

**EXPERTISE AND SENSATIONAL REPORTAGE**

**IN WEIMAR BERLIN**

by

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*For Mom, Dad, and Kathryn*

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## INTRODUCTION AND HISTORIOGRAPHY

By the outset of the Weimar Republic, Germany had developed a flourishing commercial press culture which only continued to grow as the 1920s progressed. By 1931, printed press circulation was estimated at over 20 million copies daily.<sup>1</sup> This socially and politically tumultuous decade offered the press a wide variety of topics to cover, and Berlin journalists reported sensational crime cases in a particularly interesting way. This dissertation examines Berlin newspaper coverage of Karl Grossmann, Fritz Haarmann, Karl Denke, and Peter Kürten, four serial killers apprehended between 1921 and 1930. I will analyze press reports from these cases to discover what this sensational reportage intended to convey/assert about the journalist and the newspaper, and what internal logics or implications drove these particular narratives of events.

More specifically, I will argue that Berlin newspaper coverage of sensational crime during the 1920s did not simply cynically exploit the public for profit or automatically act in support of state or social institutions of control. This reportage attempted to claim a very particular authority for the journalist and, by extension, the newspaper itself. This specialized authority, a sort of expert knowledge of location, interacted in complex ways with both the republican state and two other emergent

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<sup>1</sup> H. Kapfinger, "Die Struktur der katholischen Presse" in *Die Presse und der Katholik*, ed. Jw. Naumann (Augsburg: Hass & Grabherr, 1932), 218. Actual readership was certainly much higher than this number, as newspapers tended to be shared within families and amongst friends, Erhard Georgii, *Handbuch der deutschen Tagespresse* (Berlin: Carl Duncker Verlag, 1932).

categories of explanatory expert knowledge: criminology and psychiatry. This is not to say that all sensationalism necessarily asserts such expert claims, but rather that such claims appeared in these sensational texts in this period. Similarly, I am not suggesting that Berlin sensational reportage in the 1920s *only* attempted to claim expertise; it also certainly made the sorts of emotional claims to shared social norms of behavior that have often been observed in other scholarly studies of sensational reporting. Depending on the case and the newspaper, sensational reportage could uphold or challenge social norms, or it could foster other impulses altogether (voyeurism, melodrama, etc).

The expertise claimed in these newspaper reports differed in important ways from psychiatry and criminology, the newly ascendant expertises often mobilized by the state's juridical apparatus to investigate and discipline criminals.<sup>2</sup> German psychiatry and criminology during the Weimar Republic were first and foremost expertises of the subject's body—their claims to specialized knowledge depended heavily on the expert understanding aspects of the subject's body better than did the subject her/himself. The expert had various investigative avenues to obtain such knowledge, including interviews, case histories, physical observations of the subject, etc. Central to the idea of expertise was the assertion that the psychiatric or criminological experts' training allowed them to find the "truth" hidden in these varied sources of information in ways that laypeople could not.

Conversely, the newspaper reports examined here often attempted to establish the reporter, and by extension the newspaper itself, as a sort of expert of place. The journalist, in this narrative, was far more capable than the layperson of exploring,

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<sup>2</sup> See for example Warren Rosenblum, *Beyond the Prison Gates: Punishment and Welfare in Germany, 1850-1933* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008).

understanding, and explaining crime scenes. Vivally, reporters' claims to this sort of expertise were not necessarily accurate. That is to say, while these reporters offered detailed descriptions of sensational murder locations and made special note of the dangers inherent in such places, their claims about these locations at times conformed to popular stereotypes or affirmed audience expectations. While certain journalists no doubt possessed detailed knowledge of particular places, sensational murder coverage exhibited generic similarities in descriptions of crime scenes in different cities, as this dissertation will demonstrate. Thus, while individual reporters may or may not have possessed specialized knowledge of a particular location, newspaper stories consistently affirmed that they possessed this knowledge.

Reporters used investigative techniques unavailable to the average reader, including interviews with locals and close examination of the actual crime scene, and these aspects of the report helped affirm the reporter's knowledge as specialized. Such coverage implied both the danger the reader (layperson) would face in attempting to navigate such places and the reporter's ability to travel within, understand, and explain that same place. In this way, the newspaper claimed a scarce mastery of the location of the crime in a logic that paralleled psychiatry and criminology's claims to understand the perpetrator of the crime. Claims of expertise rely on the logic of exclusion: for a certain type of knowledge accumulation to qualify as "expert," it must be unavailable to the broader public. Such a sense of separation can be achieved through instituting standards of training, or, as was the case for these Berlin papers during the Weimar Republic, by emphasizing that the specialized skills of the expert were beyond most people's capacity.

Of course, this is not to say that reportage made no claims to specialized knowledge of the individual, or (especially) that either psychiatry or criminology was unconcerned with location in this period; rather, I suggest that reportage focused primarily on making places legible, while psychiatry and criminology worked foremost to make individuals legible. These disparate, sometimes contradictory, threads of discourse were interwoven in the media coverage that blanketed major media events in the 1920s. While the psychiatrist and criminologist concentrated on mapping the individual, the reporter asserted authoritative knowledge of the places on which he reported. In so doing, reporters were attempting to establish their own reportage as more accurate, more capable reaching revelatory truth, than was the discourse of laypeople.

I should note another fundamental difference between the expert claims of psychiatrists and criminologists on the one hand and reporters on the other. Scholarship on the development of German psychiatric and criminological expertise has suggested that they shared several key characteristics, most particularly: the construction of new knowledge; the development of professional organization around this expert knowledge; attempts to claim authority; a tendency to read social norms or prejudices into expertise; and assertions that the public could not properly understand the specifics of their expertise.<sup>3</sup> The knowledge claims of the Berlin press shared two of these characteristics in particular, both noted above: claims to authoritative knowledge and the tendency to inscribe prejudices/norms into this knowledge. However, this journalistic expertise most emphatically did not assert that the public was unable to understand the expert's specialized findings.

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<sup>3</sup> E.g. Paul Lerner, *Hysterical Men: War, Psychiatry, and the Politics of Trauma in Germany, 1890-1930*, (New York, 2003); Richard Wetzell, *Inventing the Criminal: A history of German Criminology, 1880-1945*. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000);

While Berlin's papers positioned the reporter as an expert, they also publically shared the fruits of this expertise with the explicit intent of "educating" the audience. The result was a sort of empathetic expertise. While journalists still asserted their knowledge as specialized, they also emphasized sympathy with the audience and aimed first and foremost to communicate their knowledge to the lay reader. Reporters related not only their own claims to the public, but also other expert claims, including expert testimony by psychiatrists and criminologists.

During sensational murder trials such as those of Grossman, Haarmann, and Kürten, this sensational reportage necessarily interacted with the juridical, criminological, and psychiatric expertise that the judiciary mobilized to charge and discipline defendants. As this dissertation will demonstrate, these newspapers did not simply transcribe these expert claims to the public. Rather, Berlin newspapers, in addition to asserting the reporter's own expertise, often reinterpreted or even challenged criminological and psychiatric expertise, and their sensational reports at times criticized the investigative and juridical apparatuses of the state. For example, during the Kürten case the Berlin press's sensational reportage created a profile of the criminal that eventually challenged the state experts' psychiatric model of Kürten.

Although Berlin's newspapers together created the sense that their press discourse constituted a type of expertise, they often used their explanatory narratives towards very different ends. As the Grossmann, Haarmann, and Denke cases will demonstrate, sensational coverage of non-political events was heavily politicized in Weimar Berlin. In the Grossmann case, the sensationalism of the Berlin press generally upheld social norms and the claims of the police and judiciary. In the Haarmann and Denke cases, however,

certain papers adapted these events into attacks on the competence of the government. In fact, sensationalism as a genre provided a particularly powerful form to convey the journalist's "expert" critiques of the policing and judicial authority of the German government. However, despite the different political meanings that individual Berlin papers drew from these sensational events, on a more fundamental level these papers worked in congress with one another to affirm that reporters were experts with a specialized ability to understand the locations on which they reported.

This introductory chapter begins with a methodological discussion of my choice to focus on the newspaper texts themselves rather than audience reception of these texts. I will review and note the value of several theories of audience reception before explaining the advantages of reading newspaper texts without an explicit eye towards their eventual popular negotiation. I will then situate this project within the historiographies of Weimar Republic newspaper research; studies of sensationalism; cultural history of the Weimar Republic; and histories of psychiatric, criminological, and juridical expertise, to which this dissertation should contribute.

The question of how news media affect audiences drove a notable amount of scholarship on the press of the Weimar Republic. Several young scholars in this field produced intriguing arguments suggesting that audiences negotiated media messages rather than being heavily influenced or controlled by the media.<sup>4</sup> More recently, a similar

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<sup>4</sup> For example, Emil Willems argued that the conditions under which newspapers could affect an audience were dependent on the reader's own subjective opinions: "the reader's individual basic position... creates the basis for the influence of the press." Gerhard Münzner believed that critics overestimated the power of the press, as he argued that audience beliefs existed on several strata, with press reports only affecting the

idea, active audience theory, has emerged in media studies scholarship. This theory claims that audiences are not passive receivers of media, but rather consume and understand media in a variety of ways, often dependent on factors like ethnicity, sex, age, etc. This work is particularly indebted to Stuart Hall's theory of encoding/decoding.

Hall theorizes that a particular process of discursive production occurs in media systems.<sup>5</sup> He suggests that certain codes, or systems of meaning, relate particular written/spoken language and visual signs to different ideological positions. These codes can place signs within "particular 'maps of meaning' onto which any culture is classified; and those 'maps of social reality' have the whole range of social meanings, practices, and usages, power and interest written in to them."<sup>6</sup> Through these codes, cultural norms are either legitimized or contested. The hegemonic cultural order is any "taken for granted" knowledge of social structures—whatever seems "coterminous with what is 'natural,' 'inevitable'... about the social order."<sup>7</sup> Hall argues that mainstream television news is "encoded" with this hegemonic viewpoint: that its codes link to an overall system of meaning, an ideology, which legitimizes a dominant order.<sup>8</sup>

However, Hall argues that a media audience does not passively receive codes as they had been intended (encoded) by producers of media. Rather, audiences actively

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least permanent of these tiers ("gaseous opinions"). The audience filtered press opinions through previously established, "solid" convictions, and thus the press could not alter the fundamental convictions of a society: the press was only an "amplifier of tendencies towards particular opinions" rather than creator of them. See Emil Willems, *Kollektivmeinung und Presse in Zusammenhängen, ein Beitrag zur speziellen Soziologie* (Cologne: Pilgram, 1930), 37; Gerhard Münzner, *Öffentliche Meinung und Presse: eine sozialwissenschaftliche Studie* (Karlsruhe: G. Braun, 1928), 54; also notable is Wilhelm Carle, *Weltanschauung und Presse: eine Untersuchung an zehn Tages-Zeitungen. Als Beitrag zu einer künftigen Soziologie der Presse* (Leipzig: C.H. Hirschfeld, 1931).

<sup>5</sup> Stuart Hall, "Encoding/Decoding," in *Culture, Media, Language: Working Papers in Cultural Studies, 1972-79*, ed. Stuart Hall (London: Hutchinson, 1980).

<sup>6</sup> Hall, "Encoding/Decoding," 134.

<sup>7</sup> Hall, "Encoding/Decoding," 137.

<sup>8</sup> As Fiske has put it, television does not reproduce reality but rather "reproduces the dominant sense of reality," John Fiske, *Television Culture* (London: Methuen, 1987).

“decode” the media report. Consumers might decode the message in the same terms that it has been encoded (as representative of the normal/natural/taken for granted); they might decode it in a negotiated way (accepting the hegemonic position generally while seeing exceptions in their own beliefs or behavior); or they might decode it in a completely oppositional way (for instance, reading every mention of “national interest” as “class interest”).<sup>9</sup> Hall’s ideas encouraged a considerable media studies research into the ways that different groups might understand the same words and phrases in completely different ways.<sup>10</sup>

Several findings have complicated the most literal reading of Hall’s encoding/decoding theory. Greg Philo, who believes that the media have significant power to influence the audience, has conducted heavily empirical audience research suggesting that readers of media texts (particularly television, in his work) do not create new meaning out of what they see. Rather, they understand the intended message of a piece and may then disagree with that message if it does not fit their beliefs; for example, they may believe that other pieces of information are being hidden/not being shown.<sup>11</sup> Similarly, other research has indicated that audience members who possess hegemonic viewpoints (those who you might expect to decode directly as intended) also understand that there are other specific viewpoints which are being ignored in a news piece.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Hall, “Encoding/Decoding,” 136-138.

<sup>10</sup> E.g. Teun Van Dijk, “Opinions and ideologies in the press” in *Approaches to Media Discourse*, eds. Allan Bell and Peter Garrett (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998), 21-63; Teun Van Dijk, *Communicating Racism: Ethnic Prejudice in Thought and Talk* (Newbury Park: Sage Publications, 1995); Fiske, *Television Culture*; David Morley, *Family Television: Cultural Power and Domestic Leisure* (London: Methuen, 1986).

<sup>11</sup> Greg Philo, “Active Audiences and the Construction of Public Knowledge,” *Journalism Studies* 9, no. 4 (2008): 535-544.

<sup>12</sup> David Morley, *The Nationwide Audience: Structure and Decoding* (London: Comedia Pub. Group, 1980), 106, 140.

Philo has expanded his critique of the encoding/decoding framework to a more general criticism of textual analysis as a form of media studies.<sup>13</sup> Philo's primary concern is scholarship work focusing on textual analysis fails to consider either the context of production or audience reactions. In order to understand press discourse, in Philo's reasoning, one must examine the communication system as a whole, from production to content to reception: "all these elements must be understood and studied as part of a total system—rather than in isolation as with studies which remain focused on texts."<sup>14</sup> Certainly, Philo here underappreciates the degree to which a primarily textual analysis can be contextualized. My dissertation will spend much of its first chapter considering the professionalization of the German press before focusing on careful analysis of the crime reports that this press produced.<sup>15</sup>

Nevertheless, Philo's critique is worth considering in more detail, as he is certainly correct that deep understandings of production, product, and reception are each tremendously useful for analyzing cultural texts. It does not follow, however, that text-based analysis is necessarily inaccurate without consideration of that text's specific production or the audience's reaction to that text. One could certainly argue that Philo's concerns are primarily with media texts whose producers and recipients are still alive and able to be interviewed. In the historical context, where producer motivations and audience reactions must also be inferred from text, reaching these perspectives can be

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<sup>13</sup> Greg Philo, "Can Discourse Analysis Successfully Explain the Content of Media and Journalistic Practice?" *Journalism Studies* 8, no. 2 (2007): 175-196.

<sup>14</sup> Philo, "Discourse Analysis," 194.

<sup>15</sup> For a proposed set of research strategies for discourse analysis that take into consideration Philo's critiques, see Anabela Carvalho, "Media(ted) Discourse and Society: rethinking the framework of critical discourse analysis," *Journalism Studies* 9, no. 2 (2008), 161-177. A good example of heavily text-based media analysis that incorporates political economic context is Elfriede Fürsich, "Between Credibility and Commodification: Nonfiction Entertainment as a Global Media Genre," *International Journal of Cultural Studies* 6, no. 2 (2003): 131-153.

particularly tricky. Along these lines, Bonnie Dow has asserted that audience studies are no more empirically sound than textual studies, because in both methodologies “the act of interpretation and argument by the researcher is paramount.”<sup>16</sup>

However, even in cases where producer and audience reactions can be accessed directly or unproblematically, examining text by incorporating producer’s intentions and audience reactions can over-determine an initial reading of the text itself. As Richard Johnson has argued, “formal reading of a text has to be as open and multi-layered as possible, identifying preferred positions or frameworks certainly, but also alternative readings and subordinate frameworks.”<sup>17</sup> Reading a text through its producer’s stated beliefs can create misleading expectations about the relation of production to text. To take an obvious example, if a large proportion of media members are liberal, they do not necessarily produce a liberal media. Structural, economic, and professional forces constrain media production and are thus very useful to study; my first chapter will consider at length these factors in the context of the Weimar Republic.<sup>18</sup> However, even here, I have incorporated this historical context into my argument after having first considered the narrative dynamics within each written text itself.

Meanwhile, an approach that reads media texts with a primary interest in audience reaction can similarly overly constrain the meanings of that text. This is a danger for Philo’s approach and the approach of the Glasgow University Media Group more generally.<sup>19</sup> His work, which relies heavily on focus groups, is tremendously helpful for

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<sup>16</sup> Bonnie Dow, *Prime-time Feminism: Television, Media Culture, and the Women's Movement Since 1970* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1996), 15; see also Ien Ang, *Living Room Wars: Rethinking Media Audiences for a Postmodern World* (London: Routledge, 1996).

<sup>17</sup> Richard Johnson, “What Is Cultural Studies Anyway?” *Social Text* 6 (1986-87), 74.

<sup>18</sup> For more on the constraints on media production, see W. Lance Bennett, *News: The Politics of Illusion* (New York: Longman, 2001).

<sup>19</sup> e.g. Greg Philo and Mike Berry, *Bad News from Israel* (London: Pluto Press, 2004).

gauging how media messages circulate and change. However, this analytic almost always treats the media text itself as a stimulus for generating audience feedback, rather than also considering the text on its own terms. Precisely because media texts are rife with myths and archetypes that usually go unacknowledged in an audience's reflections on a text, focusing on audience reaction, while helpful for a historical understanding of that audience, risks missing important elements of the text itself.<sup>20</sup>

My research has considered first the newspaper texts themselves, and secondly the historical context from which these texts emerged. If we return to Hall's formulation, the press report is the site of both producers' encoding and audience's decoding, but I suggest it is capable of distinctive discursive moments of its own and therefore necessitates interpretation in its own right. As Elfriede Fürsich has argued, "only independent textual analysis can elucidate the narrative structure, symbolic arrangements, and ideological potential of media content."<sup>21</sup> In the cases this dissertation examines, we do not find journalists speaking explicitly about being experts of location, nor do we find audiences taking explicit note of this. Yet, as this dissertation will show, the texts themselves certainly make these claims. Having observed this aspect of the text, we can theorize its origins (e.g. as I will describe in Chapter 1, the combination of these journalists' belief in their mission to educate the public and their frustration at being disrespected) and what effects this textual characteristic might have on readership (e.g. strengthening the power of reportage's claims).

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<sup>20</sup> On the prevalence of mythologies and archetypes in press reports, see Jack Lule, *Daily News, Eternal Stories: The Mythological Role of Journalism* (New York: Guilford Press, 2001); and James Carey, *Media, Myths, and Narratives: Television and the Press* (Newbury Park: Sage Publications, 1988).

<sup>21</sup> Elfriede Fürsich, "In Defense of Textual Analysis," *Journalism Studies* 10, no.2 (2009), 239.

These reflections on the utility of textual analysis raise the further question of how, exactly, media reports interact with society in general. Winfried Schulz has helpfully organized theories of media's relation to reality into two broad camps, which he terms "Ptolemaic" and "Copernican." The "Ptolemaic" position sees a clear division between mass media and society, with the media ideally holding a mirror to society by gathering information from reality and providing it to the audience. From this perspective, the news media can be critiqued based on whether their representations of the world are true, and this is the approach that, for example, Philo's argument encourages. By contrast, the "Copernican" perspective understands the media as an integral component of society, where the media actively participate in the construction of reality and the media text is a space where society is both reproduced and contested. In this view, reality is the result of communication, rather than its object.<sup>22</sup>

My work borrows somewhat from both perspectives on the media. To the extent that this dissertation observes that reporters did not always possess the expertise of location that their reportage claimed, it undertakes a "Ptolemaic" critique of the Berlin press. However, the main thrust of this work will be "Copernican," in that it understands this journalism as an attempt to construct a particular model of reality. I am less interested in how closely the Weimar Berlin press report reflects reality than in what version of reality this report promotes. The press's coverage during sensational murder

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<sup>22</sup> Winfried Schulz, "Massenmedien und Realität. Die 'ptolemäische' und die 'kopernikanische' Auffassung" in *Massenkommunikation. Theorien, Methoden, Befunde*, ed. Max Kaase (Opladen: Westdeutscher Verlag, 1989), 135-149; see also Winfried Schulz, ed, *Die Konstruktion von Realität in den Nachrichtenmedien. Analyse der aktuellen Berichterstattung* (Freiburg: Alber, 1976); Kim Schroder, "Discourses of Fact," in *A Handbook of Media and Communication Research: Qualitative and Quantitative Methodologies*, ed. Klaus Jensen (London: Routledge, 2002), 98-116. The constructivist approach to the media is further discussed from several perspectives in Bernhard Pörksen, Wiebke Loosen, Armin Scholl, and Siegfried Weischenberg, eds., *Paradoxien des Journalismus: Theorie, Empirie, Praxis: Festschrift für Siegfried Weischenberg* (Wiesbaden: VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften / GWV Fachverlage, 2008).

events was intended to affirm the press's special ability to understand and organize reality for the reader. In this sense, the press's own self-conception was decisively "Ptolemaic:" it suggested that reporters' practices were especially capable of uncovering and relating objective, external reality. Insofar as the newspaper was able to assert itself as a mirror of society, its claims would carry particular weight.

I suggest that questions about news media's relation to external reality have also influenced critical responses to sensationalism as a genre of reporting. Common critiques of news sensationalism have included complaints that it displaces more significant stories, that it is socially indecent, and that it embodies the social drift into a culture of excess.<sup>23</sup> These complaints have themselves been considered and subsequently challenged by numerous scholars.<sup>24</sup> I argue that these critiques of sensationalism point to a deeper frustration with sensationalism's unreliability in presenting the world-as-is, and thus undermining the "Ptolemaic" perception of reporting's function. Sensationalism foregrounds the "Copernican" elements of reportage by taking narrative liberties to produce emotionalism in its audience. Sensationalism makes it quite clear that media are not simply a mirror of reality, which is particularly frustrating to journalists and other

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<sup>23</sup> See e.g. Carl Bernstein, "The idiot culture: Reflections of post-Watergate journalism," *The New Republic* 22 (1992), 22-26; Carol Marin, "The erosion of values: A debate among journalists over how to cope," *Columbia Journalism Review* 36 (1998), 44-47; Ron Powers, "Eyewitness News," *Columbia Journalism Review*, (May/June, 1977), 17-23.

<sup>24</sup> For arguments that sensationalism actually affirms a society's common notions of morality by showcasing the unacceptable, see John Stevens, "Social utility of sensational news: Murder and divorce in the 1920's," *Journalism Quarterly* 62, no. 1 (1985), 53-58; Warren Francke, "Sensationalism and the development of 19<sup>th</sup>-century reporting: The broom sweeps sensory details," *Journalism History* 12, no. 3-4 (1985), 80-85; Kai Erikson, *Wayward Puritans: A Study in the Sociology of Deviance* (New York: Wiley, 1966); for work that calls into question the distinction of sensationalism from socially-significant news, see Maria Grabe, "Tabloid and Traditional Television News Magazine Crime Stories: Crime lessons and reaffirmation of social class distinctions," *Journalism and Mass Communication Quarterly* 73, no. 4 (1997), 926-946; John Stevens, "Sensationalism In Perspective," *Journalism History* 12 no. 3-4, 78-79; for a critique that past periods of the press have been idealized, particularly by the press itself, see S. Elizabeth Bird, *For enquiring minds: A cultural study of supermarket tabloids* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1992); Donald Shaw and John Slater, "In the eye of the beholder? Sensationalism in American press news, 1820-1860," *Journalism History* 12, no. 3-4, 86-91.

critics who believe that reporting can and should reproduce reality. Unsurprisingly, critics of the mass press have often deployed the term to cut off analysis rather than open an investigative dialogue.<sup>25</sup>

This frustration with sensationalism's "Copernican" elements suggests that there are stylistic aspects to sensational reportage as well as a particular choice of topic to report. When sensationalism has been defined for scholarly research, it has often been in vague terms of the topics covered, i.e. "news categories that have intrinsic human interest and which the press has exploited."<sup>26</sup> Certainly, such a definition of sensationalism is overly reliant on content at the expense of form. It is easy to imagine a sensational topic such as crime being packaged so that it is not sensational, just as one can imagine sensational versions of topics not usually considered sensational. Thus, I suggest that certain formal, genre features also play a role in what we term sensationalist news.<sup>27</sup> In the printed press, the sensational genre employs emotive appeals intended to motivate reader sympathy, and in so doing it often relies on certain narrative forms to connect more directly to the reader (in the case of murder, the story of a victim, the story of the killer, etc). As I will argue in my discussion of the Kürten case, the narrative tendencies of sensationalism also allowed the reporter himself to become a character in the sensational report.

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<sup>25</sup> For examples of such critiques in the context of early twentieth century Germany, see Peter Fritzsche, *Reading Berlin, 1900* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996), 179-180; Wilhelm Kaupert, *Die deutsche Tagespresse als Politicum* (Freudenstadt: O. Kaupert, 1932); Georg Bernhard, "The German Press" in *Der Verlag Ullstein zum Welt-Reklame-Kongress 1929* (Berlin, 1929); Hildegard Kriegk, *Die politische Führung der Berliner Boulevardpresse* (Berlin: O.O, 1941).

<sup>26</sup> Kenneth Nordin, "The Entertaining Press: Sensationalism in Eighteenth-Century Boston Newspapers," *Communication Research* 6, no. 3 (1979): 298; see also Frank Mott, *American Journalism: A History, 1690-1960* (New York: Macmillan, 1962).

