of self-positioning.

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34. Some prints are available in the following: Ferber, Christian, ed. “Zeitbild, Chronik, Morität für Jedermann 1892–1945.” *Berliner Illustrierte Zeitung*. Berlin: Ullstein, 1982. 108.

35. Several newspaper articles in: BAK. Articles, ZSg 113–517.

## VI. Making Secrets Public and Revealing (Homo)Sexuality

Around 1900, the strands from all the publications about the vice trials, the colonialists, and the court society intertwined, turning private matters into political matters and making politicians' sexuality an element of political debate. This intertwining can be illustrated by the then occurring revelations of homosexuality. Like the seduction of young women, homosexuality was another image attributed to decadent aristocrats. Within the court and the political elite, those who had a homosexual disposition were widely known. Journalists and politicians from the opposition slowly inched forward by dropping hints in public. August Bebel, for example, referred in 1898 in a parliamentary debate to a "pink list" that the Berlin police had prepared comprising many homosexuals from the high society. Its publication would result in "a scandal making the Panama scandal, the Dreyfuss affair, the Lützow-Leckert affair, and the Tausch-Normann-Schumann scandal a piece of cake" (*Reichstag*, 16. Sitz. 13 Jan. 1898: 410).

Four years later, the Social-Democratic press actually endorsed this strategy. Although it was not aimed at a member of the court, it was directed against a powerful, well-connected man, the tycoon Friedrich Alfred Krupp, who had close connections to the Kaiser. The social democratic paper *Vorwärts* openly wrote about homosexual "orgies" Krupp and several youths allegedly had revelled in within Italy, in Capri's grottos (*Vorwärts* 15 Nov. 1902; Wolbring 307–30), thus unmistakably following the narrative of the aristocrat who ensnared young people with his money. The politics of sensation practiced in the colonial debate by the SPD's party-press was herewith transferred to the arena of inner affairs. Their suspicions were given new plausibility by widely known vice trials like the case of the multimillionaire Sternberg two years earlier. Whereas the Social-Democratic campaigns against Krupp's policies of prices and wages were unsuccessful, the SPD was now able to set in motion his moral and physical elimination. However, Krupp's death one week after the allegations (most probably by suicide) together with the withdrawal of all charges by his widow against the Kaiser's wish caused this debate to discontinue rather quickly.<sup>36</sup> It lacked an important catalyst for the publication of the private, namely the public trial, leading to a merely narrow continuation

36. Cf. BAK. Margarethe Krupp to August Eulenburg. 5 Dec. 1902; BAK. Response Wilhelm II 6 Dec. 1902 to letter: August Eulenburg to Wilhelm II. 6 Dec. 1902.

of the uncovering.

Harden, editor of the Social-Democratic magazine *Die Zukunft*, also drew on the narrative of the decadent court when he accused imperial advisers such as Philipp von Eulenburg and General Kuno von Moltke of their alleged homosexuality in 1906/1907. The following lawsuits brought about the exposure of homosexual leanings of various members of the imperial court and high-ranking military.<sup>37</sup> This scandal led to several dismissals and a long-lasting public debate on homosexuality, by which the transformation of politicians' homosexuality into a public matter can be nicely demonstrated. First of all, it is remarkable that Harden did not start his campaign with a big cover story. Instead, he commenced with innuendoes that only the elites themselves could understand, but would remain unnoticed by the public. Obviously, his interests were not essentially commercial. In fact, these publications can be identified as targeted blackmail to influence individuals, political styles, and contents. And indeed, Eulenburg reacted to this by conducting secret negotiations that led to the demand that he withdraw from politics on short notice (*BZaM* 17 June 1907; *Vossische Zeitung* 28 Dec. 1907) Not until the state's public reaction—In this case the dismissal by the Kaiser—did long articles appear in all newspapers at the end of May 1907. The media were obviously in need of official validation to pick up on such a topic.