<sup>27</sup> This argument has been made with reference to sensationalism on TV in Maria Grabe, S. Zhou, B. Barnett, "Explicating Sensationalism in Television News: Content and the Bells and Whistles of Form," *Journal of Broadcasting and Electronic Media* 45 (2001): 635-655. This research suggested that a central aspect of sensationalism on TV was its "bells and whistles that draw viewer's attention," rather than the topic covered, (653).

In this dissertation, I examine the print reportage of the Grossmann, Haarmann, Denke, and Kürten cases. Each of these serial murder cases—Grossmann in 1921, Haarmann and Denke in 1924, and Kürten in 1929-30—presents moments where both the state’s juridical apparatus and the popular press mobilized to explain terrible events to the public. As such, these cases are excellent windows into the interaction between press expertise and the criminological and psychiatric expertises deployed by the court system. Moreover, although these events were not explicitly political, the press often read them in political ways. These cases thus offer ample examples of discursive conflict between different papers. For the sake of convenience, I have thus far referred to Berlin reporting in aggregate, but the city’s papers certainly did not report in a monolithic fashion. Contrary to certain scholarly claims about the power of the mass press to create united communities in early twentieth century Germany, the worlds these papers constructed often conflicted with one another.<sup>28</sup> While some of these papers had official ties to particular political parties, they all demonstrated distinctive political and social outlooks, based especially on what they imagined their audience to be. Papers of different ideological affiliation presented the same set of facts in drastically different ways to support their particular political and social interests.

My primary source base for this analysis will be the sensational newspaper texts themselves. Certainly, newspaper sensationalism is a visual as well as written medium, and Berlin’s papers turned increasingly to photographs and large headlines during this

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<sup>28</sup> Examples of scholarly arguments for the unifying power of the press include Kaspar Maase, *Grenzloses Vergnügen: Der Aufstieg der Massenkultur 1850-1970* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag, 1997); Fritzsche, *Reading Berlin*.

period. However, the cases I examine here were, with the exception of Kürten in 1931, generally not front-page stories and thus did not appear in visually distinctive ways. My focus will thus be on the choice of language and the logic underpinning reporters' narratives. As discussed above, I believe that focusing particularly on the newspaper text itself can reveal elements of the report that can be obscured if the research focus is on audience reception. Certainly, a varied and intelligent literature on the public reception of the sensational press already exists.<sup>29</sup> While I will draw from a wide variety of the numerous Berlin dailies from the 1920s, I will focus especially on the SPD-affiliated *Vorwärts*; the KPD-affiliated *Rote Fahne*; the moderate liberal papers the *Vossische Zeitung*, *Berliner Tageblatt*, and *Berliner Morgenpost*; the moderate tabloid *BZ am Mittag* and the conservative tabloid *Berliner Lokal-Anzeiger*, and the right wing *Deutsche Allgemeine Zeitung* and *Kreuzzeitung*. I will provide more background detail on these papers in Chapter 1, but for now it is worth noting that this selection of papers offers a broad political spectrum for analysis. I will read these press accounts closely and against the grain, noting the assumptions that undergird their claims about the state, criminals, and other newspapers during these events.

With detailed knowledge of the sensational texts themselves, I then work to understand the historical context in which they emerged. I will consider the professionalization of the German press during the late nineteenth century, concentrating particularly on how these reporters understood their own mission as journalists. Here, personal reflections of journalists from the time and press guidebooks will be particularly

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<sup>29</sup> I will discuss this literature below, but for particularly fine examples that consider the reception of sensational reportage, see Judith Walkowitz, *City of Dreadful Delight: Narratives of Sexual Danger in Late-Victorian London* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992); Bernhard Fulda, *Press and Politics in the Weimar Republic* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009); Sace Elder, *Murder Scenes: Normality, Deviance, and Criminal Violence in Weimar Berlin* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2010).

helpful. I will also employ the extensive contemporary scholarship that has examined the professionalization of the German press.

Meanwhile, in order to understand the dynamics between psychiatric/criminological experts and reporters, I will also examine psychiatric records presented during these sensational trials. Questions about the mental fitness of the defendants in these cases meant that the state's juridical apparatus mobilized its psychiatric and criminological expertise to deem the criminals fit to stand trial (and be executed). I will compare these expert assessments of the criminal to the newspapers' own presentations of the criminal. I will further consider how the newspapers themselves presented official psychiatric assessments to the public. By comparing the similarities and differences in these accounts, I will be able to illuminate the complicated relationship between these newspapers and psychiatric knowledges. When possible, I also employ accounts written or dictated by the killers themselves, as well as the judicial records in the cases which went to trial. Again, these records will provide useful comparison with just how the various reporters chose to describe these cases.

I have focused my analysis on Berlin during the newly-expanded public sphere of the Weimar Republic because I believe this period represented a high point for sensational, tabloid journalism in Germany. This is not to say that sensationalism was new to Germany in the 1920s, as the development of a tabloid press during Wilhelmine Germany had certainly produced sensational reportage. However, the *Boulevardpresse*, Berlin's sensational daily tabloids, had only begun to boom before the founding of the Weimar Republic; Germany lagged notably behind both England and France in the development of these daily publications. Many well-known political broadsheets, for

example, provided relatively staid coverage of murders in the late nineteenth century. Sensational coverage was more wide-spread in the Weimar Republic, and with radio's popularity only starting to take off by 1930, the newspaper remained the primary source of public information in Germany during the 1920s.<sup>30</sup> Finally, and equally vital to my study, this decade was marked by a surprising number of sensational serial murder cases where reportage interacted with state expertise, and several of these cases were located within or very close to Berlin.

If the Weimar Republic is the ideal period for such a study of the German tabloid press, then Berlin offers us a unique case study, because the popularity and variety of the Berlin *Boulevardpresse* was absolutely unmatched in Weimar Germany. Tabloid circulation (meaning street sales alone) rose from 375,000 in 1925 to 670,000 in 1927 and nearly one million by 1930.<sup>31</sup> The city housed the three largest publishing companies in the country: Mosse, Ullstein, and Scherl,<sup>32</sup> and, as Germany's political capitol, it featured, by far, the largest number of politically-affiliated newspapers in Germany.<sup>33</sup> Thus, Weimar Berlin both represented the most vibrant tabloid culture in Germany and featured the country's most politicized papers. Not surprisingly, these papers provided extensive coverage for each of the sensational cases examined here, whether these cases were local (in the case of Grossmann) or slightly further afield (in the case of Haarmann).

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<sup>30</sup> Bernhard Fulda, "Industries of Sensationalism : German Tabloids in Weimar Berlin" in *Mass Media, Culture, and Society in Twentieth-Century Germany*, ed. Karl Führer (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 183.

<sup>31</sup> Fulda, *Press and Politics*, 24.

<sup>32</sup> For more discussion of the influence of these press houses on Berlin media, see Peter de Mendelssohn, *Zeitungsstadt Berlin. Menschen und Mächte in der Geschichte der deutschen Press* (Berlin: Ullstein, 1959), 56-92.

<sup>33</sup> See Walther G. Oschilewski, *Zeitungen in Berlin* (Berlin: Haude + Spener, 1975), 146-152. For excellent analysis of the overtly political reporting in Berlin during Weimar, see Fulda, *Press and Politics*.

Recent cultural studies scholarship on the media landscape of the Weimar Republic has tended to focus heavily on films and the emergence of radio.<sup>34</sup> That the printed press has received less attention is surprising, as German newspaper readership was the most popular spare-time activity in the 1920s, with at least 20 million readers in 1930,<sup>35</sup> a figure more than double that of radio listenership at the start of the 1930s.<sup>36</sup> German scholars and academics at the time certainly judged the newspaper to be a vital influence on culture and politics. Institutions for *Zeitungswissenschaft* (newspaper science) had emerged in Berlin, Cologne, Leipzig, and Heidelberg by 1914, and the republican era saw scholars producing a considerable number of tracts on the German newspaper. While this research was, with a few exceptions, not especially rigorous or detailed, it nevertheless indicates the contemporary belief that the newspaper was an extremely significant element of Weimar culture.<sup>37</sup>

Media studies scholarship of the 1960s and 1970s on German newspapers entailed broad studies of the entire scope of German press history, rather than close study of a

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<sup>34</sup> For a good overview of this research, see Karl Christian Führer, "Neue Literatur zur Geschichte der der modernen Massenmedien Film, Hörfunk, und Fernsehen," *Neue Politische Literatur* 46 (2001): 216-243.

<sup>35</sup> Eberhard Georgii, "Zur Statistik der deutschen Zeitungen," *Handbuch der deutschen Tagespresse* (Berlin, 1932).

<sup>36</sup> Fulda, *Press and Politics* . 3.

<sup>37</sup> An extremely useful primer on German press research in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries is Fritz Franzmeyer and Walther Heide. *Presse-Dissertationen an deutschen Hochschulen, 1885-1938; auf Grund der Jahresverzeichnisse der deutschen Hochschulschriften und der Verzeichnisse für die Ostmark und das Protektorat Böhmen bearbeitet* (Leipzig: Börsenverein der Deutschen Buchhändler, 1940). The most comprehensive work of the era was no doubt Otto Groths's *Die Zeitung*. Further analysis of German newspaper research through the end of Weimar is available in Stefanie Averbeck, *Kommunikation als Prozess. Soziologische Perspektiven in der Zeitungswissenschaft, 1927-1934* (Münster: Lit, 1999); Stefanie Averbeck, "The Post-1933 Emigration of Communication Researchers from Germany: The Lost Works of the Weimar Generation," *European Journal of Communication* 16 (2001): 451-475; while the fate of *Zeitungswissenschaft* during the Nazi era is the focus of Arnulf Kutsch, ed, *Zeitungswissenschaftler im Dritten Reich. Sieben biographische Studien* (Cologne: Hayit, 1984).

particular period or paper.<sup>38</sup> The scholarship that did consider the 1920s newspaper landscape, such as Kurt Koszyk's path-breaking work, often focused more on the organizational structure of newspapers, rather than on precisely how a given paper covered news stories.<sup>39</sup> Particularly in analysis of political papers like those of right wing press-baron Alfred Hugenberg, scholars often seem to assume that the will of the publisher transferred unproblematically to the paper's coverage itself.<sup>40</sup> While these approaches were useful in creating a picture of broad historical trends in the German press, and in improving our understanding of the day-to-day organizational workings of the Berlin press in the 1920s,<sup>41</sup> they did not produce rich studies of the narrative representations of the press.

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<sup>38</sup> For example, see Heinz-Dietrich Fischer (ed.), *Deutsche Zeitungen des 17 bis 20. Jahrhunderts* (Pullach and Munich: Pullach: Verl.Dokumentation, 1972); Heinz-Dietrich Fischer (ed.), *Handbuch der politischen Presse 1480-1980* (Dusseldorf: Droste, 1981); Rolf Engelsing, *Massenpublikum und Journalistentum im 19. Jahrhundert in Nordwestdeutschland*. (Berlin: Duncker u. Humblot, 1966); Otto Groth, *Die Unerkannte Kulturmacht: 7 Vols.* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1961-72). More recent examples of this approach include Konrad Dussel, *Deutsche Tagespresse im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert* (Münster: LIT, 2011); and Jürgen Wilke, *Grundzüge der Medien- und Kommunikationsgeschichte: von den Anfängen bis ins 20. Jahrhunderts* (Cologne: Böhlau-Verlag, 2000).

<sup>39</sup> Kurt Koszyk, *Zwischen Kaiserreich und Diktatur. Die sozialdemokratische Presse von 1914 bis 1933* (Heidelberg: Quelle & Meyer, 1958); Kurt Koszyk, *Deutsche Presse 1914-1945, Geschichte der deutschen Presse Teil III* (Berlin: Colloquium Verlag, 1972); or Mendelssohn, *Zeitungsstadt Berlin*; other examples of the more biographical approach include Kurt Weinhold, *Verlag M. Dumont Schauberg, Köln: Die Geschichte eines Zeitungshauses, 1620-1945. Eine Chronik 1945-1970*. (Cologne: DuMont-Schauberg, 1969); Isolde Rieger, *Die Wilhelminische Presse im Überblick, 1888-1918* (Munich: Pohl, 1957); Oron Hale, *The Captive Press in the Third Reich* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1964).

<sup>40</sup> Dankwart Guratzsch, *Macht durch Organisation. Die Grundlegung des Hugenbergschen Pressimperiums* (Dusseldorf: Bertelsmann Universitätsverlag, 1974); Heidrum Holzbach, *Das "System Hugenberg" Die Organisation bürgerlicher Sammlungspolitik vor dem Aufstieg der NSDAP* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlagsanstalt, 1981). Certainly, Holzbach's work is primarily concerned with Hugenberg's capture of the DNVP, while Guratzsch offers a very useful study of the structure of interests that Hugenberg built; nevertheless, both of these fine works read the relationship of Hugenberg to his press somewhat bluntly, producing a less nuanced view of the press itself.

<sup>41</sup> Quite a bit of recent German historical press scholarship has been devoted to regional and/or temporal studies of the press, which has improved scholarly understanding of Germany's generally decentralized press system. See for example Paul Hoser, *Die politischen, wirtschaftlichen und sozialen Hintergründe der Münchener Tagespresse zwischen 1914 und 1934. Methoden der Pressebeeinflussung* (Frankfurt am Main: P. Lang, 1990); Michael Meyen, *Leipzigs bürgerliche Presse in der Weimarer Republik. Wechselbeziehungen zwischen gesellschaftlichen Wandel und Zeitungsentwicklung* (Leipzig: R. Luxemburg Verein, 1996); Gerd Meier, *Zwischen Milieu und Markt. Tageszeitung in Ostwestfalen 1920-1970* (Paderborn: F. Schöningh, 1999).

The most recent generation of Weimar press scholars has moved towards a closer analysis of individual newspapers themselves. Much of this scholarship has been politically focused; that is, research questions focus on the degree to which various papers influenced the tumultuous Weimar political climate, or the ability of various editors to produce coverage at odds with their publisher's political perspectives.<sup>42</sup> However, such research on the Berlin press in particular has been difficult, as fire destroyed the records of many publishing houses during the Battle of Berlin in 1945.

Nevertheless, a compelling picture of the influence of the Berlin press on the German political climate has begun to emerge. This research suggests that popular broadsheets could exert considerable influence on the terms of political debate (e.g. which figures were politically important, or how the parliamentary process was publically perceived). Still, as useful as this analysis is, it treats Berlin newspapers as political organs in relation to the Berlin political process. It also almost uniformly ignores the possible political dimensions of sensational press coverage of major crime events.

As a result, the broader cultural influence of Berlin papers in the 1920s, as well as these papers' claim to specialized authority, has gone largely unstudied. This dissertation attempts to remedy this issue by examining the way Berlin papers addressed the cultural phenomenon and political implications of serial killing in 1920s Germany. While Berlin newspapers had covered sensational murders for decades, in the Weimar Republic such sensational coverage offered explanations for these killings that competed with the

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<sup>42</sup> Fulda, *Press and Politics*; Daniel Siemens, *Metropole und Verbrechen. Die Gerichtsreportage in Berlin, Paris, und Chicago, 1919-1933* (Stuttgart : Steiner, 2007); Matthias Lau, *Pressepolitik als Chance. Staatliche Öffentlichkeitsarbeit in den Ländern der Weimarer Republik* (Stuttgart: F. Steiner, 2003); Bernd Söseman, *Theodor Wolff: Ein Leben mit der Zeitung* (Munich: Econ Ullstein List & Co, 2000); Bernd Söseman, *Das Ende der Weimarer Republik in der Kritik demokratischer Publizisten. Theodor Wolff, Ernst Feder, Julius Elbau, Leopold Schwarzschild* (Berlin: Colloquium-Verlag, 1976).

psychiatric expertise of the juridical system. Beginning in 1921 with the capture of Karl Grossmann, through stories recounting the crimes of Friedrich Haarmann and Karl Denke in 1924, and culminating in the unprecedented coverage of Peter Kürten's trial in 1931, the Berlin press grappled in new ways with the idea of the serial killer and the proper roles for the police, the courts, the newspaper, and the public during such cases.

These cases themselves have received considerable scholarly attention, both in cultural studies and, especially, criminology.<sup>43</sup> However, this scholarship focuses attention on the either the murderers themselves or the psychiatrists who attempted to classify and understand them. The press in these accounts usually appears as an instrument for the dissemination of trial information to the public, rather than as an actor in itself. When news reporting does manifest as an actor, scholars often deploy the term “sensationalist” in a pejorative rather than analytical manner. For example, one study which set out to examine the intricacies of the press's presentation of the Kürten case led the author to note in exasperation the press's “failure” to investigate and understand this case as we would today.<sup>44</sup>

Using the term sensationalism dismissively prevents fuller understanding of the Berlin press during the Weimar Republic. The existence of titillating details in a press account does not automatically invalidate that article or prove that the account attempted to do nothing more than appeal to the reader's base instincts. John Hartley, surveying a wide range of tabloid sources, has argued that journalism is a form of cultural production,

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<sup>43</sup> For cultural studies, see for example Isabella Classen, *Darstellung von Kriminalität in der Deutschen Literatur, Presse und Wissenschaft, 1900 bis 1930* (Frankfurt am Main: Lang, 1988); Maria Tatar, *Lustmord: Sexual Murder in Weimar Germany* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995). For criminology, see for example Kerstin Brückweh, *Mordlust. Serienmorde, Gewalt, und Emotionen im 20. Jahrhundert* (Frankfurt: Campus, 2006); Kathrin Kompisch & Frank Otto, *Bestien des Boulevards. Die Deutschen und ihre Serienmörder* (Leipzig: Miltzke, 2003); Kathrin Kompisch, *Die öffentliche Rezeption sozialer Devianz in der Weimarer Republik. Der Fall Fritz Haarmann* (Hamburg, 2001).

<sup>44</sup> Tatar, *Lustmord*, 43.

and that it even “produces its own consuming subjects: the public, the consumer.”<sup>45</sup> In other words, reportage, even sensational reportage, is at its heart a sense-making system that distant from the Habermasian-style idealized public sphere. The way that individual papers chose to make sense of these events tells us a great deal about what how they understood themselves and their mission.

In fact, as this dissertation will demonstrate, newspaper reportage entails the creation of particular explanatory narratives out of a chaotic mass of facts. News is a cultural practice as well as a realm of politics, a location for the gestation of ideas and identities.<sup>46</sup> As noted above, in cases like the Haarmann trial, different papers built distinct narratives from the same set of facts, intending to impart very particular messages to the reading audience.<sup>47</sup> In the political pressure cooker that was Weimar Berlin, such messages often supported or justified the political position of the newspaper. Particularly in a social context as hectic and disorienting as early and late Weimar Germany, the various explanations the press offered might or might not affirm the narratives provided by other public figures, whether they were politicians or state or independent experts.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> John Hartley, *Popular Reality: Journalism, Modernity, Popular Culture* (London: Arnold, 1996), 47. This provocative argument implies that the public itself is not a simple sociological reality (readers sitting down to peruse the paper), but rather itself a cultural production. In fact, Warner goes so far as to call the public kind of practical fiction, see Michael Warner, *Publics and Counterpublics* (New York: Zone Books, 2002), 8. A similar but less radical version of this idea was offered by Bernard Cohen, who opined that “the press is significantly more than a purveyor of information and opinion. It may not be successful much of the time in telling people what to think, but it is stunning successful in telling its readers what to think about.” Bernard Cohen, *The Press and Foreign Policy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1963), 13.

<sup>46</sup> Michael Schudson, “News, Public, Nation,” *American Historical Review* (April, 2002): 481-95.

<sup>47</sup> For an excellent analysis along these lines in the American context, see Andie Tucher, *Froth and Scum: Truth, Beauty, Goodness and the Ax Murder in America’s First Mass Medium* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1994).

<sup>48</sup> This analysis challenges the argument made in Fritzsche, *Reading Berlin*, that the city of Berlin as a place and as a text (in newspapers) defined one another in a mutually constitutive manner; rather than considering Berlin as “a” text, it seems much more accurate to understand it as a multitude of competing texts, particularly in the Weimar Republic.

This dissertation is also in dialogue with cultural histories of the Weimar Republic that extend beyond the press. This area of cultural history certainly remains verdant, having recently produced useful studies of gender,<sup>49</sup> cultural crisis,<sup>50</sup> and performative political culture.<sup>51</sup> However, as Peter Fritzsche has observed, many histories of the Weimar Republic have framed their studies around the inevitability of the Republic's eventual collapse.<sup>52</sup> The ultimate, apparent fragility of Weimar democracy can become a telos dominating historical observation of political dynamics in the 1920s. This dissertation considers the political aspects of sensational reportage during the Weimar Republic and notes the tendency for the Berlin press to produce narratives along political lines. Yet, it avoids the "stabilization-crisis-collapse" model; although I consider cases from 1919, 1921, 1924, and 1931, this dissertation emphasizes similarities in the dynamics of reportage across these periods. I further contend that these various press discourses worked together to develop a particular idea of the newspaper as a location of

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<sup>49</sup> For a discussion of the growth of women's rights in early Weimar, see Kathleen Canning, "Women and the Politics of Gender," in *Weimar Germany*, Anthony McElligott ed (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009); the complicated relationship of class and gender in women's reproductive health is discussed in Cornelia Osborne, *Cultures of Abortion in Weimar Germany* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2007); the experiences of women in the conservative milieu is considered in Christiane Streubel, *Radikale Nationalistinnen: Agitation und Programmatik rechter Frauen in der Weimarer Republik* (Frankfurt am Main: Campus, 2006).

<sup>50</sup> E.g. Moritz Föllmer and Rüdiger Graf, *Die "Krise" der Weimarer Republik: Zur Kritik eines Deutungsmusters* (Frankfurt am Main: Campus, 2005); Rüdiger Graf, *Die Zukunft der Weimarer Republik: Krisen und Zukunftsaneignungen in Deutschland 1918-1933* (Munich: Oldenbourg, 2008); Todd Herzog, *Crime Stories: Criminalistic Fantasy and the Culture of Crisis in Weimar Germany*, (New York: Berghahn Books, 2009).

<sup>51</sup> For an intriguing study of the performative aspects of Weimar parliamentary culture, see Thomas Mergel, *Parlamentarische Kultur in der Weimarer Republik: Politische Kommunikation, Symbolische Politik und Öffentlichkeit im Reichstag* (Düsseldorf: Droste, 2002); for analysis of street culture and storm troopers, see Timothy Brown, *Weimar Radicals: Nazis and Communists between Authenticity and Performance* (New York, 2009).

<sup>52</sup> Peter Fritzsche, "Did Weimar Fail?" *The Journal of Modern History* 68, no. 3 (1996): 630. While Fritzsche wrote his article in 1996, the same organizing dynamics have appeared in recent general studies of Weimar as well, e.g. Ulrich Kluge, *Die Weimarer Republik*, (Paderborn: Schöningh, 2006); Ursula Büttner, *Weimar: die überforderte Republik 1918-1933; Leistung und Versagen in Staat, Gesellschaft, Wirtschaft und Kultur* (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 2008).

expertise. In this sense, I hope to contribute to the sort of “rethinking of Weimar” that Fritzsche encourages.

Eric Weitz’s elegant study of Weimar Germany, *Weimar Germany: Promise and Tragedy*, focuses particularly on Berlin, arguing that the city was the “symbol and pacesetter” of Germany. However, argues Weitz, Berlin was “too far in front” of the rest of the country, a dynamic which ultimately proved fatal to the German democracy.<sup>53</sup> Weitz’s celebration of Berlin’s modernity emphasizes high-brow culture such as architecture, literature, and certain film. Benjamin Ziemann has suggested that Weitz overvalues and overestimates the appeal and influence of these works in 1920s Germany. Ziemann is particularly concerned that such important factors as agrarian labor relations and social change and nationalism in the German countryside are virtually absent from this account.<sup>54</sup> While this dissertation, focusing on Berlin press coverage, does not consider Germany as a whole, it does focus on a discourse that was both broadly popular and decidedly not high-brow. As such, it could provide a useful point of comparison to contemporaneous news coverage from other regions to test Weitz’s theory that Berlin was a city out of step with its country.

By approaching the Berlin press’s coverage of these sensational cases from the perspective of the newspapers themselves—considering their rhetorical and political aims and thinking about how they chose to construct particular narratives— this dissertation contributes substantially to our understanding both of popular culture in the Weimar Republic and, more specifically, the nature of press reportage in this period. Rather than

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<sup>53</sup> Eric Weitz, *Weimar Germany: Promise and Tragedy*. (Princeton, 2007), 79.

<sup>54</sup> Benjamin Ziemann, “Weimar was Weimar: Politics, Culture, and the Emplotment of the German Republic,” *German History*, 28.4 (2010), 548. Ziemann makes similar complaints about the cinematic studies of Anton Kaes, e.g. Anton Kaes, *Shell Shock Cinema: Weimar Culture and the Wounds of War*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009).

considering the press as a sort of monolithic force, this analysis compares approaches to the same story from a variety of Berlin dailies.

Of course, despite potential differences in specific narratives, these newspapers were generally uniform in their efforts to establish themselves as experts in their own right. While reporting on murder trials could indeed reify the expertise that psychiatrists and criminologists offered as witnesses, these Berlin dailies provided their own types of analysis and explanation to make these complicated and unsettling events knowable for their readership. In short, then, this study hopes to introduce sensationalism as an analytical category into the discussion of the Berlin press's relation to police and judicial authority in particular and to the political system in general.

Sensationalism's history as a category of analysis is much shorter than the history of the writing practice itself. The term was coined in the nineteenth century as a dismissive description of literature or journalism that aimed to elicit popular emotional reactions.<sup>55</sup> These sorts of reactions were considered non-rational, as they emphasized sensory stimulation rather than internal reflection.<sup>56</sup> Critics of sensationalism also associated the genre with the mass public, which was understood to be easily influenced and misled by the cynical, emotional appeals of sensational writings. Yet, the practice of sensational writing far predated the emergence of the descriptive term. From the mid-sixteenth century onward, German broadsheets used sensational language, marked by

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<sup>55</sup> Joy Wiltenburg, "True Crime: The Origins of Modern Sensationalism," *The American Historical Review* 109, No. 5 (Dec. 2004):1379.

<sup>56</sup> Such traits were also feminized, see Catherine A. Lutz, "Engendered Emotion: Gender, Power, and the Rhetoric of Emotional Control in American Discourse," in *Language and Politics of Emotion*, eds. Lutz and Lila Abu-Leghod (Cambridge, 1990), 69-91.

appeals to the emotions of the reader, to recount crimes and executions. Numerous scholars have studied early modern press sensationalism, and their work suggests that while sensationalism in different eras shares some similarities, the genre is heavily influenced by the era in which it is produced.<sup>57</sup>

Certainly, sensational reporting has been widely criticized in every era in which it has appeared.<sup>58</sup> Even in the early modern period, when reading was the province of those with high social standing, the success of sensationalist accounts (while not specifically identified as such) caused great consternation among scholastic intellectuals. Some clerics, for example, despaired to observe that readers unmoved by Gospel readings could

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<sup>57</sup> For work on early German sensationalism, see especially Joy Wiltenburg, *Disorderly Women and Female Power in the Street Literature of Early Modern England and Germany* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1992); Tom Cheesman, *The Shocking Ballad Picture Show: German Popular Literature and Cultural History* (Oxford: Berg Publishers, 1994); Richard van Dülmen, *Theater of Horror: Crime and Punishment in Early Modern Germany*, trans. Elisabeth Neu (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1990), 80-92; Lyndal Roper, *Oedipus and the Devil: Witchcraft, Sexuality, and Religion in Early Modern Europe* (New York: Routledge, 1994); Joy Wiltenburg, "Family Murders: Gender, Reproduction, and the Discourse of Crime in Early Modern Germany," *Colloquia Germanica: Internationale Zeitschrift für Germanistik* 28, nos. 3-4 (1995): 357-74; Gisela Ecker, *Einblattdrucke von den Anfängen bis 1555: Untersuchungen zu einer Publikationsform literarischer Texte* (Göppingen: Kümmerle Verlag, 1981); Karl Schottenloher, *Flugblatt und Zeitung: Ein Wegweiser durch das gedruckte Tagesschrifttum* (Berlin: R. C. Schmidt & co, 1922), 150-156; Holger Dainat, "Der unglückliche Mörder: Zur Kriminalgeschichte der deutschen Spätaufklärung," *Zeitschrift für deutsche Philologie* 107, no. 4 (1988): 519; Walter Krieg, *Materialien zu einer Entwicklungsgeschichte der Bücher-Preise und des Autoren-Honorars vom 15. bis zum 20. Jahrhundert* (Vienna, 1953), 79-82. Emotional appeal was certainly not limited to such sensational accounts, either; for discussion of the general increased use of emotional and empathetic appeals among scholars and clerics in the early modern period, see Wayne A. Rebhorn, *The Emperor of Men's Minds: Literature and the Renaissance Discourse of Rhetoric* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995). On the motivations of these early sensational writers, see Lennard Davis, *Factual Fictions: The Origins of the English Novel* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983), 42-82; Alain Boureau and Roger Chartier, eds. *The Culture of Print: Power and the Uses of Print in Early Modern Europe*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), 8; Elizabeth Eisenstein, *The Printing Revolution in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983); Lorna Jane Abray, *The People's Reformation: Magistrates, Clergy, and Commons in Strasbourg, 1500-1598* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985), 77-78. For studies outside of the early modern German context, see Lorraine Daston and Katherine Park, *Wonders and the Order of Nature, 1150-1750* (New York: Zone Books, 1998); Peter Lake, "Deeds against Nature: Cheap Print, Protestantism, and Murder in Early Seventeenth Century England" in *Cultural Politics in Early Stuart England*, eds. Kevin Sharpe and Lake (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1993), 257-283; Daniel Williams, "Rogues, Rascals and Scoundrels: The Underworld Literature of Early America," *American Studies* 24, no. 2 (Fall, 1983): 5-19; <sup>58</sup> Stevens, "Social utility," 53; Richard Hofstetter and David Dozier, "Useful News, Sensational News: Quality, Sensationalism and Local TV News," *Journalism Quarterly* 63, no. 4 (1986): 815-853.

be brought to tears at the reading of a particularly poignant crime account.<sup>59</sup> Dismissals of sensationalism as frivolous and a distraction from more important messages have persisted since that time.<sup>60</sup> Such critiques can have a variety of motivations, and I will discuss in more detail criticisms that aim to maintain social and political power and critiques that stem from particular intellectual concerns.

Intellectually, scholarly unease with sensationalism stems at least in part from the division in modern intellectual distinction of the emotive from the real, with the former often typed as imaginary and the latter as rational. From this perspective, sensational reporting can indeed seem trivial at best and actively malicious at worst. As such, sensationalism sometimes retains its pejorative associations in academic studies, particularly in historical work.<sup>61</sup> In such a formulation, sensationalism most often functions as a term of blame rather than analysis. Certainly, more recent historical research, to be discussed below, has convincingly demonstrated the utility of examining sensational writing to gauge popular attitudes and moral norms. Nevertheless, several academic critiques of the sensational genre are quite formidable and merit serious consideration.

The most compelling attacks on sensationalism have two major and interrelated thrusts: first, that sensationalism is a commercial object produced by the exploitative modern mass media; and second, that it succeeds through appealing to the worst aspects

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<sup>59</sup> Joyce Coleman, *Public Reading and the Reading Public in Late Medieval England and France* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 29.

<sup>60</sup> Maria Grabe, Annie Lang and Xiaoquan Zhao, "News Content and Form: Implications for Memory and Audience Evaluations," *Communication Research* 30, no. 4 (2003): 388.

<sup>61</sup> E.g. Rob Sindall, *Street Violence in the Nineteenth Century: Media Panic or Real Danger?* (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1990); James Crouthamel, *Bennett's New York Herald and the Rise of the Popular Press* (Syracuse: Syracuse UP, 1989); David Abrahamson, "An Inconvenient Legacy: The Jungle and the Immigrant Imperative," *Journalism History* 34, no. 3 (Fall 2008): 163-165; Schwartz, "Sensationalism and sensibility," 30-32; Halttunen, *Murder Most Foul*, 29-30.

of human taste for gore, and thus has little history. In short, sensationalism is either the commercial manufacture of outrage or a petty distraction. Among the best examples of the former analysis is Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer's attack on the "culture industry" in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. This work decries the commercial concentration of radio and cinema, bemoaning the web of ideological interests that prop up mass-produced, mass-consumed culture. For Adorno and Horkheimer, this mass culture constitutes a technique for social control.<sup>62</sup> This line of argument is part of the massive, long-running debate about whether mass culture is primarily a liberating or repressive force.<sup>63</sup>

Jürgen Habermas's work is a useful articulation of the second, related critique of sensational reporting; namely, that such reporting is a catastrophically corrosive force in civil society. For Habermas, the rise of the commercial mass press of the late nineteenth century was synonymous with the decline of the public sphere. This was the moment where a "culture-debating public" devolved into a "culture-consuming public," where the rational-critical debate of the bourgeois public sphere surrendered to "staged 'public opinion.'" In Habermas's analysis, the "world fashioned by the mass media is a public

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<sup>62</sup> Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, "The Culture Industry," *Dialect of Enlightenment*, trans. John Cumming (New York: Herder & Herder, 1972), 120-67. Adorno and Horkheimer were primarily concerned with audio-visual media in industrial society; for a critique that extends the idea of the culture industry into postindustrial society, see Vilém Flusser, "Kriterien-Krise-Kritiek," in *Gegen die Indifferenz der Fotografie: Die Bielefelder Symposien über Fotografie, 1979–1985; Beiträge zur ästhetischen Theorie und Praxis der Fotografie* (Düsseldorf: Ed. Marzona, 1986); and Vilém Flusser, *Into the Universe of Technical Images*, trans. Nancy Ann Roth (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011).

<sup>63</sup> Examples abound, but particularly useful works include Chandra Mukerji and Michael Schudson, eds. *Rethinking Popular Culture: Contemporary Perspectives in Cultural Studies* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991); Stuart Hall, "Notes on Deconstructing the 'Popular,'" in *People's History and Socialist Theory*, ed. Raphael Samuel (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981); Frederic Jameson, "reification and Utopia in Mass Culture," *Social Text* 1 (1979): 94-190; James Naremore and Patrick Brantlinger, eds., *Modernity and Mass Culture* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991).

sphere in appearance only.”<sup>64</sup> In its most extreme formulation, this argument suggests that not only does no room exist for rational-critical discussion in the mass media, but that there is not a public at all, only passive audience.<sup>65</sup> Certainly, this analysis from Habermas has been substantially critiqued--<sup>66</sup> even the discussion earlier in this chapter on the nature of early modern sensational writing suggests some problems for Habermas’s argument. As Craig Calhoun has observed, Habermas seems to idealize the public sphere of the eighteenth century, largely ignoring “penny dreadfuls, lurid crimes, and scandal sheets, and other less than altogether rational-critical branches of the press”<sup>67</sup>

The shortcomings of the Habermasian approach to the press are more concretely demonstrated in Jean Chalaby’s influential work on the origins of professional journalism in nineteenth century Britain. Chalaby argues that the professionalization of journalism represented the decline of a better form of press discourse, one which was “political at heart and public in character.”<sup>68</sup> This earlier press, exemplified by unstamped newspaper writers in 1820s Britain, had a specific social class position and an accompanying political ideology. Such papers reported on the activities of the political associations they represented and, in Chalaby’s view, actively attempted to change readers’ preconceptions. The principles of commercialism, however, perverted the press so that

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<sup>64</sup> Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Bourgeois Public Sphere*, trans. Thomas Burger (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1989), 159-75, 181-201. For an updated example of this critique of journalism’s influence on the public sphere, see Jean Chalaby, *The Invention of Journalism* (New York: Macmillan Press, 1998).

<sup>65</sup> Habermas, 206.

<sup>66</sup> see Warner, *Publics and Counterpublics*; Geoff Eley, “Nations, Publics, and Political Cultures: Placing Habermas in the Nineteenth Century” in *Habermas and the Public Sphere*, ed. Craig Calhoun (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1992), 289-339; Nancy Fraser, “Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy” in *Habermas and the Public Sphere*, ed. Craig Calhoun (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1992), 109-142; Oskar Negt and Alexander Kluge, *Public Sphere and Experience* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993).

<sup>67</sup> Craig Calhoun, “Introduction: Habermas and the Public Sphere,” in *Habermas and the Public Sphere*, ed. Craig Calhoun (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1992), 33.

<sup>68</sup> Chalaby, *Invention of Journalism*, 2.

journalism's mission became keeping the popular classes "in a state of ecstasy" rather than informing them about the world and their place in it.<sup>69</sup>

Chalaby's argument that the modern mass press is the story of the marketplace overwhelming the public, and particularly the citizen becoming the consumer, resonates with a great deal of academic work, but it suffers upon closer historical analysis.

Chalaby certainly overstates the degree to which the papers he studies represent an entire era rather than an interesting historical moment,<sup>70</sup> and he also cannot effectively argue for the way that audiences received these papers. In fact, historical study has suggested the papers he idealizes were read first and foremost for their cheap news, rather than principled political doctrines.<sup>71</sup> Perhaps most importantly, this study assumes far too readily that commercialized and sensationalized journalism always supports established economic and political power.

In fact, economic and political elites have historically been quick to condemn sensational journalism, suggesting their frustration at the rhetorical power of the sensationalist genre to mobilize the public against elite interests.<sup>72</sup> Certainly, the intent and effects of sensationalism are highly variable, but as this dissertation will help demonstrate, sensationalism is a particularly effective genre for fomenting popular challenges to political power. Several investigations of American sensationalist papers in the nineteenth century have shown that these papers often sided with the economically

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<sup>69</sup> Chalaby, *Invention of Journalism*, 5.

<sup>70</sup> Schudson, "News, Public, Nation" 487.

<sup>71</sup> Patricia Hollis, *The Pauper Press: A Study in Working-Class Radicalism of the 1830s* (London: Oxford University Press 1970), 285. Hollis further suggests that these papers rather quickly shifted from radical political essays to crime news in an effort to engender popular interest and survive, 122.

<sup>72</sup> Ross Eaman, *Historical Dictionary of Journalism*. (Lanham: Scarecrow, 2009), 28.

disadvantaged against economic and political elites.<sup>73</sup> Unfortunately, similar studies have been far less common in the German context.<sup>74</sup>

As this analysis has suggested, critiques of sensationalism concentrate on questions of popular reception: either the public is being manipulated or the public is being debased. Certainly, focusing on reception is imminently reasonable, given that the mass press's intent is to communicate with the public. However, these critiques treat the writers of such mass publications much as early modern sensationalism treated murderers: there is no interest in the motivations of the actor, only in the results of the action. In these critiques, reporters who engage in sensationalism are either tools of oppressive control or cynical opportunists preying on the gullible. My dissertation attempts to read major sensational reports not for what they tell us about the audience, or what effect they have on the general audience, but rather what they tell us about the writers and their relationship with various state agents, independent experts, and, in some cases, even the criminals themselves.

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<sup>73</sup> David Anthony has suggested that the sensationalist coverage of the Helen Jewett murder trial critiqued upper and middle-class morality, David Anthony, *The Helen Jewett Panic: Tabloids, Men, and the Sensational Public Sphere in Antebellum, N.Y.* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997); similarly, New York sensational trial reportage often sided with trade union workers and against judges' harsh sentences, and offered criticism of the social life of elites, Alexander Saxton, "Problems of Class and Race in the Origins of the Mass Circulation Press," *American Quarterly* 36, no.2 (1984): 224-6; the power of apparently sensational text to provide critical perspectives on everyday life is discussed in Shaw, Slater, "Eye of the Beholder," 86-91; for a discussion of sensationalism's power to promote food safety see Francke, "Sensationalism and the Development," 80-85. For an intriguing comparison to these accounts, see Freeman's study of Japanese press clubs in Laurie Anne Freeman, *Closing the Shop: Information Cartels and Japan's Mass Media* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 171.

<sup>74</sup> One exception is Alex Hall's work, which argued that Wilhelmine SPD press's use of sensationalism indicates the degree to which the party was oppressed and further suggests the effectiveness of sensationalism as an oppositional strategy Alex Hall, *Scandal, Sensation, and Social Democracy: The SPD Press and Wilhelmine Germany 1890-1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977).

Several recent historical studies have treated sensationalist text as a worthwhile object of analysis for cultural history,<sup>75</sup> perhaps as a result of more general acceptance of the use of studying emotional responses in history.<sup>76</sup> Similarly helpful to serious scholarship on newspapers was Benedict Anderson's assertion that newspapers helped form national consciousness in the European nation-state.<sup>77</sup> In Anderson's analysis, any community larger than a small village is "imagined;" that is, the sense of community felt by its participants is a shared mental construct. Newspapers promoted such communal consciousness because, as individuals read them, those readers were aware that numerous other people were reading the same thing. Anderson's excellent work draws attention to the importance of print, language, and popular literature in the creation of national consciousness. At the same time, as this dissertation should demonstrate, it is important to remain aware that tremendous differences can exist between various papers.

The most common branch of historical analysis of sensationalism views such text as a window into the popular norms of the time.<sup>78</sup> This approach understands media representations as cultural agents: these scholars quite rightly observe that these texts'

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<sup>75</sup> See particularly Judith Walkowitz, *City of Dreadful Delight*; Edward Berenson, *The Trial of Madame Caillaux* (Berkeley: University of California, 1992); Ruth Harris, *Murders and Madness: Medicine, Law, and Society in the Fin de Siècle* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989).

<sup>76</sup> See e.g. Barbara Rosenwein, "Worrying about Emotions in History," *American Historical Review* 107, no. 3 (June 2002), 821-845; Carol Z. Stearns & Peter N. Stearns, eds. *Emotion and Social Change: Towards a New Psychology* (New York: Holmes & Meier, 1988).

<sup>77</sup> Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1983). We might usefully contrast Anderson's concept of community with Habermas's idea of the public sphere, considering that Habermas despairs at the effects of the mass press. For Habermas, the public created by early print was especially a set of liberal social norms organizing public discussion, while Anderson's communities are far more tied to a sense of emotional connection. Given this distinction, it is easy to see how the two authors come to different conclusions on the effects of the mass press.

<sup>78</sup> See for example Lisa Duggan, *Sapphic Slashers: Sex, Violence, and American Modernity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000); Tucher, *Froth and Scum*; Frances E. Dolan, *Dangerous Familiars: Representations of Domestic Crime in England, 1550-1700* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994); Lincoln Faller, *Turned to Account: The Forms and Functions of Criminal Biography in Late Seventeenth and Early Eighteenth Century England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987).

popular effects and reception are not constrained by the intent of their authors and distributors, commercial or otherwise.<sup>79</sup> Joy Wiltenberg, for example, has argued that sensationalism forms an intersection between the public and private, “between structures of power and normative emotional demands—between public order and the interior life of the individual”<sup>80</sup> In Wiltenberg’s view, a sensationalist text resonates emotionally with its audience, and its existence therefore assumes a like-minded community. From this perspective, sensationalism’s success suggests its historical significance: the growth of the genre “reflects not merely the growth of commercialism but the success of sensationalism in employing the discourse of violent crime to address changing cultural needs and sociopolitical agendas.”<sup>81</sup> Focusing on reception, these studies often understand journalistic accounts as articulating a generally pro-authority attitude towards the violation of law and the actions of authority.

A related approach among recent works argues that sensational reporting of spectacle worked to create a new sort of public.<sup>82</sup> Studying *fin de siècle* France, for example, Vanessa Schwartz has argued that the sensational reporting about Paris in Parisian papers helped to fashion a new sort of public, an active, diverse crowd that represented the democratizing power of commercial culture. For Schwartz, this represents the formation of a community of interest that crossed traditional social

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<sup>79</sup> Cohen, *Pillars of Salt*, argues that crime texts shaped culture as well as reflected it.

<sup>80</sup> Wiltenburg, “True Crime,” 1380.

<sup>81</sup> Wiltenburg, “True Crime,” 1379

<sup>82</sup> E.g. Vanessa Schwartz, *Spectacular Realities: Early Mass Culture in Fin-de-Siècle France* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998); Marie-Christine Leps, *Apprehending the Criminal: The Production of Deviance in Nineteenth-Century Discourse* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1992); Gregory Shaya, *Mayhem for Moderns: The Culture of Sensationalism in France, C. 1900* (Ph.D dissertation, University of Michigan, 2000); Fritzsche, *Reading Berlin*; Robin Walz, *Pulp Surrealism: Insolent Popular Culture in Early Twentieth-Century Paris* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000).

boundaries and enjoyed real cohesion .<sup>83</sup> Again, such studies focus quite heavily on the reception of reportage.

Both Wiltenberg and Schwartz provide useful correctives against academic dismissals of sensational reporting, particularly because both approaches focus on reception, which is also the crux of most critiques of sensationalism. Yet precisely because these works focus on reception, particularly the popular construction of shared values and individual identity, they neglect the rhetorical strategies and agendas of the reporters themselves. As a result, in these studies we learn very little about the intent and ideas of the journalists as a group.

This recent reconsideration of sensationalism productively demonstrates that the writers of these sensational texts were savvy observers of public norms, but by viewing such accounts as windows into public opinion, these studies focus on popular interpretations of the texts, rather than on the specifics of the individual journalistic accounts themselves. This scholarship thus understands the writers of such newspaper articles as first and foremost members of the general reading public, expressing that public's fears and beliefs. I suggest that, as useful as this approach can prove, it does injustice to the complexity of sensationalist reportage and particularly to the intent of the journalists. Meanwhile, as noted above, historical literature that does examine journalism as a profession and that considers journalists' motives tends to focus on political reporting rather than sensationalist reporting of crime.

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<sup>83</sup> Schwartz, 10, 202. As Gregory Shaya has pointed out, Schwartz is less convincing in her argument about the degree to which this new crowd had command over the spectacle that it observed, or whether "this new crowd was a new form of sociability or the figurative construction of mass culture itself." Gregory Shaya, "The Flaneur, the Badaud, and the Making of a Mass Public in France, circa 1860-1910," *The American Historical Review* 109, no.1 (Feb, 2004): 43.

By examining the relationship between sensational reportage and the psychiatric, criminological, and juridical/penal expertise deployed by the German judiciary, this dissertation also hopes to contribute to recent historical analysis of the professionalization and popularization of each of these types of expertise. In the wake of Michel Foucault's path-breaking critiques of psychiatry, historians have critically re-examined the professionalization of psychiatry, considering particularly the constructed nature of mental illness, the normative function and disciplinary operation of state institutions, and the diffusion of power through professional and technical discourses.<sup>84</sup> Similar work has emerged in the historiography of criminology.<sup>85</sup> Such studies have amply demonstrated how psychiatrists and criminologists reserved for themselves particular explanatory power over the actions and motivations of other individuals. These expert claims held considerable sway in the criminal cases examined in this study.

As Mort astutely observes of his own work, historical studies of the professionalization of these types of expertise focus primarily on the language employed by the experts themselves, rather than, for example, the transmission of those knowledge claims through the press.<sup>86</sup> Thus, as Lerner's *Hysterical Men* and Wetzell's *Inventing the*

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<sup>84</sup> See particularly Michel Foucault, *Abnormal* (New York: Picador, 1999); *Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason* (New York: Vintage, 1965). Works that productively apply Foucault's perspective include Micale and Porter, eds. *Discovering the History of Psychiatry* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994); Jan Goldstein, *Console and Classify: The French Psychiatric Profession in the Nineteenth Century*, (Cambridge, 1987); Lerner, *Hysterical Men*; Dirk Blasius, *Der verwaltete Wahnsinn: Eine Sozialgeschichte des Irrenhauses*. (Frankfurt, 1980); Ann Goldberg, *Sex, Religion, and the Making of Modern Madness 1815-1849* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998).

<sup>85</sup> E.g. Wetzell, *Inventing the Criminal*; Leps, *Apprehending the Criminal*; Frank Mort, *Dangerous Sexualities: Medico-Moral Politics in England since 1850*. (New York: Routledge, 2000); Harry Oosterhuis, *Stepchildren of Nature: Krafft-Ebing, Psychiatry, and the Making of Sexual Identity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000); Isabel Hull, *Sexuality, State, and Civil Society in Germany, 1700-1815*. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996).

<sup>86</sup> Mort, *Dangerous Sexualities*, xxii.

*Criminal*, two recent works on psychiatry and public policy in Germany, illustrate, this scholarship often focuses on how this expertise related to that of state institutions like the courts, the economy, or the military. Out of necessity, these studies pay much less attention to how the knowledge-claims of these psychiatric and criminological experts gained hegemonic influence in society at large. At times in this literature, there seems to be an implicit assumption that such hegemonic power automatically accompanies the colonization of major institutions of the state, allowing very little conceptual space for the contestation or social reorganization of the explanatory categories these experts articulate. Wetzell's scholarship demonstrates the usefulness of this line of inquiry while also indicating the ways that this dissertation might contribute to the historiography.

Wetzell's *Inventing the Criminal* traces the development of Western European criminological theory, but it does not address the public dissemination or reception this expert knowledge. Like Lerner, Wetzell offers a nuanced account of the web of relations between emergent medical expertise and other institutions claiming particular expertise—in this case, the German legal system. He traces the shifting relationship of medical and legal expertise, demonstrating that, regardless of whether their relation at a particular moment was cordial or antagonistic, each system of knowledge referred to the other on an equal footing “above” lay discourse. Even in disagreement, lawyers and doctors reinforced each other's standings as specialized experts whose knowledge deserved particular consideration. Wetzell's work often ends up summarizing these dialogues; we are left wondering how these discourses, which gained a great deal of strength from their intensely self-referential nature (allowing claims of objectivity) interacted with popular institutions outside of the state. Such work presents powerful accounts of the genealogies

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of expert medical knowledge and its relation to other emergent professional expertises, but little to no consideration of public contestation of these categories of understanding.

While this dissertation focuses on how reporters constructed their stories rather than on the popular reception of this reportage, it suggests that the Berlin press interacted with the criminological and psychiatric claims made by both state-affiliated and unaffiliated experts. An examination of exactly how the press presented such expertise will demonstrate one way that this knowledge was publically communicated.

Newspaper accounts of the 1920s often did not simply repeat the claims of such experts, but would variously bowdlerize, challenge, or expound upon the implications of the expertise deployed in a sensational case. By considering the press discourse as its own sort of expertise that also attempted to mobilize criminological and psychiatric expertise, this dissertation should add to our understanding of the popularization of this knowledge.