The following trials entailed that the rather detailed description of the homosexual acts carried out by the formerly closest friend and advisor to the Kaiser were published in all the newspapers. The citation of testimonies legitimated the previously unthinkable explicit naming of homosexual practices. Hirschfeld, also a leading sexologist, played a key role as expert in court and gained a public for his ideas about homosexual behavior and its nature (like the “Dritte Geschlecht,” a “third gender”). A new understanding of homosexuality was negotiated in these debates, for example, what behaviour would indicate homosexuality, if it was hereditary, whether it should be punished, and if homosexuals should be allowed to hold leading positions in

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37. Cf. Hecht, Karsten. “Die Harden-Prozesse-Strafverfahren, Öffentlichkeit und Politik im Kaiserreich.” Diss. München University, 1997; Leuchtmann, Angela. “Der Fall Eulenburg. Anfang und Ende einer Karriere im wilhelmschen Deutschland.” Diss. München University, 1997; Jungblut, Peter. *Famose Kerle. Eulenburg—eine wilhelmische Affäre*. Hamburg: Männerschwarm Skript, 2003; Domeier, Norman. *Der Eulenburg-Skandal. Eine politische Kulturgeschichte des Kaiserreichs*. Frankfurt am Main: Campus, 2012.

society and the military. It was the conservative and the Catholic newspapers that especially protested the thorough reporting. Nonetheless, they were joining in on grounds of the argument that readers would turn their backs on their papers. The conservative *Reichsbote* for instance, in 1907 stated accordingly:

For a long time we hesitated whether we should print those reports. But what is the use in only one paper not doing so? We also could not decide to omit the objectionable parts in the report, for they form the very heart of the trial, and leaving them out would make the report incomprehensible if the disgusting statements were omitted. (*Reichsbote* 25 Oct. 1907)<sup>38</sup>

The *Kreuzzeitung* managed to keep their silence for several days during the second Eulenburg trial, but ultimately started printing detailed stories,<sup>39</sup> while lamenting the fact that “the editorial staff of respectable newspapers” would be “forced by the readers to publish the reports” (*Neue Preußische Zeitung* 13 July 1908).

The government’s unceasing efforts to gain control of the situation or at least to mediate failed once again in the face of these scandals. At the same time, the intensive interaction between newspapers and the media users could again be observed. Simple milkmen or coachmen came forward to the press to report captivating stories about Eulenburg’s homosexuality. The printing of photographs furthered these interactions and gave a carnivalesque touch to the scandals. Nearly anyone could now contribute to the mocking and overthrowing of the powerful. The main witness who brought about Eulenburg’s descent was but a simple fisherman who had read about the allegations in the newspapers. While this particular fisherman actually had had homosexual relations with Eulenburg for some years, most of the “witnesses” in such lawsuits were driven by the prospect of monetary or public attention, sometimes along with ideological or political aims. The unfounded denunciations went so far that a brochure even accused Reichskanzler Bülow of having a homosexual relationship with his secretary, although this was not true at all.<sup>40</sup> Thus, in Germany, the private sphere of politicians was not a private matter anymore by 1907. Every prominent person had to fear the charge of private misconduct.

38. Cf. *Kölnische Volkszeitung* 4 July 1907.

39. Cf. *Neue Preußische Zeitung* 10 July 1908; 17 July 1908.

40. Cf. BAB/L. Adolf Brand, Fürst Bülow und die Auffassung vom §175.

A comparison with England shows a similar development. Although the English public had a slightly different structure and was less restrained by censorship, the strands illustrated here intertwined in a similar way though a little bit earlier. After the public debate on several vice trials in the 1880s, such as Stead's campaign against girl trafficking (Fisher 65–84), they also intertwined with the narrative of the aristocratic seducer and a policy of sensationalism. This is particularly obvious with the British Cleaveland-Street scandal. Here, too, investigative journalists like Stead at first dropped warning hints without revealing names until 1889, when the radical journalist Ernest Parke published the names of high-ranking aristocrats who had visited brothels for homosexuals on a regular basis (*North London Press* 16 Nov. 1889: 1; Bösch 70–86). The Cleaveland-Street scandal became a political issue when the radical MP Henry Labouchere introduced the matter before the House of Commons and held the Prime Minister Maquess of Salisbury responsible for not having the homosexual aristocrats sentenced but—as in the case of Lord Somerset—allowing their escape abroad (*Times* 1 Mar. 1890: 8; 6 Mar. 1890: 7).