One perspective on psychiatric expertise that does consider its popular reception is the expansive literature on *Lustmord*.<sup>87</sup> This cultural analysis often produces compelling accounts of the popularization of that category of deviance. It is less useful,

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<sup>87</sup> See for example Hania Siebenpfeiffer, “*Böse Lust: Gewaltverbrechen in Diskursen der Weimarer Republik*” (Cologne: Böhlau, 2005); Kerstin Brückweh, *Mordlust*; Tatar, *Lustmord*; Beth Irwin Lewis, “Lustmord: Inside the Windows of the Metropolis,” *Berlin: Culture and Metropolis*, eds. Charles W. Haxthausen, and Heidrun Suhr (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1990), 111-40; Martin Lindner, “Der Mythos 'Lustmord': Serienmörder in der deutschen Literatur, dem Film und der bildenden Kunst zwischen 1892 und 1932,” *Verbrechen--Justiz--Medien: Konstellationen in Deutschland von 1900 bis zur Gegenwart*, eds. Joachim Lindner, and Claus-Michael Ort (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1999), 273-305; Mark Benecke, *Mordmethoden: Ermittlungen des bekanntesten Kriminalbiologen der Welt* (Bergisch Gladbach: Lübbe, 2002); Frank Robertz, *Serienmord. Kriminologische und kulturwissenschaftliche Skizzierungen eines ungeheuerlichen Phänomens* (Munich: Belleville, 2004); Maren Hoffmeister, “Der Körper des Täters in der Deutung des Lustmords,” *Kriminologisches Journal* 35.3 (2003): 212-23, and “Emotionen Im Fokus Des Deutungsmusters Lustmord,” *Paragrana* 20.1 (2011): 121-127; Eva Bischoff, “‘Between Animal Instinct and Morality’: The Construction of White Masculinity in Medico-psychiatric Discourse in Weimar Germany,” in *Historicising Whiteness: Transnational Perspectives on the Construction of an Identity*, ed. Katherine Ellinghaus, Melbourne University conference and seminar series 15 (Melbourne: RMIT Publishing, 2007), 427-35, and “Mee/at Your Neighbors: Dangerous Encounters in Weimar Germany,” in *Perspectives on Endangerment*, eds. Graham Huggan, and Stephan Klasen (Hildesheim: Georg Olms, 2005), 97-108.

however, in creating a nuanced understanding of the press in this sort of case. This analysis generally ignores differences among various papers' coverage in order to argue for a particular hegemonic *Lustmord* discourse. Similarly, because this analysis focuses on the cultural construction of the *Lustmörder*, it almost uniformly (and understandably, given the focus of this research) ignores the political motives which also drove the press in its coverage. This dissertation considers several cases often cited in *Lustmord* studies, most notably Haarmann and Kürten; by considering which papers in particular deployed the *Lustmord* term and to what end, this work hopes to add additional nuance to this literature.

Scholarship aimed directly at understanding the modern judicial apparatus, meanwhile, seems to have produced more substantial press analysis than either the genealogies of psychiatry and criminology discussed above. Foucault's foundational work has again been vital here. His argument that the rituals and institutions of criminal justice were inscribed with power has encouraged historians to more thoroughly consider the cultural underpinnings of crime and punishment norms themselves, producing some outstanding scholarship.<sup>88</sup> Court records have offered access to the mentality and experience of the accused and the assumptions and practices of the court systems which prosecuted them. These studies have convincingly argued that courts are closely linked to processes of social discipline which have created the modern state and the modern citizen, and several of these studies have suggested that the popular press played a notable role in this process.

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<sup>88</sup> Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage Books, 1995); Richard Evans, *Rituals of Retribution: Capital Punishment in Germany, 1600-1987* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996); van Dülmen, *Entdeckung des Individuums*; J. Sharpe, *Crime in Early Modern England, 1550-1750* (London: Longman, 1984); Garthine Walker, *Crime, Gender, and Social Order in Early Modern England* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

For example, in examining the relationship between court testimony and print narratives in seventeenth century England, Malcolm Gaskill argues that journalistic accounts affected popular expectations about how crime should be interpreted and discussed.<sup>89</sup> Such studies are tremendously useful for demonstrating the close relationship between popular opinion and norms of reportage during these periods. As both Uwe Danker and Julius Ruff have observed, the reportage of crime and prosecution can have cultural effects that are quite distinct from those of the judicial process itself;<sup>90</sup> that is, the cultural impact of a crime and its attendant punishment stems more from its popular representation than from the crime's specifics. Similar useful work has also appeared in analysis of the French state's juridical apparatus.<sup>91</sup>

Again, this analysis of the disciplinary mechanisms of the justice system benefits greatly by increasing its scope from the juridical apparatus itself to the media which could popularize this discourse. Nevertheless, the focus in these accounts continues to be primarily on the popular reception of this reportage rather than the relationship of press to penal power. I believe that the following analysis will contribute to our understanding of the sometimes adversarial relationship between reporters and the Weimar Republic's judicial power. More broadly, I hope to demonstrate the interpretive advantages of considering reportage as a form of expertise in relation to the medical-psychiatric-juridical expertises discussed above: this approach may provide insights into the popularization of such knowledge that these previous works have not yet addressed.

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<sup>89</sup> Malcolm Gaskill, *Crime and Mentalities in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000). See also Ruff, *Violence*, 38-44.

<sup>90</sup> Uwe Danker, *Räuberbanden im alten Reich um 1700: Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte von Herrschaft und Kriminalität in der frühen Neuzeit*, 2 Vols (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1988), 1:15; Ruff, *Violence*.

<sup>91</sup> Robert Nye, *Crime, Madness, and Politics in Modern France: The Medical Concept of National Decline* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984); Ann-Louise Shapiro, *Breaking the Codes: Female Criminality in Fin-de-Siècle Paris* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996).

Having more clearly delineated the historiographical position of this work, I will provide more insight into the precise structure and specific arguments of my study. To better contextualize my case studies, the first chapter of this work offers a more detailed picture of the Berlin newspaper scene at the beginning of the Weimar Republic. This chapter focuses both on the political perspectives of individual newspapers and the occasionally intense animosities between certain papers. In addition to noting distinctions between newspapers, I will also emphasize their common characteristics in the professionalization of the German media, particularly an unusually strong belief among reporters that their task was to educate the public. By understanding the varied perspectives that different city papers held, we will be better equipped to understand how divergent political positions could lead different newspapers to produce competing explanations for sensational crimes.

Of particular interest here will be the tumultuous events of January 1919. This period saw disastrous political violence flare up within the city. This street-fighting deeply strained relations among the left-wing Berlin newspapers, and these papers would continually read these tensions into their coverage of the sensational crimes analyzed in this study. Perhaps even more importantly, a close analysis of the relationship between newspaper coverage and the specific violence in Berlin in January 1919 suggests that Berlin's left wing political newspapers, often writing in a sensational manner, tangibly influenced the development of these events. This case study also suggests how the dual

impetuses towards writing in a sensational style and attempting to educate the public might interact in a political context.

My second chapter is a case study of the 1921 Karl Grossmann case, one of the first of several infamous serial murder cases during the decade. The Grossmann case occurred in Berlin's working-class Friedrichshain district, and it thus offers an excellent opportunity to observe how the Berlin press presented and interacted with the location of a sensational crime. As suggested in this introduction, most of Berlin's newspapers covered the events in Friedrichshain in a way that emphasized the reporter's specialized ability to travel within and understand a crime location that was too dangerous for the lay reader to explore or understand unaided. Such reporting suggests a claim to a sort of expertise of location, an ability to navigate the labyrinthine city. At the same time, important distinctions appeared in how, exactly, various papers presented the Friedrichshain area, and these varied conceptions generally mapped onto political differences between the papers. Rather than producing a single concept of Berlin for readers, as Peter Fritzsche's *Reading Berlin* interestingly suggests, different papers produced quite different conceptions of the city.

In the third chapter I conduct case studies of the 1924 trial of Fritz Haarmann and the investigation of Karl Denke in order to explore the political dynamics of sensational reporting. Coverage of these cases occurred almost simultaneously. The Haarmann case presents a tremendous example of the fraught relationship between the state's policing and judicial instruments and the mass media during the Weimar Republic. Haarmann had worked as a police informant even as he was committing murders, and the police and courts attempted to cover up this embarrassing fact following his apprehension. During

the trial, journalist Theodor Lessing deemed the proceedings a show trial with Haarmann's fate already sealed. While Lessing was banned from the courtroom, different Berlin papers used the Haarmann trial to advance a variety of political agendas. This case, then, demonstrates that papers often read these sensational crime events in ways that supported their own particular, long-standing political interests. Introducing the Denke case into this analysis demonstrates how the media worked to construct political narratives out of sensation. Denke's cannibalism was read back into the actions of Haarmann and Grossman, who may have been cannibals but likely were not; given these assumptions, Berlin's papers drew a variety of lessons either in support or condemnation of the republican form of government.

My fourth chapter examines the famous case and trial of Peter Kürten, which occurred in Düsseldorf, late in the Weimar Republic. This case offers a tremendously rich amount of material, and I will consider both the periods during the 1929 police pursuit of the Kürten, when speculation as to the killer's identity was rampant, and during the 1931 trial of Kürten, when the press focused on Kürten's motivations. In analyzing coverage of the pursuit of the murderer, I will focus on sensational coverage as a genre. I noted above that sensationalism employs certain narrative forms, and here I will consider how this reportage developed characters such as the intrepid reporter and the wraith-like *Düsseldorfer Mörder*. I will then demonstrate how this image of the murderer, fashioned from press reports, became central to Kürten's own challenge of psychiatrists' analysis of him following his capture.

Taken together, these case studies should demonstrate that the sensational reporting of crime in Weimar Berlin involved much more than the cynical manipulation

of the masses or debased attempts to generate profit. By examining the internal logic and motivations behind these press reports, I hope to demonstrate that the Berlin press attempted to use these events to establish reportage as its own sort of expertise. This work should contribute to the historiography of sensationalism by focusing on what these sensational texts tell us about the journalists who wrote them and the newspapers that printed them, rather than what sensationalism might suggest about social norms or desires among the general public. This work will also benefit the growing field of Weimar Berlin press analysis, which has tended to focus on explicitly political news rather than what may at first appear to be superfluous or fantastical reporting. Finally, this research hopes to add to the historiography of psychiatric and criminological expertise by considering how newspapers grappled with these types of ascendant expertise during sensational trials.

**CHAPTER ONE:**  
**HISTORICAL CONTEXT**  
**AND THE PROFESSIONALIZATION OF THE BERLIN PRESS**

In his famous lecture “Politics as Vocation,” delivered in January 1919 during the birth of the Republic, Max Weber sympathized with the plight of the journalist. As “the most important representative of the demagogic species,” the journalist was essential to the political process. Yet, in Weber’s estimation, the genius of good journalism went unappreciated by the public. “The journalist belongs to a sort of pariah caste, which is always estimated by ‘society’ in terms of its ethically lowest representative.” In Weber’s opinion, this lowest representative was certainly the sensationalist: “the publishers as well as the journalists of sensationalism have gained fortunes but certainly not honor.” He did not dismiss the sensationalist genre out of hand, however, but rather suggested that “thus far, sensationalism has not been the road to genuine leadership or to responsible management of politics. How conditions will further develop remains to be seen.”<sup>1</sup>

Political conditions were further developing rather chaotically at the time of Weber’s January 28 remarks. Just two weeks earlier, Berlin had been beset by vicious and wide-spread street-fighting between revolutionary workers and right-wing paramilitary troops whose attacks had been blessed by the Majority Socialist government. As this chapter will argue, Berlin’s left-wing press had played an important role in the

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<sup>1</sup> Max Weber, “Politics as a Vocation” in *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, eds. Hans H. Gerth, Charles W. Mills, and Bryan S. Turner (London: Routledge, 1991), 96-97.

development of this bloody situation, largely through sensationalized reporting. These press organs, in particular the socialist *Vorwärts* and *Freiheit* and the communist *Rote Fahne*, developed powerful, competing narratives about what constituted real socialist revolution for Germany. These clashing narratives not only tangibly affected the outcomes of Berlin's January 1919 street-fighting, but they also continued to organize later stories that were not explicitly political, including the sensational serial murder cases studied later in the following chapters.

Weber's remarks also underscored a social dynamic that troubled Germany's reporters at the start of the 1920s: much of the German public, and many intellectual elites in particular, had very little respect for reporting as a vocation. Reportage was far more difficult than scholarship, Weber proposed, as reporters faced daily deadlines, "graver temptations," and needed to exercise discretion in choosing what to report. Such pressures certainly produced irresponsible journalism at times. Even though most journalists were honorable, Weber reflected, "irresponsible journalistic accomplishments and their often terrible effects are remembered," while journalistic triumphs were forgotten. As a result, the public had been conditioned "to regard the press with a mixture of disdain and pitiful cowardice."<sup>2</sup>

Weber's commentary on German public distaste for journalists during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries is generally borne out by historical scholarship. Certainly, many intellectual and political elites were dismissive of the occupation, and the mass, ad-based press was the most criticized of all the journalistic types. Such negative views of the press would have been particularly galling to German journalists given the way that German journalism had professionalized in the nineteenth century. As I will

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<sup>2</sup> Weber, "Politics as a Vocation," 98

argue in this chapter, German journalists understood their mission to be one of educating the public about the meaning of events in addition to providing factual accounts of those events. The facts of a case, from this perspective, were conduits through which the reporter could provide the reader with the correct world view. We will certainly see this perspective borne out in the socialist reporting of the 1918/19 Revolution, discussed in the latter half of this chapter.

I suggest that journalists attempted to assert their own specialized expertise in sensational cases in part to justify their profession in the face of public distaste and elite dismissal. Claims of specialized authority were attempts to add status and respect to work which most German readers during this period viewed primarily as entertainment.<sup>3</sup> These journalists believed they were doing far more than simply exciting the masses. The idea that German newspaper journalism was a sort of specialized, applied knowledge that should better society was an important aspect of the German reporter's worldview, and it originated in the political reporting of the nineteenth century.

In order to understand sensational reportage in 1920s Berlin, then, it will be useful to explore the development of German journalism during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The first half of this chapter will consider the significant changes that German newspapers underwent during this period. It will also examine how German journalism professionalized, with an eye towards how journalists understood their own profession. I will discuss the various ways that these journalists were publically perceived, noting the friction between journalistic self-conception and journalistic public images. I will further consider differences amongst journalists themselves, particularly

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<sup>3</sup> E.g. Gideon Reuveni, "Reading, Advertising, and Consumer Culture in the Weimar Period" in *Mass Media, Culture and Society in Twentieth-Century Germany*, eds. Karl Führer and Corey Ross (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 209.

between adherents to an older style of political reporting and writers for the emergent mass press. The second half of the chapter aims to demonstrate how these aspects of journalistic culture affected reporting during a major political crisis. I will examine in detail the important role of Berlin's left-wing press from October 1918 through January 1919, focusing specifically on how sensationalism interacted with the reporter's need to educate and enlighten the readership.

When the German government removed its onerous press tax in 1874, the German newspaper became a profitable business. Prior to that point, the German news press had catered especially towards elites and focused heavily on national politics.<sup>4</sup> Certainly, books and calendars had become increasingly available to the wider German public during the late eighteenth century, but the newspaper itself had been the province of the economic and educational elite.<sup>5</sup> Without the press tax and with improvements in printing technology,<sup>6</sup> however, new papers sprang up, readership expanded, and total

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<sup>4</sup> For more discussion of how German journalists interacted with German society in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, see Frederik Ohles, *Germany's Rude Awakening: Censorship in the Land of the Brothers Grimm* (Kent: Kent State University Press, 1992); James Retallak, "From Pariah to Professional? The Journalist in German Society and Politics, from the Late Enlightenment to the Rise of Hitler," in *German Studies Review* 16, no. 2 (May, 1993): 175-223; Daniel Moran, *Toward the Century of Words. Johann Cotta and the Politics of the Public Realm in Germany, 1795- 1832* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990); Walter Homberg, *Zeitgeist und Ideenschmuggel: Die Kommunikationsstrategie des Jungen Deutschland* (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1975).

<sup>5</sup> Rudolf Schenda, *Die Lesestoffe der kleinen Leute: Studien zur populären Literatur im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert* (Munich: Beck, 1976), 28–29. For a very detailed study of Germany's popular reading revolutions, also see Rudolf Schenda, *Volk ohne Buch: Studien zur Sozialgeschichte der populären Lesestoffe 1770-1910* (Frankfurt am Main: V. Klostermann, 1970); and Rolf Engelsing, *Analphabetentum und Lektüre: Zur Sozialgeschichte des Lesens in Deutschland zwischen feudaler und industrieller Gesellschaft* (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1973).

<sup>6</sup> Particularly important were the arrival of the cylinder press in 1814 and new rotational presses in the 1870s, the latter being nearly 200 times more efficient than the previous twin flat plates method of printing. See Horst Heenemann, *Die Auflagenhöhen der deutschen Zeitungen: Ihre Entwicklung und ihre Probleme* (Berlin:Heenemann, 1929).

circulation increased continuously through the 1920s.<sup>7</sup> From 1881 to 1932, Germany's total newspaper titles grew from about 2,400 to 4,700, more than the combined total of the British and French press.<sup>8</sup>

German papers also began to rely more on advertisement sections than subscription sales; ad profits allowed papers to decrease their prices, making these papers more affordable for Germany's quickly growing and increasingly literate working-class.<sup>9</sup> This ad-based profit model also encouraged the press to focus on local sales and regional news, as most advertisers were based locally rather than nationally.<sup>10</sup> This local-focus trend held true within Berlin as well. By the time of the Weimar Republic, the city, in addition to its major daily papers, also fielded over 30 district papers, each focusing almost entirely on specifically local business and concerns.<sup>11</sup> Individual German newspapers also began publishing more frequently; whereas in 1880 most papers had appeared at most three times per week, by the First World War almost half of Germany's papers appeared daily.<sup>12</sup> The importance of ad revenue has also made it difficult to

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<sup>7</sup> Jürgen Wilke, *Grundzüge der Medien- und Kommunikationsgeschichte: von den Anfängen bis ins 20. Jahrhunderts* (Cologne, 2000), 259. For an argument that journalists' own lobbying was influential in the liberalization of the press law in 1874, see Robert Keyserling, "Bismarck and the Freedom of the Press in Germany 1866-1890," *Canadian Journal of History* 11, no. 1 (1976):31-33.

<sup>8</sup> Bernhard Fulda, *Press and Politics in the Weimar Republic* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 13.

<sup>9</sup> This process is described in Stephan Schreder, *Der Zeitungleser. Eine soziologische Studie mit besonderer Berücksichtigung der Zeitungslerserschaft Wiens als Inauguraldissertation*, (Vienna: Verlag des Verfassers, 1936), 29. Also important to the growth of advertising's influence were the advertising reforms of 1850, see Corey Ross, *Media and the Making of Modern Germany: Mass Communications, Society, and Politics from the Empire to the Third Reich* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2008), 22-23. More generally speaking, the popularization of the German print media stemmed, like most changes to media systems, from a complicated mix of cultural and technological change; for more discussion of this idea with reference to other contexts, see Asa Briggs and Peter Burke, *A Social History of the Media* (Cambridge: Polity, 2005), 1-12.

<sup>10</sup> For more discussion of Germany's localized press, see Otto Groths, *Die Zeitung. Ein System der Zeitungskunde (Journalistik)* (Mannheim: J. Bensheimer, 1928), 203-257.

<sup>11</sup> Thomas Friedrich, "Die Berliner Zeitunglandschaft am Ende der Weimarer Republik" in *Berlin 1932. Berlin 1932: Das letzte Jahr der Weimarer Republik: Politik, Symbole, Medien*, eds. Diethard Kerbs and Henrick Stahr (Berlin: Edition Hentrich, 1992), 81-117.

<sup>12</sup> Rudolf Stöber, *Die erfolgverführte Nation: Deutschlands öffentliche Stimmungen 1866 bis 1945* (Stuttgart: Steiner, 1998), 84.

calculate precise circulation totals for these papers during the 1920s, as these numbers were often exaggerated to impress potential advertisers. Nevertheless, Fulda's investigations have suggested that total circulation in Germany was at least 20 million by 1930,<sup>13</sup> with actual readership certainly much higher, given the contemporary habit of sharing single papers among multiple readers.

With this rapid growth came cultural changes to the German practice of reportage, as coverage of local events and entertainment news began to outstrip a focus on political reporting.<sup>14</sup> The distinctly German style of reporting during the nineteenth century had been heavily influenced by both the Napoleonic occupation and Germany's 1848 Revolution. The Napoleonic Wars had produced a political press (*Meinungspresse*) in Germany that saw simple recaps of events as a "meager, inane, and feeble" method of reportage.<sup>15</sup> Instead, many reporters came to believe that the job of the press in the absence of basic freedoms was to make judgments and educate readers.<sup>16</sup>

The idea that the press needed to educate readers only grew as German literacy expanded in the nineteenth century. German literacy did grow quite rapidly: while in 1764 about 15 percent of German-speaking territories could read, by 1830 the number had climbed to 40 percent.<sup>17</sup> By the time of unification, literacy rates topped 70 percent and kept rising.<sup>18</sup> This growth in public literacy meant more access to newspapers for the

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<sup>13</sup> Fulda, *Press and Politics*, 14. For more estimates on circulation numbers from a contemporary source, see Gerhard Muser, *Statistische Untersuchung über die Zeitungen Deutschlands, 1885-1914* (Leipzig: E. Reinicke, 1918).

<sup>14</sup> The characteristics of the earlier German newspapers are discussed in Karl Schottenloher, *Flugblatt und Zeitung: Ein Wegweiser durch das gedruckte Tagesschrifttum* (Berlin: R. C. Schmidt & co, 1922) ; see also Johannes Weber, "Strassburg, 1605: the Origins of the Newspaper in Europe," *German History* 24, no. 3 (2006): 387-412.

<sup>15</sup> Konrad Dussel, *Deutsche Tagespresse im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert* (Münster: LIT, 2011), 25–6.

<sup>16</sup> Ross, *Media and the Making*, 21.

<sup>17</sup> Thomas Nipperdey, *Deutsche Geschichte 1800-1866*, 2d ed. (Munich: C.H. Beck, 1984), 587.

<sup>18</sup> Retallak, "From Pariah to Professional?" 179.

lower classes, who elites often viewed as unable to make mature judgments about complicated political events without aid.

Thus, from the late eighteenth century onwards, liberal journalists in particular believed that proper political journalism should educate the oblivious, recently literate masses. For some of these journalists, this education was also a means of liberation, a way to challenge state authority. Karl Biedermann understood his *Deutsche Allgemeine Zeitung* as a cudgel to beat back demagoguery and political lies.<sup>19</sup> Karl Phillip Moritz, editor of the *Vossische Zeitung*, the Berlin paper that by the end of the First World War was the elder statesmen of the German press, stated that the newspaper should not simply report novelties. Instead, the paper must “be a mouthpiece through which one can preach to the people and force the voice of truth into both the palaces of the mighty and the hovels of the lowly.”<sup>20</sup>

Certainly, many early nineteenth century German journalists were not as eager as Moritz to challenge the state. Conservative German journalists tended to distrust mass readership to such a degree that they began to blame its excessive reading (*Lesesucht*) for social and political unrest-- these readers were too ignorant to distinguish objectivity from partisanship, the thinking went.<sup>21</sup> Of course, conservative journalists were something of a rare species in the nineteenth century, where almost all the major names in journalism were liberals.<sup>22</sup> The notable exception to the general ascendancy of the liberal press was Bismarck’s successful press manipulation, particularly the Ems

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<sup>19</sup> Karl Biedermann, *Mein Leben und ein Stück Zeitgeschichte: 2, 1849-1886*. (Breslau: S. Schottlaender, 1886), 192-215.

<sup>20</sup> Karl Moritz, “Ideal einer vollkommnen Zeitung,” 1784, excerpted in Elger Blühm and Rolf Engelsing, *Die Zeitung. Deutsche Urteile und Dokumente von den Anfängen bis zur Gegenwart* (Bremen, 1967), 124-131.

<sup>21</sup> James Sheehan, *German History, 1770-1866* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), 215.

<sup>22</sup> Retallak, “From Pariah to Professional?”, 196, 204

Telegram affair, but as a rule, the German press in general maintained classically liberal sympathies.<sup>23</sup>

Even the less politically-ardent liberal journalists believed they should provide general knowledge to the public, serving as both critic and judge of the material they chose to present.<sup>24</sup> Famed publisher Johann Cotta, for example, urged that the press must “define and institutionalize a realm of action” that would value both intellectual independence and political loyalty.<sup>25</sup> A journalist who had previously worked as a reporter in England remarked on how the German journalistic self-perception differed from the English perspective to which he was accustomed: “the German newspaper writer prefers to regard himself as an intellectual.”<sup>26</sup> Generally speaking, then, the nineteenth century German journalistic ideal was to apply expertise altruistically for the betterment of society.

That so many German journalists felt this way should not be surprising once we consider their social origins, which were quite similar to those of German lawyers, doctors, and other intellectual professionals in the nineteenth century. Jörg Requate’s

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<sup>23</sup> For discussion of Bismarck’s press exploits, see particularly Robert Keyserlingk, *Media Manipulation: The Press and Bismarck in Imperial Germany* (Montreal: International Publishers Representatives, 1977); Irene Fischer-Frauenthien, *Bismarck’s Pressepolitik* (Münster: C.J. Fahle, 1963); Eberhard Naujoks, “Bismarck und die Organisation der Regierungspresse,” *Historische Zeitschrift* 205, no.1 (1967): 46-80. Despite Bismarck’s successes, the German government during the Kaiserreich spent surprisingly little on its press budget and was far from cutting edge in its press relations, see Bernd Söseman, “Publizistik in staatlicher Regie,” in *Bismarck und seine Zeit*, ed. Johannes Kunisch (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 1992), 300-305.

<sup>24</sup> Wolfgang Martens, “Die Geburt des Journalisten in der Aufklärung,” *Wolfenbütteler Studien zur Aufklärung* 1 (1974): 84. In the late eighteenth century context, this particularly meant the application of statistical analysis to society: see Hans Erich Bödeker, “Journals and Public Opinion. The Politicization of the German Enlightenment in the Second Half of the Eighteenth Century,” in *The Transformation of Political Culture: England and Germany in the Late Eighteenth Century*, ed. Eckhart Hellmuth (London: German Historical Institute, 1990), 423-445.

<sup>25</sup> Moran, *Toward the Century*, 18.

<sup>26</sup> Cited in Jörg Requate, *Journalismus als Beruf: Entstehung und Entwicklung des Journalistenberufs im 19. Jahrhundert: Deutschland im internationalen Vergleich* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1995), 155.

extensive study of nineteenth century German journalists is particularly helpful here. While Requate's work relies primarily on well-preserved archives, and thus does not consider Berlin for the most part, he nevertheless paints a vivid picture of the more than 800 German journalists he studies. In Requate's findings, for most of the nineteenth century, journalists came primarily from educated middle-class homes, with approximately 80 percent of them having graduated from university and over 50 percent holding doctorates.<sup>27</sup> German journalism was also an overwhelming male occupation, particularly through the end of the nineteenth century. One 1905 study estimated that only 3.5 percent of German political journalists were women, and this represented significant growth from a decade earlier.<sup>28</sup> For much of the nineteenth century, then, German journalists tended to emerge from and belong to the *Bildungsbürgertum*, the educated bourgeois social stratum which was also disproportionately reflected in newspaper readership.<sup>29</sup>

Nevertheless, journalism was slow to develop as a full-time or life-long pursuit in Germany, relative to the English and American cases. Most of these highly educated German journalists had tried other professions before beginning as professional news writers, and many went on to other careers after trying their hand at journalism.<sup>30</sup> Particularly in the mid-nineteenth century, many German journalists expressed frustration at their working conditions, low pay, and particularly their public image. For example, the great classicist Theodor Mommsen, who edited the *Spenerische Zeitung* during the

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<sup>27</sup> Requate, *Journalismus als Beruf*, 142-145. Requate's research here supports the much earlier, somewhat more speculative findings of German Zeitungswissenschaft work on the topic; see Kurt Brunöhler, *Die Redakteure der mittleren und größeren Zeitungen im heutigen Reichsgebiet von 1800 bis 1848* (Ph.D. diss, University of Leipzig, 1933); and Rudolf Oebsger-Röder, *Untersuchungen über den Bildungsstand der deutschen Journalisten* (Bottrop, 1933).

<sup>28</sup> Eliza Ichenhäuser, *Die Journalistik als Frauenberuf* (Berlin: Verlag der Frauen-Rundschau, 1905).

<sup>29</sup> Ross, *Media and Making*, 22.

<sup>30</sup> Requate, *Journalismus als Beruf*, 209-212.

1848 Revolution, called journalism so “spiritually dissipating” and “disreputable” that it would have ruined him had he not escaped the profession.<sup>31</sup> The frequency with which these journalists changed their jobs has made it difficult to determine the precise number of nineteenth century German journalists, but Nipperdey’s research suggests that by 1904, more than 4,600 journalists were active in Germany.<sup>32</sup>

The 1848 Revolution politicized the German press still further. The Revolution created an explosion of papers with explicitly defined political agendas.<sup>33</sup> While the number of newspapers appearing in the German Confederation before 1848 has been estimated at 1,000 (of which perhaps 100 were political), by 1850 this number had ballooned to 1,500, with the vast majority of new additions being heavily political.<sup>34</sup> In the following years, these papers often became connected to political parties as official organs, and even when this did not occur, newspapers were generally overtly committed to specific political convictions.<sup>35</sup> Berlin, as the seat of the Prussian Landtag and eventually the German Reichstag, was home to a particularly large portion of these publications.

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<sup>31</sup> Mommsen to Henzen, April 5, 1848, cited in Rolf Engelsing, *Der literarische Arbeiter* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1976), 408. For similar expressions of frustration from famous German journalists, see *ibid.*, 403-409.

<sup>32</sup> Nipperdey, *Deutsche Geschichte 1866-1918*, 1: 805.

<sup>33</sup> During the Revolution, the Diet of the German Confederation decreed an end to press censorship; several German states followed suit, including Saxony (March 9), Austria (March 15), Prussia (March 17) and Bavaria (June 4). Of course, other restrictions and penalties remained and were used to repress newspapers during the reaction. See Kurt Koszyk, *Deutsche Presse im 19. Jahrhundert* (Berlin: Colloquium Verlag, 1966), 120-26.

<sup>34</sup> Hans-Ulrich Wehler. *Deutsche Gesellschaftsgeschichte*, V 2 (Munich: C.H. Beck, 1987), 528-529. This process is also discussed in Nipperdey, *Deutsche Geschichte*, v.1 798-811.

<sup>35</sup> Friedrich Stamper, *Erfahrungen und Erkenntnisse. Aufzeichnungen aus meinem Leben* (Cologne: Verlag für Politik und Wirtschaft, 1957).

Most of these post-1848 newspapers considered high politics—the national rather than the local—as the appropriate focus of reportage.<sup>36</sup> They also included far more editorials and perspectives from journalists than did contemporary reporting in England or the United States, which were generally more report-oriented. For example, several German observers of American Civil War coverage were appalled at American papers’ emphasis on reports rather than essays, commentaries, and editorials.<sup>37</sup> As the German press continued to develop, then, its journalists generally maintained the belief that the reporter must educate the audience as well as “just” relate the news. Implicit in this perspective was a *Bildungsbürgertum* belief in the power of education and knowledge to improve society, as well as the assumption that the journalist could deliver such enlightenment to the reading public.

The role of the Socialist Party (SPD) press during the Kaiserreich is worth noting in particular here.<sup>38</sup> In his “Politics as Vocation” speech, Weber had argued that only in the SPD press did the journalist have a favorable opportunity to reach official party positions.<sup>39</sup> This press, with its Berlin flagship *Vorwärts*, was intensely political and clearly believed in the power of the press to educate the reader—yet unlike most other political papers of the time, this press was also notably sensational almost from its

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<sup>36</sup> For more discussion of this dynamic, see Hans-Wolfgang Wolter, *Generalanzeiger, das pragmatische Prinzip: zur Entwicklungsgeschichte und Typologie des Pressewesens im späten 19. Jahrhundert mit einer Studie über die Zeitungsunternehmungen Wilhelm Girardets (1838-1918)* (Bochum: Studienverlag Brockmeyer, 1981), 158-164.

<sup>37</sup> Michael Schudson, *The Power of News* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995), 72. Chalaby has interestingly argued that the American and English shift to heavily report-based journalism was a cultural development as much as an economic one. He suggests that the Anglo-American world had a weaker hierarchy of discursive forms than the European continent, where for example in France the essay had far greater prestige than the report. While Chalaby does not consider Germany, a similar self-perception seems to be true in the German case. Jean Chalaby, “Journalism as an Anglo-American Invention,” *European Journal of Communication* 11 (1996): 303-26.

<sup>38</sup> For much more detail, see Alex Hall, *Scandal, Sensation, and Social Democracy: The Spd Press and Wilhelmine Germany 1890-1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977).

<sup>39</sup> Weber, *Politics*, 97.

inception. While the Socialist press had been outlawed for a period during the Kaiserreich, after its return it aggressively pursued scandals aimed at embarrassing the government which was repressing the SPD. As Ferdinand Tönnies would later write of the SPD press in Wilhelmine Germany, “its exaggeration and distortion of the facts to the point of the grotesque was a reality which could not be denied.”<sup>40</sup> SPD politician and journalist Adolf Braun argued that this approach was necessary, for “the newspapers of the SPD are the most outstanding methods of agitation which the party has.”<sup>41</sup> Not surprisingly, the emphasis on scandal and sensation in the SPD press had its critics from within the party itself, although these criticisms varied from complaints that the press was too boring to concern it did not do enough to educate the readers.<sup>42</sup> As we will see, the ease with which the socialist press mobilized sensation in political reporting would be quite useful during the 1918/19 Revolution.

During the last three decades of the nineteenth century, German journalism became increasingly specialized. Journalistic roles diversified to include political reporters, foreign correspondents, theater critics, book review editors, and so on.<sup>43</sup> The physical space of the newsroom changed in accordance with the division of newspaper topics. Different rooms began to be assigned to staff who edited material based on the

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<sup>40</sup> Ferdinand Tönnies, *Der Kampf um das Sozialistengesetz 1878*. (Berlin: Springer, 1929), 69.

<sup>41</sup> cited in Anton Dang, *Die sozialdemokratische Presse Deutschlands* (Ph.D. diss, Frankfurt, 1928), 12.

<sup>42</sup> Hall, *Scandal*, 26.

<sup>43</sup> Charles McClelland, "Zur Professionalisierung der akademischen Berufe in Deutschland," 233-47 *Bildungsbürgertum im 19. Jahrhundert*, eds. in Werner Conze, Jürgen Kocka, Reinhart Koselleck, and Mario R. Lepsius (Stuttgart, 1985), 237.

topic, ranging from domestic policy, foreign affairs, business, front page news, and political reporting, with the editor in chief working from his own special room.<sup>44</sup>

After 1870, the number of journalists who had moved to journalism immediately following their education rose continuously, while the number of journalists who ventured on to other professional career steadily declined. For new journalists with little experience, pay was extremely low or even non-existent. However, particularly as the nineteenth century progressed, experienced correspondents and editors began to earn large salaries. By 1900, an experienced correspondent often earned between 10,000 and 20,000 marks per year, while the salary of the editor-in-chief of a large national paper might range from 40,000 to 50,000 marks.<sup>45</sup> These were substantial sums that, financially, would place such journalists in notable circles.

Nevertheless, many German elites continued to hold reporters in low esteem, much to the chagrin of journalists themselves. Before 1848, Germany's socially and politically privileged had tended to dismiss journalism as an unserious occupation, particularly relative to growing professions like medicine and science or what they deemed more literary forms of writing.<sup>46</sup> In 1843, King Friedrich Wilhelm IV of Prussia captured this sentiment when he claimed, "What I do not wish is the degradation of science and literature into journalism or that the latter should be placed in a position of equal dignity with the former."<sup>47</sup> Certainly, there was not just one elite perspective on

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<sup>44</sup>Jürgen Wilke, "The History and Culture of the Newsroom in Germany," *Journalism Studies* 4, no. 4 (2003):468.

<sup>45</sup> Koszyk, *Deutsche Presse*, 220-228.

<sup>46</sup> Lenore O'Boyle, "The Image of the Journalist in France, Germany, and England, 1815-1848," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 10, no. 3 (1968): 290-317. Also useful is A. Aspinall, "The Social Status of Journalists at the Beginning of the Nineteenth Century," *Review of English Studies*, 21, no. 83 (1945): 216-232.

<sup>47</sup> Cited in Carolyn Henderson, *Heinrich Leo: A Study in German Conservatism*. (PhD dissertation, University of Wisconsin, 1977), 111.

journalists: liberal elites often supported the mission (if not the writing style) of the journalist, particularly in the aftermath of 1848.<sup>48</sup> Conservative political elites, on the other hand, expressed increasing dismay about German newspapers as German journalism grew and further politicized following 1848.

Complaints about journalism from German educated elites included both stylistic critiques and concerns about the substance of reportage. In 1851, for example, philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer dismissed the journalistic style as “alarmist” and prone to “exaggeration of every sort.” Such writing was simply “their way of making themselves interesting.”<sup>49</sup> Other attacks referred to German journalists as, variously, shepherds, gypsies, and actors.<sup>50</sup> Complaints came from the left as well as the right: socialist Ferdinand Lassalle decreed that reporters were “men who are unqualified to be elementary school teachers and too slothful to be postal clerks.”<sup>51</sup> In the literary sphere, many German playwrights treated journalism as synonymous with base personal motives and hypocrisy.<sup>52</sup>

Still, the most relentless critics of the German press remained conservative leaders and thinkers (and even conservative journalists),<sup>53</sup> who seemed to equate the development of journalism with growth of liberalism.<sup>54</sup> These critiques often used the

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<sup>48</sup> Retallak, *From Pariah to Professional?* 177.

<sup>49</sup> Cited in Blühm and Engelsing, *Die Zeitung*, 181.

<sup>50</sup> Blühm and Engelsing, *Die Zeitung*.

<sup>51</sup> Ferdinand Lassalle, *Die Feste, die Presse und der Frankfurter Abgeordnetentag. Drei Symptome des öffentlichen Geistes* (Düsseldorf: Schaub'sche, 1863).

<sup>52</sup> Fentsch discusses a wide selection of this literature not simply limited to Freytag in Wilhelm Fentsch, *Journalismus und Journalisten im Drama von Gustav Freytag (1757 - 1848)* (Ph.D. diss, University of Münster, 1921).

<sup>53</sup> Retallak, *From Pariah to Professional?*, 189-202. For more analysis of the German conservative press during the nineteenth century, see Lothar Dittmer, *Beamtenkonservatismus und Modernisierung: Untersuchungen zur Vorgeschichte der Konservativen Partei in Preussen 1810-1848/49* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner, 1992).

<sup>54</sup> Heinz Schulze, *Die Presse im Urteil Bismarcks: Dargestellt auf Grund seines bisher publizierten Schrifttums, seiner Reden und Gespräche* (Leipzig: E. Reinicke, 1931).

language of class to make their political implications explicit. Conservative social historian Wilhelm Heinrich Riehl scoffed at journalists as “an intellectual proletariat” whose work was comparable to comic actors or unsalaried lecturers.<sup>55</sup> Several decades later Kaiser Wilhelm II also referred to German journalists as a “proletariat of school-leavers [*Abiturienten-proletariat*].<sup>56</sup> Meanwhile, in 1862, Bismarck famously dismissed journalism as the last resort for people who had failed to find their calling in life.<sup>57</sup>

German journalists were well aware of their negative image among many German elites. Writing at the beginning of his career, Maximilian Harden, who would later become a noted journalist in the Weimar Republic, lamented that “the position of the press in the land of poets and philosophers” was dire. Germans with cultural, political, and economic power looked down “not only on the true reporter, who nimbly hauls in reports and toils at them” but also scoffed at “everyone who is associated with the press.” Things had reached the point where being called a reporter was a “disreputable social designation.”<sup>58</sup>

The myriad of journalistic handbooks that appeared with increasing frequency after 1880 were full of advice on how to combat these negative perceptions through quality reportage. One such handbook noted that because a favorite pastime for Germans was complaining about newspapers, reporters should be especially careful about accuracy when analyzing events.<sup>59</sup> Another emphasized the importance of honor for the journalistic estate. Reporters had to avoid “scandal-seeking” and “dogmatism” in order to

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<sup>55</sup> Cited in Engelsing, *Massenpublikum*, 52.

<sup>56</sup> Cited in Johannes Frizenschaf, *Die Praxis des Journalisten: ein Lehr und Handbuch für Journalisten, Redakteure und Schriftsteller* (Leipzig: W. Fiedler, 1901), 57.

<sup>57</sup> cited in Richard Jacobi, *Der Journalist: Das Buch der Berufe. Eine Führer und Berater bei der Berufswahl*, vol. 8 (Hanover: J anecke, 1902), 168.

<sup>58</sup> Maximilian Harden, “Die Journalisten,” *Die Zukunft* 38 (March, 1902): 382-385.

<sup>59</sup> Frizenschaf, *Die Praxis des Journalisten*, 20.

present the reader with the truth while “respecting the law.”<sup>60</sup> These handbooks also often urged reporters to make certain their grammar and syntax was correct, as educated critics enjoyed attacking journalists for poor writing style, or *Zeitungsdeutsch*.<sup>61</sup> In general, these works valued journalism which accurately represented events, demonstrated a learned style, and, especially, acted for the betterment/education of the reader. To the extent that such handbooks condemned sensational style, they understood sensation to mean reports which were untrue or exaggerated, rather than reports which moved readers. This was what Theodor Barth, the famed editor of *Die Nation*, meant when he argued that the press needed to attract reader interest in order to properly inform the public, but counseled his fellow journalists to be wary as they navigated between the “Scylla of boredom” and the “Charybdis of sensationalism.”<sup>62</sup>

Thus, most German journalists’ self-conception remained largely positive in the face of criticism. Barth, for one, editorialized that journalism existed as both an art and a practice, contributing vitally to both literature and politics. From this perspective, the cultural isolation journalists faced guaranteed their creativity and political independence.<sup>63</sup> A detailed study of the fictional literature written by journalists found

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<sup>60</sup> Wehle, *Die Zeitung*, 149.

<sup>61</sup> Heinrich Keiter, *Praktische Winke für Schriftsteller und Zeitungs-korrespondenten; mit den neuen Gesetzen über das Urheberrecht und das Verlagsrecht* (Essen-Ruhr: Fredebeul & Koenen, 1905), 55. For similar appeals to journalists to focus on truth and principle, see e.g. Eugen Buchholz, *Aus der Praxis eines Redakteurs und Schriftstellers: Aus der Praxis - für die Praxis* (Danzig: Brüning, 1907); W. Drabitus, *Über den Klatsch und Quatsch in unseren Zeitungen. Eine Mahnung an die liberale Presse* (Berlin: Selbst-Verlag, 1885); Gustav Spiethoff, *Die Grossmacht Presse und das deutsche Schriftsteller-Elend : Ein Wort an alle Zeitungs-Verleger und Literaten Deutschlands aus Anlass des Falles Dr. Maron in Berlin* (Düsseldorf: Bagel, 1883).

<sup>62</sup> Theodor Barth, “Die Journalistik als Gewerbe und als Kunst,” *Die Nation* 5, no. 45 (August 1888): 628-629.

<sup>63</sup> Barth, “Die Journalistik,” 628.

that such works often treated journalists as heroes.<sup>64</sup> Similarly, one contemporary handbook's promise to its audience of journalists that "you alone will illustrate that in the present organization of society, journalism is a moral factor of the highest power" accurately represented a central thesis of most such work.<sup>65</sup> Thus, as German journalism professionalized at the end of the nineteenth century, it was marked both by reporters' belief that their specialized discourse could educate and better society by revealing truths to the general public, and by reporters' awareness that many German intellectual, political, and economic elites found their work distasteful at best and actually harmful to the public good at worst.

The journalistic style of political, national-level reportage aimed explicitly at bettering the reader came into friction with the type of reporting encouraged by the ad-based mass press that emerged towards the end of the nineteenth century. The mass press was overtly commercial, reporting on entertainment and local news that would appeal to both readers and advertisers. As such, established political papers often condemned this new style as "unpolitical."<sup>66</sup> Maximilian Harden complained that "people who have no idea about law or political economy proclaim themselves—both shamelessly and

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<sup>64</sup> Cecilia von Studnitz, *Kritik des Journalisten: ein Berufsbild in Fiktion und Realität* (Munich: K.G. Saur, 1983). Studnitz also found that fictional journalists hailed from lower classes much more often than did actual practicing journalists of the time.

<sup>65</sup> J.H. Wehle, *Die Zeitung: Ihre Organisation und Technik; Journalistisches Handbuch* (Vienna: A. Hartleben, 1883), 146.

<sup>66</sup> Wolter, *Generalanzeiger*, 8.

proudly—publicists.”<sup>67</sup> Unsurprisingly, German conservatives were even quicker to condemn the mass press as a deleterious distraction for upstanding society.<sup>68</sup>

Such complaints that the mass press was apolitical were somewhat wide of the mark, however. While most of the new ad-based press did not explicitly endorse a particular party and did not focus specifically on national politics, these papers did articulate particular political perspectives in their coverage.<sup>69</sup> The *Berliner Morgenpost*'s advertising claim to be “partisan, not party member” (*Parteinehmer, nicht Parteigänger*) was representative of this journalistic approach to politics.<sup>70</sup> For the most part, prior to the First World War, most of Berlin's major ad-reliant papers maintained a conservatively bourgeois perspective that was hostile to Social Democracy.<sup>71</sup> At the same time, it was true that by beginning of the war, German newspapers as a whole were spending less space on explicitly political coverage and much more on entertainment, advertisements local news.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> Harden, “Die Journalisten.” Similar complaints had marked the growth of the German press immediately following the removal of the press tax in 1874. E.g. historian Heinrich Wuttke lamented that because “any little entrepreneur” could now go into the press business, the quality of German reportage was rapidly declining. Heinrich Wuttke, *Die deutschen Zeitschriften und die Entstehung der öffentlichen Meinung: ein Beitrag zur Geschichte des Zeitungswesens* (Leipzig: J.W. Krüger, 1875), 101-105.

<sup>68</sup> See for example O. Arendt, “Der Amerikanismus in der Fach- und Tagespresse,” *Die Redaktion* (September 25, 1904): 298-299; W. Hammer, *Die Generalanzeigerpresse, ein Herd der Korruption* (Leipzig: Vollrath, 1912).

<sup>69</sup> Fulda, *Press and Politics*, 15.

<sup>70</sup> Peter Fritzsche, *Reading Berlin 1900* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996), 75-76.

<sup>71</sup> An especially good example of this was the *Berliner Lokal-Anzeiger* after Hugenberg assumed ownership of the Scherl-Verlag in 1916. The paper, despite claiming to be apolitical, in fact continuously pushed right-wing arguments and political perspectives. Hugenberg believed that papers over the long run would be unsuccessful if they explicitly represented a single party: Jörg Requate, “Medienmacht und Politik,” *AfS* 41 (2001): 93. Guratzsch provides a detailed account of the Hugenberg approach more generally, in Dankwart Guratzsch, *Macht durch Organisation: Die Grundlegung des Hugenbergschen Presseimperiums* (Düsseldorf: Bertelsmann Universitätsverlag, 1974), particularly 293-296.

<sup>72</sup> Gerd Meier, *Zwischen Milieu und Markt: Tageszeitungen in Ostwestfalen 1920-1970* (Paderborn: F. Schöningh, 1999), 53.

The tension between classic political reportage and the new, more commercial style also led to debates about whether specialized training was necessary for proper journalistic work. By the turn of the century, professional credentialing schools had appeared at universities in Berlin, Zurich, Cologne, and Heidelberg.<sup>73</sup> Journalists remained divided on the utility of such classes, however. The *Berliner Tageblatt* made the standard claim in favor of the experience-based approach to journalism when it urged against “laying down any compulsion in any direction for the only free profession.” Instructors should “give up the attempts to advance journalists’ training through institutes or seminars” and instead embrace “this wild, unregulated situation.”<sup>74</sup> Similarly, attempts to organize German journalists into associations proved a generally fraught enterprise. While various associations began to form at the turn of the century, these often splintered quite quickly over political differences.<sup>75</sup> Thus, compared to professions like medicine and law, German journalism remained somewhat less consolidated and quite ambivalent about professional training compared to on-the-job experience. At the same time, German journalists still usually had at least university training of some sort, and the broad impetus to educate the reader through reportage remained strong.

At the vanguard of Germany’s emerging commercial press were publishers Rudolf Mosse and August Sherl, both of whom were businessmen rather than journalists. Mosse had founded the *Berliner Tageblatt* in 1871 as a way to expand his advertising business, and the paper was aggressively priced at well under the average subscription

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<sup>73</sup> Rüdiger vom Bruch, “Zeitungswissenschaft zwischen Historie und Nationalökonomie. Ein Beitrag zur Vorgeschichte der Publizistik als Wissenschaft im späten deutschen Kaiserreich,” *Publizistik* 25 (1980): 579-607. A list of classes at some of these schools is presented in Richard Wrede, *Was heisst und wie werde ich Journalist?* (Berlin: R. Wrede, 1902).

<sup>74</sup> Cited in vom Bruch, “Zeitungswissenschaft,” 590.

<sup>75</sup> Retallak, “From Pariah to Professional?” 207.

paper.<sup>76</sup> By 1880, the *Tageblatt*'s circulation had reached 50,000, making it the most-read paper in Germany.<sup>77</sup> Over the following decades, the *Tageblatt* also introduced weekly supplements aimed at particular groups of readers; these sections included a home and garden section, a technical magazine, and a sports section. The paper took a left-liberal perspective, unlike the majority of Berlin's mass commercial press.

Further to the right was Scherl's own *Berliner Lokal-Anzeiger*. This paper first appeared in 1883, modeled in the style of British and United States dailies, meaning it primarily featured human interest stories and advertisements.<sup>78</sup> This paper, in addition to covering similar topics to the *Tageblatt* from a right-wing perspective, also published serialized novels within its pages to encourage reader loyalty. The *Lokal-Anzeiger* soon became Germany's most successful paper, with circulation reaching 150,000 within a few years of its founding.<sup>79</sup> The large circulation numbers for both the *Tageblatt* and *Lokal-Anzeiger* also speak to the growth, size, and receptiveness of the Berlin population, for these papers had a notably local focus and did not sell well outside of the Berlin area.<sup>80</sup>

Leopold Ullstein's press also entered this extremely competitive commercial fray in Berlin.<sup>81</sup> Ullstein's publishing structure departed from earlier publishing houses'

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<sup>76</sup> Elisabeth Kraus, *Die Familie Mosse* (Munich: C.H. Beck, 1999), 179.

<sup>77</sup> Dussel, *Tagespresse*, 86.

<sup>78</sup> Scherl's perspective on the press and his strategy with the *Lokal-Anzeiger* is detailed in Hans Erman, *August Scherl: Dämonie und Erfolg in Wilhelminischer Zeit* (Berlin: Universitas Verlag, 1954), 55-73.

<sup>79</sup> Ross, *Media and the Making*, 23.

<sup>80</sup> Similar business/journalistic ventures in other areas of Germany were not always so successful; Cologne in particular proved a risky location for new papers, see Jörg Requate, "Zwischen Profit und Politik," in *Grossbürger und Unternehmer: Die deutsche Wirtschaftselite im 20. Jahrhundert*, ed. Dieter Ziegler (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2000).