Those previously occurring revelations were likely to have had a certain correlation to the German public. Spectacular English cases, such as Oscar Wilde's were intensely ingested in Germany and caused the German Social Democrats to start dealing with homosexuality. One of the pioneers of this culture transfer was Eduard Bernstein, who at the time of the trials was residing in London and reporting for the paper *Die Neue Zeit* (Herzer 33). Vice versa, reports on the sex life of German personages might have influenced the production and reception of corresponding articles in England. The Scottish colonial hero Hector MacDonald, for example, committed suicide only four months after Krupp did, because of newspaper reports about homosexual behavior in which he was alleged to have engaged in Ceylon (*Times* 26 Mar. 1903: 8; Royle 130). Generally speaking, an analysis of the English press shows that only through the reports on German scandals certain terms—such as homosexuality—became utterable in England. “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,” stated the *Times* (7 Nov. 1907: 3).

Despite the spectacular revelations, the point is striking that many politicians, who had not been afflicted so far, did not refrain from taking risks and adapt their sex life to comply strictly with the moral norms. One example is the case of the anti-Semitic Reichstag deputy of the party *Wirtschaftsvereinigung*

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(Economic Union), Schack. Just a few months after the scandals around Hammann and Kiderlen-Wächter, the chair of the influential right-wing *Deutschnationalen Handlungsgehilfenverbands* (German National Association of Commercial Employees) naively placed a lonely hearts ad in a Hamburg newspaper, looking covertly for a young woman for a *ménage à trois*. After the police arrested him on the suspicion of trafficking, all newspapers explicitly reported the case, printing long excerpts from his letters to the chosen woman (*Hamburger Fremdenblatt* 29 June 1909). In contrast to the cases of Hammann und Kiderlen-Wächter, the majority of the papers, with the exception of the rightist ones, demanded he resign. A right-wing anti-Semite like Schack did not elicit much sympathy in the liberal and social-democratic public. So, the revelation of his private life immediately entered the political debate and was juxtaposed with his speeches about morality. However, a surprisingly liberal opinion was stated as well, namely, that Schack as a private individual might indeed follow his inclinations. The paper *Berliner Tageblatt*, that at first had refused to disclose his case and now demanded his resignation from office, wrote: “[...] a person not in control of his desire, not able to contain oneself, may lead a private life however he wants to; but, he may not be an actor on the political stage any longer” (*Berliner Tageblatt* 9 Sept. 1908).

Sure enough, one can diagnose a learning effect in the reaction to the publication of the private. German politicians (like the ones in England) tried to cover up the disclosures. Schack, for instance, had resigned immediately from his Reichstag mandate and his office as chairman and had committed himself to a sanatorium claiming a mental breakdown in order to avoid any public dispute. Additionally, he tried to avoid a trial by apologizing and by getting his fellow party members to successfully talk the woman out of filing a complaint.<sup>41</sup> Next to the strategies of avoiding trials, heightening security, and reforming laws, politicians focused on an increased public transparency of their private lives. Around 1900, not only accused individuals but also many respectable politicians opened their homes to the journalists. They allowed photographs of their families around the coffee table and reported their private everyday routines to the journalists. These early “home stories” were completed by photographs of hobbies and vacations. Especially the *Berliner Illustrierte Zeitung*, the paper with the highest circulation in Germany at the time, printed

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41. Cf. *Deutsche Blätter* 16 Oct. 1909.

such pictures again and again.<sup>42</sup> Particularly Reichskanzler Bülow pushed regular reports on his private life; especially his vacations on Norderney Island, often times garnished with details of his dog.<sup>43</sup> In this fashion, politicians took up forms of visual representation of nobility and at the same time undermined the separation of private and public—even if strictly formalized.

To put it in a nutshell, one could say: As soon as the private became political, the political became more private. This apparent transparency of the private life probably did not inhibit but rather encouraged further disclosures. This showed the dialectics of modernity understood as a period with a loss of certainty, a change of values, and politicians' public self-reflections. The demand for more transparency in politics caused the private sphere to become subject to political argument. Thus, the scandals contributed to the construction of an image of the ideal politician. Next to moral integrity in private life, this image included honesty, for with all the confessions that had to be made during the course of the allegations, a truthful testimony was among the most important demands.

## VII. Politics, Media, and Public around 1900

This article has illustrated how in various discourses the construction of borders between private and public had shifted, transferring politicians' sexuality—which had been defined as being part of the private sphere—into political communication. Newspaper reports of the vice trials, colonialism, and the court society built bridges that connected sexuality with the field of politics and allowed the media to articulate what had been unsayable before. This process caused a dynamic interaction that can be seen even in the journalistic formats. The revealing court reports, for instance, became linked with the genre of the parliament report. This way parliamentary sessions gained more popularity even among those magazines that were not interested in politics.