<sup>81</sup> In addition to the dailies discussed below, Ullstein also introduced the tremendously successful weekly *Berliner Illustrierte Zeitung* in 1891. This paper, as well as Scherl's similar *Die Woche*, will not be a focus for this dissertation, as they provided little if any coverage for any of the cases I study. However, they are extremely notable for helping to introduce high quality engravings, illustrations, and eventually, during Weimar, photography into press coverage of weekly trends and events. The BIZ's own editor discussed his

approaches to news: his press published a wide variety of print formats, from dailies to weeklies to illustrated papers to magazines, from the same publishing house.<sup>82</sup> This centralization meant that while the various papers remained independent, they shared both sources and technical resources. This approach quickly became common for the major Berlin publishing houses.

The Ullstein Verlag's two major Berlin newspapers were the *Berliner Morgenpost* and the *BZ am Mittag*. The *Berliner Morgenpost* first appeared in 1898 and focused on entertainment and local news while introducing important format changes. The paper provided readers with games and puzzles, and it emphasized accessibility with an easier-to-read layout. While the classic German newspaper had featured three evenly-spaced columns of dense text with small headlines, the new ad-based press like the *Morgenpost* ran larger, bold headlines and occasional illustrations, making use of white space and new type-faces to draw the reader's eye on the street. By 1900, the paper's circulation had already reached 250,000.<sup>83</sup> In 1904, Ullstein began publishing the *BZ am Mittag*, a daily which maintained an even more hectic reporting pace, focusing on a broad range of human interest and entertainment topics. The paper avoided explicitly political positions and relied on state-of-the-art presses and distribution systems to break local news stories ahead of its competitors.

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approach in interesting detail in Kurt Korf, "Die Berliner Illustrierte," in *50 Jahre Ullstein 1877-1927* (Berlin, 1927), noting that in his selection of stories to print, the appeal of an image could trump the importance of the news to which it was attached.

<sup>82</sup> Wilke, "Origins," 471.

<sup>83</sup> A. Bernstein, G Bernhard, and G Kauder. *50 Jahre Ullstein 1877-1927* (Berlin, 1927), 149-150.

The First World War expedited the growth of this sensational, commercial-based press, as reader demand for new information about the conflict led to numerous special editions sold exclusively on the street (a substantial departure from the traditional subscription-based German press).<sup>84</sup> Papers also increasingly used large headlines, a variety of typography, and what most newspapermen agreed was a more sensational tone. Such a tone came in part from the increased patriotism that many papers felt it necessary to demonstrate in war time.<sup>85</sup> The war also crippled newspapers' advertising revenue, leading to higher newspaper prices even as consumers had less money to spend. This hardship promoted cutthroat competition for readers amongst Berlin papers and also led to more use of the sensational genre.<sup>86</sup> As a result of this competition amongst papers for diminishing resources, the number of German newspapers declined precipitously over the course of the conflict, falling by 50 percent, even as readership actually grew slightly: readers was flocking to a few, large papers, such as the *Vossische Zeitung* and *Berliner Tageblatt*. However, the decline of Germany's smaller papers reversed following the war. The number of German newspapers rebounded by almost 100 percent between 1918 and the end of 1920.<sup>87</sup> Nevertheless, readership for most of these papers was small, while the major papers enjoyed growing readership. After the war ended, the Berlin press

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<sup>84</sup> Albrecht Blau, *Der Inseratenmarkt der deutschen Tageszeitung* (Berlin: Junker und Dünnhaupt, 1932), 59-60. For discussion of the role of the press during the lead-up to the war, and particularly the foreign stereotyping that appeared in many German papers during this period, see Bernhard Rosenberger, *Zeitungen als Kriegstreiber?: Die Rolle der Presse im Vorfeld des Ersten Weltkrieges* (Cologne: Böhlau, 1998).

<sup>85</sup> Ross, *Media and the Making*, 142.

<sup>86</sup> Marcus Mende, *Sensationalismus als Produktgestaltungsmittel: eine empirische Analyse über die verlegerische und journalistische Orientierung am Sensationsbedürfnis in der deutschen Presse zwischen 1914 und 1933* (Cologne: Botermann & Botermann, 1996).

<sup>87</sup> Bruno Rauecker, "Die Fachvereine des freien deutschen Schriftstellertums," in *Die geistigen Arbeiter, Teil 1, Freies Schriftstellertum und Literaturverlag, Schriften des Vereins für Sozialpolitik*, bd. 152, Teil 1, ed. Ludwig Sinzheimer (Munich, 1922), 182. See also Kurt Koszyk, *Deutsche Pressepolitik im Ersten Weltkrieg* (Düsseldorf: Droste, 1968).

continued to deploy the bold headlines and pictures that had become so prevalent during hostilities.

The 1920s Berlin press was also marked by, if anything, an even stronger local identity than it had exhibited before the war. The three Berlin papers with the largest circulation during this decade, the *Berliner Tageblatt*, the *Berliner Lokal-Anzeiger*, and the *Berliner Morgenpost*, sold almost all of their cumulative 1 million daily copies within the city itself.<sup>88</sup> As such, they tended to maintain a strict focus on Berlin events, only looking outside the city at events of extreme popular interest. After arch-conservative businessman Alfred Hugenberg had acquired the *Lokal-Anzeiger* in 1916, that paper listed still further to the right, while both the *Morgenpost* and *Tageblatt* continued to approach news from a moderate left perspective.<sup>89</sup>

The Berlin press in general remained intensely political, even as much of the press insisted on being labeled “non-partisan” (*parteilos*) to avoid offending readers.<sup>90</sup> Many such “*parteilos*” papers were actually actively hostile towards the Weimar Republic.<sup>91</sup> On the right, the *Neue Preussische Zeitung (Kreuzzeitung)*, *Der Tag*, and the *Deutsche Allgemeine Zeitung (DAZ)* had a cumulative daily circulation exceeding 170,000 in 1925.<sup>92</sup> Journalist Gerhard Schultze-Pfaelzer noted that sensational tabloids reported politics to “remarkable effect,” for “even if they hide their true faces behind a veil of

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<sup>88</sup> Peter de Mendelssohn, *Zeitungsstadt Berlin. Menschen und Mächte in der Geschichte der deutschen Presse* (Berlin: Ullstein, 1959), 243.

<sup>89</sup> Heinz-Dietrich Fischer (ed.), *Handbuch der politischen Presse 1480-1980* (Düsseldorf: Droste, 1981), 229.

<sup>90</sup> For more discussion of particulars, see Bernhard Fulda, “Industries of Sensationalism : German Tabloids in Weimar Berlin” in *Mass Media, Culture, and Society in Twentieth-Century Germany*, ed. Karl Führer (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006),

<sup>91</sup> Rudolf Stöber, “Emil Dovifat in der Weimarer Republik,” in *Emil Dovifat: Studien und Dokumente zu Leben und Werk*, eds. Bernd Söseman and Gunda Stöber (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1998), 69-92.

<sup>92</sup> Fulda, *Press and Politics*, 22.

gossip, in certain decisive cases they nonetheless come to the fore with their propaganda all the more crassly.”<sup>93</sup>

In the following chapters, I further suggest that the sensational mass press brought political readings to cases that were not explicitly political. In the Grossmann case, these papers’ political orientations were good predictors of their perspective on the location of the crime. In the Haarmann case, Berlin’s press mobilized Haarmann’s crimes to support their own political interests. In both the Denke and Kürten cases, several papers read the crimes in a way that challenged the competence of the German penal and juridical apparatus to police and protect its population.

During the 1920s, Berlin’s *Boulevardpresse* flourished. This street-based tabloid press, which depended wholly on ad revenue and street-sales, emphasized speed in reporting, often bragging to readers about how quickly they had discovered various bits of news.<sup>94</sup> Of these tabloids, Ullstein’s *BZ am Mittag* remained the most popular and influential, boasting a daily readership of over 180,000 in the early 1920s.<sup>95</sup> The premiere Berlin *Boulevardpresse* publication, this paper attempted to appeal to as wide an audience as possible, maintaining a moderate political perspective while devoting space to politics, local news, culture and entertainment, gossip, sports, business, and, of course, advertisements.<sup>96</sup> In 1919, the *12-Uhr-Blatt* appeared as a major competitor to the *BZ am Mittag*, using the same basic model, and in 1922, a major left-wing tabloid named the *Welt am Abend* began publishing.

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<sup>93</sup> Cited in Fulda, *Press and Politics*, 54.

<sup>94</sup> Gerhard Schultze-Pfaelzer, “Neue Formen des Meinungskampfes in der aktualisierten Zeitung,” *Deutsche Presse* 23 (1928).

<sup>95</sup> Fulda, *Press and Politics*, 25.

<sup>96</sup> For more description of the *BZ am Mittag*’s approach to reporting in Weimar, see Gustav Kauder, “Bezett — Bezett am Mittag! Die Geschichte eines neuen Zeitungstyps. Zeitgeist und Sportgeist,” in *50 Jahre Ullstein 1877-1927* (Berlin, 1927).

The *Boulevardpresse* papers were notable not only for their constant use of sensational tone but also for their exceptional growth, and Berlin's other papers began incorporating aspects of the tabloid press to maintain readership. By 1930, the street press had almost equaled the 1 million daily sales of the mass commercial dailies, while over the same period, the more subscription-based political papers saw their daily circulation decline moderately to just under 500,000 per day.<sup>97</sup> As such, by the middle years of the Republic, most of Berlin's more traditional papers had adopted aspects of the *Boulevardpresse* approach, including new sections dedicated to sports, cinema, and travel. These papers also began to concentrate more on Berlin's female readers, as women often made the decisions about what paper their household would subscribe to.<sup>98</sup> Women's sections thus became common, as did serialized novels. Changes to news page layouts continued trends towards larger headlines and more white space.<sup>99</sup> Coverage of murder and crime increased dramatically, creating the sense of a city beset by crime that was out of keeping with the actual numbers of crimes occurring.<sup>100</sup> Unsurprisingly, the general tone of such coverage was usually sensational.<sup>101</sup>

Amidst these trends towards more sensational writing and new layouts and topics, the German journalist's belief in the need to use reportage as a vessel for educating the reader persisted.<sup>102</sup> With the foundation of the Republic, many editors believed that

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<sup>97</sup> Fulda, *Press and Politics*, 34.

<sup>98</sup> Ross, *Media and the Making*, 143-144.

<sup>99</sup> A. Franke, "Das Gesicht der Zeitung," *Zeitungs-verlag: Fachblatt für das gesamte Zeitungswesen* 27 (October 29, 1926), 2327-2330.

<sup>100</sup> Sace Elder, *Murder Scenes: Normality, Deviance, and Criminal Violence in Weimar Berlin*, (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2010), 22-35.

<sup>101</sup> A. Esbach, "Die Sprache der Zeitung," *Zeitungs-verlag: Fachblatt für das gesamte Zeitungswesen* 27 (June 18, 1926), 1439-1442.

<sup>102</sup> This perception was true not only among journalists themselves but also within the German newspaper research community. The growing discipline of *Zeitungswissenschaft* in the 1920s saw itself as a scientific field examining what people learned and should learn from the media, and its scholars often understood

newspapers could play a vital role in educating new citizens. One of *BZ am Mittag*'s editors, Arthur Koestler, later explained that the starting point for a report was "the correspondent's *Weltanschauung*.... His job was not to report the news and facts... but to use facts as pretexts for venting his opinions and passing oracular judgments." The condescending view towards the reader as someone who needed the world explained also continued: "Facts,' a famous German editor said, 'are not fit for the reader when served raw; they had to be cooked, chewed, and presented in the correspondent's saliva.'"<sup>103</sup> Theodor Wolff, editor of the *Berliner Tageblatt*, concurred, explaining that Germans, "whose political maturity had been underdeveloped under its previous subordination, must be educated above all for new tasks, a new form of government, and new responsibilities," and the press should perform this task.<sup>104</sup> Georg Bernhard, editor of the *Vossische Zeitung* believed that the newspaper "wishes to bring events in the world to the attention of the reader from a particular point of view."<sup>105</sup> In Bernhard's view, the German reader understood his newspaper as "not merely a source of news information, but also an organ of instruction."<sup>106</sup>

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themselves as providing advice for journalists in their attempts to educate the public. Stefanie Averbeck, "The Post-1933 Emigration of Communication Researchers from Germany: The Lost Works of the Weimar Generation" in *European Journal of Communication* 16 (2001): 453. See also Stefanie Averbeck, *Kommunikation als Prozess. Soziologische Perspektiven in der Zeitungswissenschaft, 1927-1934* (Münster: LIT, 1999), 54.

<sup>103</sup> Arthur Koestler, *Arrow in the Blue* (London, 1952), 171; Cited in Fulda, *Press and Politics*, 18.

<sup>104</sup> Cited in Bernd Söseman, *Theodor Wolff, Ein Leben mit der Zeitung* (Berlin: Econ Ullstein List & Co, 2001), 144-145.

<sup>105</sup> Cited in Michael Groth, *The Road to New York, the Emigration of Berlin Journalists, 1933-1945* (Munich: Minerva Publikation, 1984), 50.

<sup>106</sup> Georg Bernhard, "The German Press" in *Der Verlag Ullstein zum Welt-Reklame-Kongress 1929* (Berlin, 1929), 58.

Berlin's socialist press, most notably the SPD official organ *Vorwärts*, had been one of the first political papers to adopt a more sensational tone in political reporting. As noted earlier, the paper had spent considerable space on scandals during the Wilhelmine period, and its tone in such coverage tended towards the sensational.<sup>107</sup> This sensational style also appeared in the Weimar Republic, although the SPD's press commission was loathe to define its approach as sensationalist. Even as the 1919 commission noted the importance of clever selection of headlines and topics in attracting readers, it insisted that "a skillful layout is by no means necessarily an encouragement of the desire for sensationalism."<sup>108</sup> While Berlin's socialist papers never achieved circulation in keeping with party voting numbers in Berlin, these papers enjoyed a daily circulation of over 150,000 by 1922.<sup>109</sup>

The justification the commission offered for the *Vorwärts*' apparently sensational tendencies was that the party press was "first and foremost a means of political education." This education could be best achieved by first gaining the reader's attention. This justification mapped perfectly onto the self-conception of German journalists as educators as well as reporters. The *Vorwärts* and the Berlin left wing press more generally were thus among the first of many Berlin papers to combine a sensational style with a belief that the press could improve the public by correctly explaining political events to it. The role of this left wing press from October 1918-January 1919 is worth examining in greater detail for what it tells us about the dual drives of sensation and

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<sup>107</sup> For more details on the *Vorwärts* development during the First World War, see Kurt Koszyk, *Zwischen Kaiserreich und Diktatur: Die Sozialdemokratische Presse von 1914 bis 1933* (Heidelberg: Quelle & Meyer, 1958), 67-85.

<sup>108</sup> Cited in Meier, *Zwischen*, 55.

<sup>109</sup> Rudolf Stöber, *Deutsche Pressegeschichte. Einführung, Systematik, Glossar*. (Konstanz: UVK-Medien, 2000), 242.

education, for its implications in the murder sensations studied later in this dissertation, and for what it suggests about the power of the press in 1920s Berlin.

*Vorwärts* was navigating treacherous waters as it attempted to explain the 1918 revolution to its readership. With the collapse of the German military machine in 1918, German generals Erich Ludendorff and Paul von Hindenburg had foisted control of the government (and thus, they hoped, culpability for the country's impending defeat) onto the Majority Socialist Party, the MSPD. The MSPD, once in power, attempted to institute a very limited "revolution," one which altered the German political landscape while maintaining much of the country's economic structure.<sup>110</sup> This feat, attempted while also trying to end a lost war, proved overwhelmingly difficult.<sup>111</sup>

As the official organ of the MSPD, *Vorwärts* thus had to explain how the Majority Socialists' conciliatory actions would produce the massive reforms which the paper itself had previously demanded and which many German socialists now expected. Throughout this early period of the Revolution, the *Vorwärts* tone was instructive but generally not prone to sensational language. In explaining the MSPD position, *Vorwärts* presented its readers with two somewhat contradictory messages: it argued that the Majority Socialists had joined the government to prevent chaos and work with other government parties ("the Social Democrats have entered the government not to achieve peace at any price, but rather to achieve a peace whose price the German people can afford")<sup>112</sup> and yet it simultaneously promised that this action would somehow bring

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<sup>110</sup> The political constellations of Germany in the 1918/1919 period are considered in Reinhard Rürup, *Probleme Der Revolution in Deutschland 1918/19* (Wiesbaden: F. Steiner, 1968).

<sup>111</sup> See for example Gerald Feldman, "Economic and Social Problems of the German Demobilization, 1918-19," *The Journal of Modern History* 47, no. 1 (1975): 1-47.

<sup>112</sup> *Vorwärts*, October 4, 1918.

about a world socialist revolution: after resolving the war, “Socialism will begin her march... a better future depends on us, trust our experience.”<sup>113</sup>

*Vorwärts* told readers that the rise of the Majority Socialists to political power was in fact the revolution made manifest. “We stand in the middle of a peaceful revolution.... Democracy is not a sacrifice, it is a necessity”<sup>114</sup> In the *Vorwärts*’ narrative of revolution, the greatest antagonist to socialist order was not right-wing reaction but far left interference. The far left, claimed *Vorwärts*, “tell the people, ‘you have not bled enough, you have not hungered enough, you must experience more suffering.’ But we say No! Our children will awaken to a free and better future.” In October and November 1918, this threat came from a vague “leftist” sentiment rather than from a specific group.

In the following months, three other left-wing organizations would play significant roles in the direction of the German Revolution in Berlin: the Spartacus Group, the Revolutionary Shop Stewards, and the Independent Socialist Party. The communist Spartacus Group, strongly grounded in Marxist and Leninist theory, was led by Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg. Socio-economic exploitation, argued Spartacist leaders, could only be dismantled through spontaneous revolution by the masses. Spartacus members were generally well-educated, and the group included several truly talented writers (most notably Luxemburg). Yet while the Spartacists were very interested in the discourse of revolution, the group’s membership was sparse through 1918—the movement boasted no more than a thousand members during this period, and its organizational abilities were relatively weak (particularly in comparison to the eventual power of the communist KPD, which was founded by Luxemburg and

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<sup>113</sup> *Vorwärts*, October 4, 1918.

<sup>114</sup> *Vorwärts*, October 5, 1918.

Liebknecht in December 1918). However, the group wielded great rhetorical power, initially through pamphlets and then especially through its newspaper, *Die Rote Fahne*.

The Revolutionary Shop Stewards, meanwhile, had emerged in February 1917 from the membership of the Berlin Metal Workers' union. As wages and food prices became increasingly unstable in 1916, unofficial factory leaders had emerged, challenging the official trade union functionaries. By early 1917 these unofficial leaders had adopted the name the Revolutionary Shop Stewards, and within months these Stewards had created a powerful organization in Berlin that demonstrated a capacity for action well beyond what the Spartacists had thus far managed.<sup>115</sup> In April 1917 the Stewards organized a strike of around 250,000 workers in Berlin and Leipzig, temporarily crippling the German war effort and forcing the German government to grant food concessions to the metalworkers, who were vital to the war effort. The Stewards were an activist movement in the purest sense of the word; they were interested in decisive and immediate action rather than theoretical debates or long-term political programming. Not surprisingly, then, the Stewards saw little use for an official paper through which they could discuss their views with German society as a whole—action, not propaganda or debate, was the key to success.

Finally, the Independent Socialist Party had split from the Majority Socialists in 1916 due to disagreement about the war; the USPD believed that an immediate cessation of the hostilities was necessary. Popular support for the USPD grew in late 1918 as workers became increasingly frustrated with the pace of MSPD reforms.<sup>116</sup>

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<sup>115</sup> Rudolf Coper, *Failure of a Revolution: Germany in 1918-1919* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1955), 56.

<sup>116</sup> Hans Mommsen, Elborg Forster, and Larry E. Jones. *The Rise and Fall of Weimar Democracy* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996), 34.

Nevertheless, the two parties formed an uneasy alliance in November 1918 as the revolutionary *Räte* councils selected MSPD and USPD leadership to form the Council of People's Representatives to govern Germany. Spartacist leader Liebknecht had refused an offer for inclusion in the council, while the Revolutionary Shop Stewards leadership refused to participate in any government which still contained Majority Socialists. This lack of radical left influence in the cabinet meant that the more moderate MSPD thinking would carry the day in most policy decisions.<sup>117</sup> The new government presented an odd political situation, as, despite deriving legitimacy from the extra-constitutional *Räte*, it was primarily interested in constitutional reform.

It was in this context that new socialist and communist voices emerged in the press to challenge the *Vorwärts*' narrative of events. On November 15 the USPD began publishing their official Berlin organ, the *Freiheit*. The paper constructed a narrative of revolution which bore both similarities and differences to the *Vorwärts*'s story. The *Freiheit*, like the *Vorwärts*, blamed the military regime for all of Germany's current problems and pled for unity among socialists; however, in its rhetoric, the *Freiheit* relied much more on class distinctions than did *Vorwärts*. The paper was thus sympathetic to the German communists and much less willing than *Vorwärts* to praise liberals or recently converted intellectuals, professionals, and officials: "mistrust them, friends! Most of these people wear the clothes of socialism like businessmen, taking advantage of this recent trend. They will become bitter and staunch enemies once again when the wind

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<sup>117</sup> The specifics of the Socialist government during this period are discussed in Charles Burdick and Ralph H. Lutz, *The Political Institutions of the German Revolution, 1918-1919*. (New York: Published for the Hoover Institution on War, Revolution, and Peace, Stanford University, Stanford, Calif., by F.A. Praeger, 1966).

changes.”<sup>118</sup> Unlike the political reform proposed in *Vorwärts*, the *Freiheit* saw the appropriate revolutionary path as that of economic change such as the socialization of production and the introduction of an eight hour work day. “Our goal was not just an alteration of a paragraph in the constitution.... As long as dependency on capitalist production remains, formal democracy will not help the proletariat.”<sup>119</sup>

The actors in the revolutionary drama described by the *Freiheit* were the heroic proletariat and the villainous bourgeoisie. Conversely, the central hero of the *Vorwärts*’ narrative from October 1918-January 1919 was the German *Volk*, and the greatest danger came from the left-wing “radical.” The tendency of *Vorwärts* to deploy “*Volk*” during this period was somewhat unusual, as the socialist paper had traditionally relied much more heavily on the sort of class-based language the *Freiheit* was using. This is also not to say that *Vorwärts* avoided the language of class over this period; rather, as challenges to the MSPD grew on the left, *Vorwärts* displayed an increasing tendency to reference the needs of the German *Volk*. For example, the paper variously warned of “the decay of the German *Volk*,” the “German Bolsheviks trying to charm the *Volk*,” “the terrible danger presented to our *Volk* and the working class,” and so on.<sup>120</sup>

The difference between the *Freiheit* and *Vorwärts* approaches was exemplified in the papers’ discussion of the election process. The *Freiheit* presented the upcoming January elections in terms of class war: “this voting battle.... is about the abolition of

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<sup>118</sup> *Freiheit*, November 30, 1918.

<sup>119</sup> *Freiheit*, November 17, 1918. The *Freiheit* was also less dismissive than the *Vorwärts* about the threat from the right. The *Vorwärts* had ceased discussion of counterrevolutionary dangers in late October; it wanted to calm workers and soldiers and prevent the sort of situation which arose in early November. The *Freiheit*, on the other hand, warned its readers that “the proletariat must stay alert. Our enemies are defeated for the moment, but they are not dead. They collect new strength and wait for the moment when they can again attack us” *Freiheit*, November 15, 1918.

<sup>120</sup> *Vorwärts*, December 26, 1918; *Vorwärts*, December 31, 1918; *Vorwärts*, January 17, 1919. See also e.g. *Vorwärts*, November 13, 1919; *Vorwärts*, November 26, 1919; *Vorwärts*, January 12, 1919; *Vorwärts*, January 15, 1919, etc.

class rule, the replacement of capitalist exploitation with socialist economy.”<sup>121</sup> The *Vorwärts*, on the other hand, used much less incendiary language and emphasized empowerment of the *Volk* in general: “in the elections the *Volk* will create its own parliament through a fair vote.”<sup>122</sup> The reader needed to be wary of “bungling experiments on the living body of the economy” and rely on the “economic knowledge and practical experience” of the MSPD.<sup>123</sup> The paper considered any movement away from democratic reforms to be counterrevolutionary, a threat to the very body of the German people. In this *Vorwärts* narrative, the revolution had been completed with the formation of parliamentary democracy.

At the same time, the Spartacists began attacking the new government through their own newly founded newspaper, *Die Rote Fahne*. This paper, edited by Rosa Luxemburg, began publishing on November 11 and ran sporadically for the next months. While both the *Vorwärts*’ and *Freiheit*’s reporting on revolutionary events had thus far kept sensational language to a minimum, *Die Rote Fahne*’s language was incendiary and clearly aimed at provoking reader emotion. Refusing the idea of socialist unity, *Die Rote Fahne* argued that any collaboration under the Majority Socialist banner was not just useless, it was counterrevolutionary. “It simply leaves the state as an administrative unit in the hands of yesterday’s supporters of the Hohenzollern absolutism and tomorrow’s tools of the counterrevolution.”<sup>124</sup> The Majority Socialists’ call to unity was simply an

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<sup>121</sup> *Freiheit*, December 24, 1918.

<sup>122</sup> *Vorwärts*, January 9, 1919.

<sup>123</sup> *Vorwärts*, November 6, 1918.

<sup>124</sup> *Rote Fahne*, November 17, 1918.

attempt “to hypnotize the proletariat with the catchword of unity in order to wrench the power from its hands and reestablish the class state. Unity with traitors means defeat.”<sup>125</sup>

*Die Rote Fahne* also deployed the second person, placing readers more directly into the narrative. For example, while both the *Vorwärts* and *Freiheit* suggested that imperialists, capitalists, and industrialists had caused the First World War, the *Rote Fahne* contended that “for four long years... the governmental Socialists drove you through the horrors of war, explaining that you must defend the ‘fatherland’ when only imperialism’s predatory interests were at stake. Now that German imperialism is collapsing, they are trying to save what they can for the bourgeoisie and to throttle the revolutionary energy of the masses.”<sup>126</sup> The solution was to abolish the government, allow the *Räte* to govern Germany, and establish an international worker’s movement.<sup>127</sup>

The *Rote Fahne*’s rhetoric was precisely what the MSPD and the *Vorwärts*, so committed to bureaucratic stability and order, desperately feared. The Spartacists, although their actual organizational power was still lacking, gave voice to a radicalism that urged workers away from elections and towards revolution. While *Vorwärts*’ earlier coverage had not specified who, exactly, the “left radical” villains were, by late November and December the paper had clearly placed the Spartacists in this role. As it attacked the Spartacists, *Vorwärts* relied increasingly on sensational language to convince readers that its narrative was true.

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<sup>125</sup> *Rote Fahne*, November 18, 1918.

<sup>126</sup> *Rote Fahne*, November 15, 1918.

<sup>127</sup> Perhaps the best distillation of this Spartacist criticism was Liebknecht’s *Rote Fahne* editorial “Where Matters Stand.” In this piece Liebknecht claimed in no uncertain terms that “the present ‘Socialist’ government would like to resolve the contradiction of form and intent by riveting the proletarian form of the revolution back on the bourgeois content.” This counterrevolutionary activity had to be opposed, or else “in a few weeks the proletariat will stand before the ruins of its hopes.” *Rote Fahne*, November 21, 1918.

The shifting tone of *Vorwärts* was on display following a botched attempt by soldiers to seize power in Berlin in order to isolate the radical left. On December 6, the soldiers intended to seal off Berlin, disarm the population, and move all political power from the *Räte* and executive council to Majority Socialist leader Ebert, who was unaware of these plans.<sup>128</sup> This poorly coordinated plan predictably fell flat: soldiers arrived at the Prussian parliament and arrested the parliament, but the parliament refused to move, and the soldiers themselves were soon arrested. Meanwhile, another group of soldiers had marched to the Chancellery, where they proclaimed Ebert the president of Germany. Ebert defused this explosive situation by refusing to accept this position without first consulting his colleagues, and he assured the soldiers that the upcoming National Assembly would achieve what they desired.

However, false reports that the Executive Council had been arrested and that Ebert was now president reached the streets; a group that included both Spartacists and Shop Stewards gathered and marched in protest towards the center of Berlin. This group was met by government soldiers who had been ordered by the town commandant, Wels, to prevent the protesters from advancing. Shots were fired (both sides claimed the other had fired the first shots) and the soldiers opened fire into the crowd, killing sixteen.<sup>129</sup>

*Vorwärts*, clearly aware of the vast damage which this story could cause for the Majority Socialists, immediately dismissed the soldiers' march on the capital as spontaneous, poorly considered folly. "If Ebert or Sheidemann wanted to be dictator, we would oppose them. But since this is clearly a pack of lies, we remain behind them, for

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<sup>128</sup> Mommsen, *Rise and Fall*, 32.

<sup>129</sup> For a summary of these events, see Coper, *Failure*, 150-158.

they stand for all of Berlin and Germany.”<sup>130</sup> The paper instead focused on the counter-march, suggesting that the Spartacists had incited riots which were “deplorable; these people do not consider the consequences of their actions and deserve the sharpest condemnation.”<sup>131</sup> According to the paper’s report, “after the soldiers refused to join the Spartacists, they would not leave the soldiers alone, and they began shooting at the soldiers. The soldiers returned fire, and in the end there were dead and wounded on both sides”<sup>132</sup> (in fact, no soldiers had died). The paper insinuated that shadowy Spartacist leaders were to blame for the bloodshed: “the puppet masters and their motives have not yet been discovered.”<sup>133</sup>

While *Vorwärts* focused its narrative on the Spartacist march, the *Freiheit* emphasized the soldiers’ marches on the parliament and Chancellery: the paper deemed the event a failed putsch. “The putschists hoped that a regime without the Independent Socialists would protect businesses until the revolutionary storm had subsided. The putsch attempt can only be seen as the creation of the bourgeoisie with the encouragement of the [Majority Socialists] in the hopes of furthering their factional interests.”<sup>134</sup> The paper presented the attack on the Spartacists very differently from the *Vorwärts* version: “harmless demonstrators, peacefully gathering in support of the soldier/worker councils, were fired on by soldiers with machine guns.”<sup>135</sup> The paper included specific and gruesome details about the working class victims of the attack, including a seventeen-year-old girl shot dead and two mothers hit in the head.

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<sup>130</sup> *Vorwärts*, December 7, 1918.

<sup>131</sup> *Vorwärts*, December 7, 1918.

<sup>132</sup> *Vorwärts*, December 7, 1918.

<sup>133</sup> *Vorwärts*, December 7, 1918.

<sup>134</sup> *Freiheit*, December 8, 1918.

<sup>135</sup> *Freiheit*, December 7, 1918.

The *Freiheit* here made a further key argument: the paper asserted that the violence against the left on December 6 had resulted from the bourgeois media's conspiracy against leftist leaders, and it singled out *Vorwärts* as the ringleader:

it blames the events on the peaceful demonstrators.... It seems to forget that it did all it could to produce this result by working with the reactionary and counterrevolutionary press. And just as the police of the earlier system justified their brutality, so today *Vorwärts* justifies police action by saying that the demonstrators 'threw stones' and 'shot.' Never mind that eyewitnesses say that soldiers shot first, as soon as the rally appeared.... All the matters: the Jew will burn.<sup>136</sup>

Here the paper referred to the anti-Semitic overtones of much of the coverage (key Spartacist leaders such as Liebknecht and Luxemburg were Jewish). As noted earlier, *Vorwärts* increasingly portrayed the revolutionary conflict as a battle between the *Volk* and shadowy radical interests; the paper increasingly racialized this "radical interest" as Jewish and Russian. Moreover, suggested the *Freiheit* editorial, the very events of December 6 were themselves being portrayed in a way that would only produce more violence: "the collected press squawks today about the Spartacist group, promoting the very slander that led to today's putsch attempt and threatening peace and order."<sup>137</sup> The *Freiheit* here presented a press that was not only reporting events, but actually helping to cause future violence.

*Vorwärts*, in a special late edition, offered a revealing response to these insinuations, suggesting that "when someone does not acknowledge democratic order and systematically works for its destruction, through lies, deceit, and weapons, then he is Spartacist, Spartacist, and again Spartacist!"<sup>138</sup> While this statement actually appeared to support the *Freiheit*'s accusation rather than refute it, the paper assured its readers that

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<sup>136</sup> *Freiheit*, December 8, 1918.

<sup>137</sup> *Freiheit*, December 7, 1918.

<sup>138</sup> *Vorwärts*, December 7, 1918.

“we are fighting the Spartacists through Spartacist measures. Is the *Freiheit* really so blind that it cannot see this?” In arguing that its attacks on the Spartacus Group used the same “means” as the Spartacists, *Vorwärts* implied the danger of Spartacist media and its rhetoric. *Vorwärts* was continuing to provide its particular narrative of socialist revolution (as parliamentary reform), but as stronger challenges to this narrative were articulated, the paper turned increasingly to the sensational style. The paper followed this article with a brief story entitled “the Peaceful Spartacists,” reporting on a Spartacist rally where, apparently, a speaker had said “we should hang Ebert by a lamppost.”<sup>139</sup>

This growing *Vorwärts* obsession with the Spartacists and its tendency to ignore the Revolutionary Shop Stewards suggests the discursive power of *Die Rote Fahne*. Although *Die Rote Fahne*, publishing sporadically at this point, did not publish directly after the December 6 violence, it relentlessly asserted that the revolution was dying at the hands of the Socialist government. On December 10 Rosa Luxemburg published a scathing editorial criticizing the Independent Socialists’ agreement to support the upcoming national elections. Luxemburg argued that socialists who believed that a political election could overthrow socio-economic oppression “have forgotten that the bourgeoisie is not a parliamentary party, but a ruling class in possession of all the

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<sup>139</sup> *Vorwärts*, December 7, 1918. Another vital motivation for the *Vorwärts* fear and dislike of the Spartacists was the Spartacist link with the Russian Bolsheviks; the Spartacists openly stated that they were the German manifestation of Marxism-Leninism. On December 26 *Vorwärts* printed a full-page ad that proclaimed Bolshevism “the militarism of lazybones.” It cautioned Germans not to follow the Russian path “towards the reign of terror and blood” for Bolshevism could only mean “the collapse of Germany’s industry, the decay of the German Volk” (*Vorwärts*, December 26, 1918). A few days later an even more scathing report appeared, claiming that the “Bolshevik wolves” had in a short time “created such brutal and blinding havoc, that today Russia lies on the ground, its great body bleeding from a thousand wounds. The German Bolsheviks try to charm the *Volk* with promises of Peace, Bread, and Freedom—a bloody swindle... The Future of the Fatherland is in danger!” In an important insight into the *Vorwärts*’ fear of mass Spartacist action, it proclaimed “the most piercing and sharp weapons of the Bolsheviks are surprise and sudden attack, when order and peace seem reestablished” (*Vorwärts*, December 31, 1918).

economic and social instruments of power.”<sup>140</sup> Thus, any movement towards real socio-economic change necessarily entailed violence, and by trying to achieve non-violent reform, the Majority and Independents were perpetuating a horribly repressive system.

Luxemburg offered a brutal parody of these beliefs, as she wrote:

they imagine that the greatest social revolution in the history of humanity will take the form of the various social classes coming together and cultivating a nice, peaceful, and ‘dignified’ discussion with each other, and then staging a vote.... When the capitalist class sees that it is in the minority, then as a well-disciplined parliamentary party, it will declare with a sigh, “There is nothing to be done. We see that we have been outvoted. Very well, we bow to the majority and turn over our land, factories, mines, all our fireproof safes, and our lovely profits to the workers.”<sup>141</sup>

Thus, even though at this point their capacity to organize was marginal in comparison to the Shop Stewards,<sup>142</sup> the Spartacists through the *Rote Fahne* were gaining a discursive centrality as the focus of *Vorwärts* rage.<sup>143</sup> This trend in coverage would have dire consequences for the Spartacus Group during the January 1919 uprising in Berlin.

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<sup>140</sup> *Rote Fahne*, December 10, 1918.

<sup>141</sup> *Rote Fahne*, December 10, 1918.

<sup>142</sup> Sebastian Haffner, *Failure of a Revolution: Germany 1918-19* (London: Deutsch, 1973), 86.

<sup>143</sup> Another striking example of the *Vorwärts*’ obsession with the Spartacus group was the paper’s coverage of an incident on December 23, 1918. A group of several hundred leftist sailors, who had been occupying the royal palace since November in defense of the revolution, marched to the Chancellery to request payment for their services. After receiving a bureaucratic runaround, the sailors occupied the town commandant’s office (the same commandant, Wels, who had ordered the firing on the Spartacist march on December 6), again demanding payment. Soldiers were called in and opened fire on the sailors, causing thirty deaths before Majority Socialist leader Ebert could resolve the situation by incorporating the sailors into the government’s Republican Guard. In this conflict the Spartacists had played no role whatsoever; in fact, the sailors had been encouraged to march on the town commandant’s office by Shop Steward leader Emil Barth. Yet the *Vorwärts*’ coverage claimed (completely without merit) that after the fight the Spartacists had been seen looting the area. The paper hinted that the Spartacists might well be behind the sailors’ actions, which it claimed were the result of belief in leftist rhetoric. The *Vorwärts* offered a stark either/or choice: “Everyone must decide for him or herself whether they support *Volk* or the criminals, who adorn themselves with the words of the Revolution like glittering jewelry but who work against the *Volk*. Victory will remain with those who abide by the law. (*Vorwärts*, December 26, 1918). These words sharply contrasted the *Vorwärts* early October openness to the left, when it had celebrated the release of leftist prisoners and proclaimed “the importance of freedom of opinion” *Vorwärts*, (October 6, 1918).

On December 27, the tensions which had been brewing between the Majority and Independent Socialists boiled over. The Independent leadership declared that the revolutionary government should use a volunteer revolutionary army, rather than the standing army which had fought during the war. After the Majority Socialists did not immediately meet these demands, the Independents resigned in protest.<sup>144</sup> Predictably, *Vorwärts* blamed this government coalition split on Spartacist provocation. Although both the Spartacists and the Revolutionary Shop Stewards had organized demonstrations in Berlin in December, *Vorwärts* exclusively attacked the Spartacists. The Spartacus Group had “corrupted” the Independents, and “all that the Spartacists have done is for the Independents only child’s play--- they close their eyes to this activity. They would rather point out any oversight by an MSPD colleague.”<sup>145</sup> The paper chided the Independents that they needed to “break sharply with the Spartacists and remember that they are Social Democrats.”<sup>146</sup>

A series of protests against the government and the departure of the Independents, organized by both the Revolutionary Shop Stewards and the Spartacus Group, began on December 28. During these demonstrations, part of the crowd spontaneously seized the *Vorwärts* building. After several hours of negotiation the crowd left the building, but this

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<sup>144</sup> Majority Socialist leaders had not assured their colleagues that they would replace the standing army with volunteer revolutionary militia. This debate over the army was part of a larger Independent complaint that the Majority Socialists had not listened to their input, and that the Majority Socialists was not bringing socialism to Germany quickly enough.

<sup>145</sup> *Vorwärts*, (December 30, 1918).

<sup>146</sup> *Vorwärts*, (December 27, 1918). The *Freiheit* responded to these attacks by claiming that it did have its own social identity, and that neither the MSPD nor the Spartacists were true socialists: “it is ridiculous to identify us with the Spartacists. From the start we have shunned their tactics. Spartacus has its own organization, tactics, and politics. Its supporters have no major influence over our organization” (*Freiheit*, December 30, 1918). The Majority Socialists, meanwhile, had become incorporated into the bourgeoisie: “yesterday they combined with bourgeois demonstrators, and today they underscore the points of the bourgeois press. Their conglomeration with the bourgeois parties is already underway.” In fact, “the policies of the Spartacists are not much different from those of the MSPD. Only we stand on the theoretical and ideological ground of Social Democracy as it was before the war” (*Freiheit*, December 30, 1918).

event nevertheless set *Vorwärts* in further opposition to the radical left. That the crowd would spontaneously decide to occupy *Vorwärts* in a march organized explicitly to protest the “misguided” direction of the German Revolution is certainly significant. *Vorwärts*, as we have seen, had consistently constructed a very particular narrative of the German Revolution, in which the heroic Majority Socialists, representing the *Volk*, had successfully implemented a legitimate (i.e. political parliamentary) revolution but now had to defend this revolution against the counterrevolutionary “anarchic” tendencies of the radical left. The leftist seizure of the *Vorwärts* building suggests the protesters felt the paper exercised great influence in shaping popular understanding of the revolution; I argue that this event also illustrates how particularly the paper itself had come to symbolize the Majority Socialists’ reticence to pursue change more substantial than political reforms. This seizure of the building would be replayed eight days later, with much more disastrous results for the left radicals.

With the resignation of the Independent Socialist members of the German and Prussian governments, only one Independent Socialist, chief of Berlin police Emil Eichhorn, remained in a prominent position. Accusing Eichhorn of embezzling funds and conspiring in anti-government activities, the MSPD-led Prussian government dismissed him on January 3, 1919. Eichhorn refused to step down without being able to defend himself against the unproven charges; after a conference, the Independents and Revolutionary Shop Stewards agreed to lend their support to his cause. The Spartacists/KPD, importantly, were hesitant to enter the dispute, as their leadership wanted time to organize the movement into a political party. Although the Spartacists at this point had changed their name to the Communists, or KPD, they were still referred to

in the press as the Spartacus movement. I will continue to refer to the group as the Spartacists in the interests of keeping narrative continuity. However, the group now enjoyed a new name and party status. This party's paper was certainly not silent, as it wrote that MSPD leader Ebert had "spewed out graft and corruption in the service of the counterrevolution in a volume unsurpassed" but was frustrated "at having to do so without such an effective tool as the police department.... Anyone can see that the blow against Eichhorn was aimed at the proletarian masses."<sup>147</sup> Despite the leadership's reluctance, the massive popular support for Eichhorn convinced the Spartacists to help organize the protest.

On January 5 a mass meeting of 600,000 occurred in the center of Berlin; the Revolutionary Shop Stewards were the central group in organizing the rally.<sup>148</sup> The militant temper of the crowd encouraged the leaders to hold a conference and consider striking against the government itself. Although the more moderate USPD leaders suggested that the group was not sufficiently organized, the majority of those present, mostly Shop Stewards, voted in favor of an uprising. The group formed a revolutionary committee with the initiative coming primarily from the Shop Stewards.<sup>149</sup>

As leadership sat discussing plans, the protesters spontaneously began seizing several public buildings, the first of which was the *Vorwärts* building. The government was unprepared for such action and hesitated. By January 7, however, it was clear that

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<sup>147</sup> *Rote Fahne*, January 4, 1919.

<sup>148</sup> A J. Ryder, *The German Revolution of 1918: A Study of German Socialism in War and Revolt* (London: Routledge and Paul, 1959), 200. For further recaps of the organization and execution of these events, see also Chris Harman, *The Lost Revolution: Germany, 1918 to 1923* (London: Bookmarks, 1982), 73-95; Coper, *Failure*, 180-202; and David Morgan, *The Socialist Left and the German Revolution: A History of the German Independent Social Democratic Party, 1917-1922* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1975), 182-218.

<sup>149</sup> John Riddell, *The German Revolution and the Debate on Soviet Power: Documents, 1918-1919 : Preparing the Founding Congress* (New York: Anchor Foundation, 1986), 249.

this revolutionary effort would not succeed: the radicals were too disorganized to take advantage of their successes. The Independents organized a conference to mediate between the two sides, and the *Freiheit*, which unlike *Vorwärts* had been allowed to continue publishing, quickly worked to paint the Independents as the only reasonable group in the scenario.<sup>150</sup>

However, the radicals refused to abandon the *Vorwärts* building, insisting that they needed to keep it as recompense for previous injustices. The protesters who held the *Vorwärts* building began publishing their own version of the newspaper on the *Vorwärts* press. In their first issue, the “Organ of the Revolutionary Worker of Greater Berlin” (or *Rote Vorwärts*) explained that it had been obligated to take back *Vorwärts* from “the old bourgeois editorial board.... We could no longer tolerate the smear campaign that this sheet undertook against the *truly* revolutionary groups.”<sup>151</sup> *Rote Vorwärts* then undertook a merciless attack on *Vorwärts*, suggesting just how much these protesters resented the *Vorwärts*’ rhetorical dismissal of further revolution: “after three years of perfidious betrayal of the working class and socialism, the poisonous snake once again lies under the boot of the Berlin worker. *Vorwärts*—the disgraceful and lie-riddled paper of Ebert-Wels-Scheidemann, the organ of all *traitors* and deadly enemies of the working class, is now strangled in the fist of the worker, and can now once again speak the truth.”<sup>152</sup>

In an anecdote in its January 8 issue, the paper provided powerful insight into the far left’s motivation in seizing and holding the *Vorwärts* building. This anecdote related to the story of a soldier attempting to storm this building and being met at the door by revolutionaries who spoke with him:

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<sup>150</sup> *Freiheit*, January 7, 1919.

<sup>151</sup> *Rote Vorwärts*, January 6, 1919.

<sup>152</sup> *Rote Vorwärts*, January 6, 1919.

The Lieutenant asked ‘what do the revolutionary workers really want? What are their demands?’ The response: ‘The introduction of socialism, the expropriation of large scale enterprise, etc.’ The Lieutenant said ‘that is all well and good, I agree with your aims—but if only the Spartacists were not with you.’ The answer: ‘the Spartacist Group is very different than you’ve heard. Please read its program.’ The results of this conversation were as follows: after he read the platform the officer cried out, ‘If only we had known the truth!’ He then explained with vigorous gestures that his regiment would not move against the *Vorwärts* building, and would instead march off in the assurances of friendship.<sup>153</sup>

This story perfectly illustrates the radicals’ belief that the vast majority of Germans (at least soldiers and workers) were sympathetic to their vision of revolution; *Vorwärts* had simply swayed them from their genuine feelings by creating a false understanding of events. The soldier in this story had been trapped in the *Vorwärts*’ narrative of the threat of anarchy from the left. The revolutionaries here need only speak with the soldier directly and allow him to look at their platform before he would see the error of his ways and convert. As this story suggests, from the revolutionary viewpoint, by seizing *Vorwärts* and its presses the revolutionaries could use the newspaper’s power to reeducate the soldiers and reformulate the popular understanding of the revolution.

In the face of *Rote Vorwärts* and *Freiheit* accusations, the *Vorwärts* staff further radicalized its rhetoric. Although the *Vorwärts* building had been seized, the papers’ staff quickly established a makeshift office and printed *Vorwärts* pamphlets. These pamphlets, completely ignoring the Revolutionary Shop Stewards who had been and continued to be central motivators of the uprising, blamed the Spartacists for the civil war. The paper gave “the Reich government our blessing to answer the Spartacists with force. Force must resolve this conflict.... The government searches for lasting peace,

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<sup>153</sup> *Rote Vorwärts*, January 8, 1919.

but the Spartacists want a second world war.”<sup>154</sup> Despite the street-fighting throughout Berlin, “a huge, unbending majority opposes the Spartacists.... Ignorant children, separate yourselves from the criminals!”<sup>155</sup> The *Vorwärts* rhetoric became yet more sensational the following day: “the bloodshed caused by [the Spartacists] grows every hour. The madness, corruption, tyranny, the ignorant games they play with men’s lives—that is what characterizes Spartacist terror. All they want is terror. The blood that these murders shed screams to the heavens!”<sup>156</sup> The paper provocatively suggested that “Liebknecht has proclaimed a ‘fight to the death’ against the population.”<sup>157</sup>

The pamphlet also went out of its way to attack the Independents: “this conflict is not just between the Majority Socialists and the Spartacists. The Independents have joined the Spartacists.” The *Freiheit* was at the front of this Independent Socialist strategy, the pamphlet claimed. It “paints a bloody picture that is completely fabricated, and each picture is intended to prove the gruesome motives and bloodlust of the regime’s troops. This proves they aren’t in the middle of negotiations.”<sup>158</sup> In fact, argued the pamphlet, the Independents had little power at all—the party was really a puppet of Liebknecht and the Spartacists: “The real leader here is Liebknecht.” Both the Spartacists and the Independents, “the same people who claimed to be sharply opposed to the war, are now eager to shed the blood of the German worker.”

While *Vorwärts* focused its ire on the groups with voices in print, the USPD and Spartacists, the Revolutionary Shop Stewards were virtually ignored. The Spartacist Karl Liebknecht was indeed the figurehead of this uprising (the most recognizable of the

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<sup>154</sup> *Vorwärts pamphlet*, January 9, 1919.

<sup>155</sup> *Vorwärts pamphlet*, January 9, 1919.

<sup>156</sup> *Vorwärts pamphlet*, January 10, 1919.

<sup>157</sup> *Vorwärts pamphlet*, January 6, 1919.

<sup>158</sup> *Vorwärts pamphlet*, January 10, 1919.

revolutionary committee's three leaders), but Shop Steward involvement in the protests was extensive. Yet the *Vorwärts* showed no interest in this group which certainly threatened the "order" the paper argued the country so desperately needed. The pamphlet thus encouraged readers to "fight the infestation of Spartacus in Germany! The day of reckoning approaches!"<sup>159</sup>

The day of reckoning arrived on January 10, when government forces led by Gustav Noske brutally purged the Berlin revolutionaries.<sup>160</sup> The military's first assault came against the seized *Vorwärts* building. The force used artillery and mortars to take back the building at the cost of over 150 lives of the building's occupants.<sup>161</sup> The building fell rather quickly, and many who surrendered were summarily executed by the *Freikorps*. Over the next two days, *Freikorps* troops marched throughout Berlin executing anyone with a weapon in hand.<sup>162</sup>

The *Freiheit* and *Vorwärts* constructed the recapture of the *Vorwärts* building in revealingly different ways.<sup>163</sup> *Vorwärts* emphasized that although fighting did occur, "the Spartacists shot first." It spent a great deal of time describing the condition of the *Vorwärts* building as "totally ruined," showing that "the Spartacists behaved like vandals" (the paper did not note that this damage may have come during the raid on the

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<sup>159</sup> *Vorwärts* pamphlet, January 9, 1919. The *Freiheit* meanwhile, did note the power of the Revolutionary Shop Stewards and often made explicit note that assigning responsibility for the uprising to the Spartacists was "just silly," *Freiheit*, January 12, 1919.

<sup>160</sup> Gustav Noske was a Majority Socialist who leaned to the right of his party. Noske was appointed commander in chief of Berlin, agreeing to put down the revolution. Although some trade unionists and majority socialists had volunteered to help stop the revolution and had formed units, Noske was much more interested in using the recently formed *Freikorps* units. These groups, financed by heavy industry and composed of officers and NCOs for the most part, were generally very sympathetic to the right and harbored intense ill will towards the far left. In fact, one battalion, the *Freiwillige Jagerkorps*, even refused to take an oath of loyalty to the government it was supposed to be defending.