Accordingly, the increased publication of the private had drastic consequences for the relationships among media, politics, and the public. We can conclude that the media policy was abruptly changed by the impending publication of the private. While it had been common to take journalists to

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42. Cf. *BIZ* 26 Mar. 1898; 30 July 1899; 17 Aug. 1902; 29 Aug. 1904; 4 Aug. 1904.

43. Cf. *BIZ* 14 Aug. 1904; 26 Apr. 1903; 26 June 1903; 30 June 1906.

court in order to rigorously subdue the press, this sort of sanction now became a hazard. Many politicians chose to open up their private life to the press. Secondly, we can assert that the increasing publication of the private cannot be directly explained by the rise of commercial scandal sheets. The examples shown rather illustrate that the decidedly politically serious newspapers were oftentimes the ones that disclosed sex scandals, such as the *Berliner Tageblatt* with the cases in the colonies, *Vorwärts* in the Krupp case, and *Die Zukunft* with Eulenburg/Moltke. Such serious newspapers did not start their reports with a big selling headline but rather with hidden allusions aiming at corrections. Politicians themselves oftentimes started publications of the private, even in parliament. Such publications were not only a result of increasing competition in politics and the media, but also of a process of democratization fighting over attention and sovereignty of interpretation by using new issues and new techniques. The media were dubbed the “Fourth Estate” primarily because they were broadly positioned in the debate.

Thirdly, the publication of the private was not only a media phenomenon creating passive, depoliticized consumers. Rather, there is some evidence that the scandals stimulated and intensified important political debates about taboo issues, leading to a general debate of sexuality not only in the newspapers but also in parliament. Simple workers in the bars as well were encouraged by the disclosures to discuss these issues, as is illustrated by my evaluation of the Hamburg secretly reported “bar protocols” showing that these scandals were talked about in everyday conversations. The guests did not just repeat the newspapers positions but rather included their own experience. Obviously, this led to an increase in knowledge in areas that had been taboo before. At the same time, there is an indication that the disclosures reinforced the politicization of society. Fourth, the examples shown illustrate the constant interaction between the different horizontal and vertical levels of publicity. The media reports could only create a dynamic by the permanent interaction with the readers and conventions such as in court or in parliament. The disclosures created common issues connecting different public spheres.

This article showed a dynamic development around 1900. However, the publication of the private did not increase straight on to the present. Discontinuity seems to prevail in international comparisons as well. Especially the dictatorships and World Wars led to a constriction of media politics and to a notable abstention of journalists from publishing their knowledge of sexual offenses. We can conjecture that the fear of compromising the respect for the

nation abroad rather than the surveillance of the press was the cause for this. The Cold War extended this protective zone granted again to the private sphere of sexuality. Only since the 1960s have politicians' sexuality re-emerged as a public issue in the Western democracies. In Germany, attacks against the Social Democratic Chancellor Willy Brandt or the conservative politician Franz-Josef Strauß marked this turning point in the late 1960s. While such attacks did not resonate much in Germany, they are still very popular in Great Britain today. The point has been made, though, that such disclosures had their historic roots in Germany as well.

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## Abstract

In contrast to the United States or Great Britain, Germany is known as a country in which private and sexual behaviour of politicians was and is seldom published. This article, which is based on broad research of newspaper and archival sources, shows how the rise of the mass press since the 1880s led to an increase in sex scandals in imperial Germany, too, although censorship and the control of the press were still quite strict. Such reports about private matters provoked intense debates in different public spheres—such as parliaments, pubs, and courtrooms. Scandals about adultery, homosexuality, and sexual relations with women in colonies in Africa called public norms into questions. This way, media created a new kind of public knowledge about sexuality. The process by which political and public spheres changed is clearly linked to press campaigns. While private questions became more political, politicians presented themselves in a more private context in order to win back trust. However, many scandals were not initiated by tabloids but by political papers or by leading politicians themselves. Therefore, this article points out a change in the political communication due to the rise of the mass press and the increased political competition. In many cases, especially concerning adultery, the reactions were surprisingly tolerant and at least liberal and social democratic papers partly accepted homosexual conduct, while forced relations with African women were no longer tolerated. At the same time, these campaigns succeeded in attacking the conservative elite's reputation and politics—such as those of the Emperor and his aristocratic advisors as well as of famous colonialists and leading politicians.

**Keywords:** imperial Germany, political scandals, mass press, sexuality, private sphere

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