<sup>161</sup> Ryder, *German Revolution*, 203.

<sup>162</sup> Mommson, *Rise and Fall*, 37.

<sup>163</sup> The *Rote Fahne* had itself been seized by government forces during the fighting; it was thus unable to present the Spartacist perspective.

building, or that few if any Spartacists were actually in the building in the first place). *Vorwärts* thus emphasized the chaotic and disorderly effects of Spartacist “rule,” symbolized by the results of their supposed possession of the *Vorwärts* building. The *Freiheit*, meanwhile, continually referred to the revolutionaries in the building as “defenders” and never discussed any return-fire from these revolutionaries. *Vorwärts* noted that five troops, who it deemed “liberators,” had been killed during the storming (ignoring revolutionary losses); the *Freiheit*, meanwhile, ignored army (“attacker”) casualties and exclaimed “the losses of the defenders were horrific.”<sup>164</sup>

*Vorwärts*’ also appealed to racist anti-Semitic sentiments in a provocative poem which claimed

I saw the masses marauding  
behind Karl, the blind war god  
dancing to the Pied Piper’s flute  
Who slyly promised them the world.  
They bowed before the bloodied idols,  
Groveled before all that humanity scorns,  
Before Russia’s Asiatics and Mongols,  
before Bronstein, Luxemburg, and Sobelsohn,  
Go back, you raging hordes!  
You cry for freedom, only to kill it.<sup>165</sup>

The paper here employed the Jewish names of Leon Trotsky (Bronstein) and Karl Radek (Sobelsohn), a clearly anti-Semitic gesture. The poem placed responsibility for the uprising on the Spartacist Liebknecht (“Karl”), emphasizing the power of his rhetoric and charisma to seduce “the masses,” and suggesting that ulterior motives lay behind his promises to the workers. The paper contrasted Majority Socialist perspective, as “humanity,” with Spartacist interests, as an invasion of the Asiatic “hordes” into Germany. *Vorwärts*, in constructing its narrative of political revolution, increasingly

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<sup>164</sup> *Freiheit*, January 12, 1919.

<sup>165</sup> *Vorwärts*, January 12, 1919.

portrayed the villains of its piece as a racialized force of outsiders attempting to ruin the “true” German *Volk*—and these villains were specifically the Spartacists.

The *Freiheit* particularly attacked *Vorwärts* as masking the truth behind these events: “Only the counterrevolutionary bourgeoisie are against [the *Räte*]. But *Vorwärts* does not state these facts; it doesn’t want you to know that the same people who support it oppose the revolution.”<sup>166</sup> Stating that the innocent Spartacists “have been martyred,”<sup>167</sup> the paper claimed that “the methods of the old regime have been brought to life by the insane actions of the government. . . . all the revolution’s achievements have been undone in this one moment.”<sup>168</sup> This powerful counterrevolution meant more suffering, said the paper. “The street murders are not yet over, and the proletariat will shed still more of its fellows’ blood.”<sup>169</sup>

The *Freiheit*’s sobering prediction of further bloodshed soon proved true, as on January 15, 1919, *Freikorps* troops seized and arrested Spartacist leaders Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg. Without reporting his apprehension, Liebknecht’s captors transported him to their division headquarters; upon arrival, Liebknecht was severely beaten, then put in a car apparently headed for Moabit prison. Along the way the car stopped, the soldiers pulled Liebknecht from the vehicle and shot him in the head, leaving his body unidentified at the nearest morgue. A few minutes later Luxemburg arrived at the headquarters under similar escort. She was shot in the head, loaded in a car, and finally thrown into the Landwehr canal, where her body was not discovered until the following May.

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<sup>166</sup> *Freiheit*, January 12, 1919.

<sup>167</sup> *Freiheit*, January 16, 1919.

<sup>168</sup> *Freiheit*, January 13, 1919.

<sup>169</sup> *Freiheit*, January 13, 1919.

The day after these murders, the *Freiheit* published a scathing accusation that Liebknecht and Luxemburg had been arrested and murdered by government troops. The paper immediately noted that “this is the fruit of the brainless mudslinging of *Vorwärts* and its bourgeois accomplices.”<sup>170</sup> Here the *Freiheit* suggested that it had been *Vorwärts* coverage which had put Liebknecht and Luxemburg in the crosshairs of the *Freikorps*. *Vorwärts*, meanwhile, ran a short and upbeat article entitled “Liebknecht captured” that did not discuss what had happened after the apprehension.<sup>171</sup>

By January 17, however, Liebknecht’s body had been discovered and the rumors of the murders had been substantiated. Most Berlin workers were dismayed and horrified at the news, and the Majority Socialist leadership was honestly shocked by the murders.<sup>172</sup> Here, potentially, was a chance for *Vorwärts* to move away from its support of the army. However, while arguing that the regime was not at fault, the *Vorwärts* blamed the Spartacists rather than the soldiers: “they are the victims of a bloody death which they—against all pleas and entreaties of their former friends and comrades—brought on themselves through their slavish adherence to an insane idea.” This insane idea, according to *Vorwärts*, was the desire for a second revolution, a movement which would in fact be counter-revolutionary. The paper bluntly stated that “their gruesome demise, while shocking, should not make us misjudge their horrible guilt.”<sup>173</sup>

Only after this opening salvo against the Spartacist leaders did the paper reprimand the soldiers involved, and even this criticism simultaneously attacked the revolutionaries: “the rabble that shoots an imprisoned woman to death are even lower

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<sup>170</sup> *Freiheit*, January 16, 1919.

<sup>171</sup> *Vorwärts*, January 16, 1919.

<sup>172</sup> Heinrich Winkler, *Von der Revolution zur Stabilisierung: Arbeiter und Arbeiterbewegung in der Weimarer Republik, 1918 Bis 1924* (Berlin: J.H.W. Dietz, 1984), 46.

<sup>173</sup> *Vorwärts*, January 17, 1919.

than the lawbreakers and plunderers who behaved so horribly in the bloody week past.”<sup>174</sup> The paper used the same rhetorical technique as it promised to investigate the murders: “all injustices committed against the Spartacists will be addressed just as will be the injustices committed by the Spartacists themselves.” Although these Spartacists “had undoubtedly violated the German *Volk* severely, they still had the right to safety from assault.”<sup>175</sup> The paper still made no reference to the Shop Stewards’ role in the actual physical occupation and violence of the early January uprising; *Vorwärts* was thus, in essence, equating the real physical violence done on Spartacist leadership with the rhetorical and propagandistic violence which the Spartacist press had visited on the government. The radical left group quite capable of physically challenging the government in Berlin, the Stewards, lacked a powerful public voice with which to communicate its perspective or create its own narrative.

The bloody events of January 1919 suggest the allure and power of sensational reportage in a political context. At every stage of the revolution, the *Vorwärts*, *Freiheit*, and *Die Rote Fahne* had used their pages to educate readers by revealing the “true” narrative of revolution. While reporting on events such as protests and political violence,

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<sup>174</sup> *Vorwärts*, January 17, 1919.

<sup>175</sup> In its portrayal of the actual deaths of Liebknecht and Luxemburg, the *Vorwärts* again employed the technique. (here completely unfounded) of burdening the Spartacists with the responsibility of drawing first blood: “reports say that Liebknecht was shot on the run after he stabbed one of the soldiers with a knife.” The paper’s report further emphasized the spontaneity of the actions; Liebknecht had stabbed a guard and fled, while Luxemburg was attacked by a crowd, out of which a man leapt and shot her. After hearing about this shooting, according the *Vorwärts*, the horrified captain had ordered the wagon holding Luxemburg to speed off with her in it. The majority of the article, however, criticized the Spartacists and couched this criticism in national, *Volkish* terms. “Those who realize the terrible danger presented to our *Volk* and the working class itself by Spartacus will continue to fight it... If we sink now into anarchy, if we enter into another war through the will of the Spartacists, then we will all break together in the end.” *Vorwärts*, January 17, 1919.

these papers incorporated lessons well removed from an immediate summation of facts. *Vorwärts* told the story of revolution via political reform, the *Freiheit* of revolution through economic restructuring, and the *Rote Fahne* of revolution through communist uprising.

Before the USPD and Spartacist papers had begun offering their counter-narratives to *Vorwärts*, that paper had maintained a more detached, objective tone in attempting to educate its readers. However, as the *Freiheit* and particularly *Die Rote Fahne* began challenging the *Vorwärts*, its tone grew increasingly sensational. By January the paper was relying on anti-Semitic attacks and blood-filled descriptions of Spartacist violence, even as it continued its particular narrative of revolution. The *Rote Fahne*'s own sensational approach to describing the MSPD threat to the Revolution made the Spartacists the central target of *Vorwärts* ire, even though the Revolutionary Shop Stewards posed a real threat to MSPD leadership in Berlin during this time. Over the following year, certainly, the KPD would rapidly increase in organizational power to become, by far, the most powerful challenger to the SPD from the left.

The struggle between *Vorwärts* and *Die Rote Fahne* to define the socialist revolution continued throughout the life of the Weimar Republic. As we will see, these competing narratives reappeared in the papers' coverage of sensational murder cases such as Grossmann, Haarmann, Denke, and Kürten. As the decade progressed, these papers also began to incorporate more public interest stories and specialty sections, as they feared losing working class readers to the entertainment of the more bourgeois dailies.<sup>176</sup>

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<sup>176</sup> Ross, *Media and the Making*, 144.; Fulda, *Press and Politics*, 52; see also Alfred Rother, *Hinter roten Kulissen: was ich in der KPD erlebte* (Berlin: A. Scherl, 1932), 56.

The professionalization of the German press coincided with both an increase in sensationalist style and a strong sense among journalists that their discourse was a privileged one that could improve society. These elements mixed in revealing ways during the 1918/19 Revolution, as the left-wing Berlin papers increasingly relied on a sensational style as they attempted to convince their readers that their own version of events was true. Observing that these papers chose to write in the sensationalist genre should not discount or discredit the actual content of their claims, however; such a dismissal would simply reproduce the casual disdain of sensationalism that this dissertation works against. Certainly, sensationalism can perpetuate bias, distract readership, or lower discourse level. However, as this chapter suggests, newspapers could also use the sensationalist genre to strengthen their claims during serious, complex political disagreements.

This case certainly suggests the political power of sensationalism in explicitly political events. In the following chapters, I explore the political dynamics of sensationalism in cases that were not at first glance explicitly political: the major German serial murder cases of the 1920s. In these cases, we find the same sort of dual pulls towards sensationalism and reader education that appeared in the 1918/1919 left-wing press debate discussed here. However, I am most interested in the cases of Grossmann, Haarmann, Denke, and Kürten for what they tell us about how Berlin newspaper reporting positioned the reporter as a privileged, expert discussant, most often an expert on the location of the crime. As this chapter has suggested, such claims to expertise echoed the German journalistic belief that good reportage educated and improved its audience.

## CHAPTER TWO

### KARL GROSSMANN: REPORTAGE AND THE POLITICS OF LOCATION

Writing for the *Vossische Zeitung* in 1929, legal reporter Moritz Goldstein imagined how the Berlin cityscape appeared to his paper's predominantly middle- and upper-class readership: "The Berliner knows that Berlin extends from the east to Jannowitzbrücke or so, the areas that we know and in which we live. Beyond that begins a strange city, begins something that the citizen [*Bürger*] apprehensively identifies as a netherworld, distinguished first and foremost by its inescapable desolation."<sup>1</sup> This idea of Berlin as an amalgam of two cities, one knowable and the other dangerously foreign, often appeared in 1920s press reports about crime in Berlin's working-class areas—especially the Friedrichshain district.<sup>2</sup>

Berlin's newspapers did not all imagine these two Berlins in the same way, however. Rather, different papers constructed different versions of what constituted the "safe" and "dangerous" aspects of Berlin. Certainly, each paper's vision of Berlin had its own distinct aspects, but these papers' political orientations were strong indicators for how they generally constructed Berlin through sensational reportage. Broadly speaking, reporters for politically moderate and right-wing papers nurtured the idea of an

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<sup>1</sup> *Vossische Zeitung*, February 8, 1929.

<sup>2</sup> Jan Feustel, *Raub und Mord im Kiez: Historische Friedrichshainer Kriminalfälle* (Berlin: Kulturamt Friedrichshain, 1996), 4.

upstanding, safe, *bürgerlich* Berlin and contrasted that city with an overcrowded, seedy, dangerous Berlin located in poverty-stricken areas. Conversely, writers for Berlin's left-wing press generally fostered the image of productive, sociable working-class districts in distinction from the exploitative, corrupt richer areas of the city.

Most importantly, on both sides of this political divide, the reporting implied something more: the journalist was capable of exploring this dangerous, foreign area and reporting back accurate findings to the reader sitting safe at home. At its heart, this idea was a claim to expertise. These stories suggested the reporter's specialized ability to explore and understand dangerous places, which in turn privileged the information he related from those locations. Thus, these papers were creating a unified vision of the newspaper itself even as they built different ideas of the city on which they reported.

This chapter examines the sensational coverage of Karl Grossmann's crimes in Friedrichshain in order to observe how these press stories asserted the newspapers' expertise. I will also pay close attention to how these papers' political orientations affected their construction of Grossmann's crimes in particular and Friedrichshain in general. While these papers all asserted their own expert knowledge of the crime's location, their coverage often reproduced political tropes that mapped onto the various papers' political positions. This suggests both that sensational coverage of non-political crime in Weimar Berlin was actually politicized, and that such political claims could be empowered through the assertion that the reporter drew from specialized knowledge as he created these reports.

Low opinions of Berlin's poor areas were exacerbated when, in 1919, authorities began to discover mutilated female remains washed ashore from the Luisenstädt and Landwehr Canals. These bodies were appearing in one of Berlin's poorest areas, the Schlesischer Bahnhof neighborhood in the Friedrichshain district. Certainly, bodies in the city's varied waterways had become a depressingly common discovery in the early days of the republic; Berlin's numerous political murders following the war had sometimes resulted in victims being dumped in nearby rivers (such was the fate of KPD founder Rosa Luxemburg, for example). Nevertheless, police suspected that these newly discovered, dismembered bodies in the Engelbecken basin were the work of a sexually sadistic killer rather than political radicals.<sup>3</sup>

Despite their suspicions, police investigators made little progress on the case over the next two years. The problem was twofold. For one, in such a politically, economically, and socially tumultuous time, there was little political will to allocate major police resources to extensively investigate such a case in a poverty-stricken area.<sup>4</sup> Additionally, identifying the bodies proved extremely difficult. The remains were in poor condition and victims' faces were difficult to reconstruct.<sup>5</sup> Moreover, missing persons reports were terribly common during this period. In the *Berliner Morgenpost*'s estimate, German authorities had received 3,425 missing person reports in 1919 and 4,280 such reports in 1921, and the sites of such disappearances were disproportionately the large cities such as Berlin.<sup>6</sup> In early August, 1921, as discoveries of body parts in the

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<sup>3</sup> Sace Elder, *Murder Scenes: Normality, Deviance, and Criminal Violence in Weimar Berlin* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2010), 82.

<sup>4</sup> Maria Tatar, *Lustmord: Sexual Murder in Weimar Germany* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), 54.

<sup>5</sup> Paul Schweder, *Die grossen Kriminalprozesse des Jahrhunderts: ein deutscher Pitaval* (Hamburg: Kriminalistik, 1961), 259.

<sup>6</sup> *Berliner Morgenpost*, August 7, 1921.

canals became more frequent, the police finally established a fund to reward any tip that led to the apprehension of the killer. This fund began at 5,000 Marks and then grew to 10,000 Marks.<sup>7</sup>

On August 21, 1921, police responded to calls from neighbors who had heard screams and crashes emanating from 88/89 Lange Strasse in Friedrichshain. Upon breaking down the door, police officers discovered Karl Grossmann, a 58-year-old street merchant and butcher, standing over the bound body of a dead woman who was later to be identified as Marie Nitsche.<sup>8</sup> Grossmann immediately attempted suicide, but the police thwarted his efforts and took him into custody.<sup>9</sup> Detectives quickly began to suspect that the peddler had been responsible for the deaths of the unidentified women discovered in Friedrichshain's waterways.<sup>10</sup>

Evidence of Grossmann's guilt in the serial murders mounted in the following days. Grossmann had been a suspect in the earlier disappearance of a woman named Frieda Schubert, resulting in a police search of his apartment in 1920, although the authorities had discovered no incriminating evidence. After Grossmann's 1921 apprehension, police continued to dredge the canal and eventually found 23 female limbs.<sup>11</sup> Investigators also learned that Grossmann was known locally for inviting women in dire financial situations back to his apartment. Ostensibly Grossmann was

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<sup>7</sup> Kathrin Kompisch and Frank Otto, *Bestien des Boulevards: Die Deutschen und ihre Serienmörder* (Leipzig: Militzke, 2003), 58.

<sup>8</sup> While born Karl Friedrich Wilhelm Grossmann, Grossman preferred to spell his first name with a C rather than a K, and this was the spelling that appeared most often during the court case. Among the press, the K spelling was most common. Erich Frey, *Ich beantrage Freispruch. Aus den Erinnerungen des Strafverteidigers Prof. Dr. Dr. Erich Frey* (Hamburg: Blüchert, 1959), 43.

<sup>9</sup> Press reports at the time varied in their descriptions of this arrest. For a detailed description of the event, see Curt Elwenspoek, *Mord und Totschlag: "Polizei greift ein!" So kämpft die Kriminalpolizei!* (Stuttgart: Dieck, 1931), 12.

<sup>10</sup> For thorough descriptions of Grossmann's personal history, see Elder, *Murder Scenes*, 90-91 as well as Kompisch, *Bestien des Boulevards*, 60.

<sup>11</sup> Kompisch, *Bestien des Boulevards*, 58-59.

hiring them to work for him as housekeepers (*Wirtschaftserinnen*), but at least seven of these women could not be accounted for. In the following week, several of the women whom Grossmann had previously employed stepped forward to testify that Grossmann had sexually abused them. Police thus came to suspect Grossmann of a long string of murders. Over several months, homicide detectives worked to connect Grossmann to the discovered bodies. They eventually charged him with three murders, those to which he had confessed, although they suspected him of at least six.<sup>12</sup>

Grossmann's trial ran from July 1-5, 1922, with the public barred from the proceedings. Seventeen women testified to sexual abuse at Grossmann's hands,<sup>13</sup> while two state physicians vouched for Grossmann's competence to stand trial (particularly his ability to distinguish right from wrong).<sup>14</sup> Erich Frey, Grossmann's lawyer, had attempted to mobilize psychiatric expertise in defense of his client, contacting such notable figures as sexologist Magnus Hirschfeld, physician/sexologist Iwan Bloch, psychiatrist Albert Moll, and psychiatrist/neurologist Karl Bonhoeffer. Frey had hoped that these experts could examine Grossmann and testify to his inability to control his sexually deviant and violent impulses. While the case generally interested these experts, Frey had contacted them so close to the time of the trial that they protested that such a complex case could not be properly analyzed in such a short period of time. Several years later, Hirschfeld would classify Grossmann as an archetypal *Lustmörder*, arguing that Grossmann's crimes were certainly driven by sexual perversion, as Grossmann could

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<sup>12</sup> Estimates of the number of Grossmann's victims vary considerably, ranging from 20 in Schweder, *Amokläufer*, 260; to 6 in the state's attorney files (Elder, *Murder Scenes*, 219). As we will see, the numbers some newspapers offered at the time could be much higher still. Nevertheless, the lower numbers seem far more likely. On police frustration at being unable to tie more murders to Grossmann, see Frey, *Freispruch*, 57. For discussion of the crimes that favors higher estimates, see Franz von Schmidt, *Vorgeführt erscheint. Erlebte Kriminalistik* (Stuttgart, 1955), 190-95.

<sup>13</sup> Frey, *Freispruch*, 58.

<sup>14</sup> This expert testimony is described in more detail in Kompisch, *Bestien des Boulevards*, 74-75.

only become aroused at the sight of violence to the victim's body.<sup>15</sup> However, without expert testimony in his favor and facing certain conviction and the resulting death penalty, Grossman instead hanged himself on the night of July 4, never having provided a full confession of his crimes.

As it played out, the Grossmann case generated notable interest from local papers, but this coverage did not extend nationally, nor did it ever reach the fever pitch of later cases like Haarmann and Kürten. Coverage was likely tamed somewhat by other major Berlin events which overlapped with key points in the case. The infamous right-wing assassination of Matthias Erzberger, Centre party politician and opponent of the war, occurred on August 26, 1919, just as the police investigation of Grossmann was reaching full swing. Erzberger's murder understandably became the primary focus of all of Berlin's papers during this period. As a result, Grossmann's arrest generated about a week of intense local newspaper coverage at the end of August, but this reporting was quickly subsumed in the wave of media concern that followed the Erzberger assassination.

Similarly, days before Grossmann went on trial in 1922, Germany's foreign minister Walther Rathenau was murdered by a group of ultra-nationalist and anti-Semitic army officers. Expressions of dismay and recriminations about this assassination dominated most newspaper pages for at least a week, reducing the opportunity for reports on trial preparations. The confluence of the Grossmann case with these shocking assassinations suggests degree to which political and social chaos inflected daily life in early Weimar Berlin. Meanwhile, during the trial itself, a printer's strike crippled most

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<sup>15</sup> Magnus Hirschfeld, *Geschlecht und Verbrechen* (Leipzig: Schneider, 1930), 209.

Berlin papers, preventing them from publishing at all. Only the *Deutsche Zeitung* and *Rote Fahne* appeared with regularity.

As we will see in the next chapter, it was only in retrospect, with the capture of the cannibal Denke in 1924, that Grossmann's example assumed a much broader significance in Berlin news coverage. As this chapter will describe, rumors of Grossmann's cannibalism had appeared briefly towards the end of his 1921 press coverage. However, for the Berlin press, this idea of the cannibal Grossmann became far more widespread following Denke's apprehension. At that point, Grossmann became an exemplar of a society that was producing people who ate one another.

More generally, the Berlin press coverage of this case occurred towards the end of a key transition in the press's approach to crime reporting. Respectable papers that depended mainly on subscriptions, such as the *Vossische Zeitung*, provided relatively brief accounts of Grossmann-related events in their local news section. Such an approach had been the norm in subscription papers' coverage of crimes from 1871 up to the start of the First World War.<sup>16</sup> The major Berlin *Boulevardpresse* papers, particularly the *Berliner Lokal-Anzeiger* and the *BZ am Mittag*, approached the case quite differently. These papers, which generated income especially from street sales, took a more sensational tone. They provided much more detail while discussing Grossmann, although this coverage did not still match the media firestorms that erupted during later serial murder cases like Haarmann and Kürten. During the decade, the street press would continue its dramatic growth: while Berlin in 1920 had 1,957 street vendors of

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<sup>16</sup> More specifically, reporting on crime among the august subscription papers such as the *Vossische* had grown much more common in the early 1900s, but the style of this reporting remained distanced and relatively brief. For extensive discussion of this trend, see Eric Johnson, *Urbanization and Crime: Germany 1871-1914* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 55-74.

newspapers, by 1929 this number was 3,700.<sup>17</sup> Thus, as the decade progressed, the detail- and sensation-heavy approach of the *Boulevardpresse* became the norm for all of Berlin's newspaper reports on sensational crimes. By the time of the Haarmann trial in 1924, and certainly by the time of the pursuit of Kürten in 1929, the Berlin press in general was providing detailed, often sensationalized accounts of murder scenes and killers.

The Grossmann case is thus analytically significant in several ways. First and foremost, it demonstrates how these very different models for reporting on crime might handle the same case. As we will see, across these papers' different approaches and varied political perspectives, they consistently reported in a way that emphasized their own expertise. Second, this was the most publicized serial murder case to occur within Berlin in the 1920s; although it did not reach the sensational heights of the later Haarmann and Kürten cases, the meaning of this case evolved in later serial murder coverage, as discussed in the Chapter 3. Finally, this case demonstrates that the Berlin press's sensationalism had political dimensions in non-political contexts. As the case occurred in heavily working-class Friedrichshain in a period of significant political unrest, papers with different political interests organized their coverage to support contrasting narratives about the Berlin working-class.

While Grossmann's murders and trial did not generate a public furor at the time, in the years since these events, the Grossmann case has received numerous popular

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<sup>17</sup> Gideon Reuveni, *Reading Germany: Literature and Consumer Culture in Germany before 1933*, Trans. Ruth Morris, (New York: Berghahn Books, 2006), 115.

treatments.<sup>18</sup> Most of these accounts are concerned with the specifics of Grossmann's murders and mindset rather than the social milieu in which they occurred. These writings certainly do not analyze the press in any meaningful way, but rather tend to rely on press accounts for the facts of the case. Perhaps in part because they rely on newspaper sources for factual information, these works commonly reproduce the journalistic trope that organized Berlin's moderate and right-wing Grossmann coverage: the idea that the Friedrichshain district was a dangerous, unruly place, unsafe for common people.<sup>19</sup> One recent account goes so far as to express surprise that more killings did not occur in the area.<sup>20</sup>

Meanwhile, academic scholarship on Grossmann's capture and trial is relatively sparse, at least relative to Haarmann and Kürten.<sup>21</sup> This comparative lack of in-depth scholarly investigations may be a result of the case's less extensive coverage in comparison to serial murders later in the decade. Historians have most often referenced the story for what it says about the cultural reception of *Lustmord*, and the later Haarmann case offers much more state, psychiatric, and press sources in this regard. Whether or not one agrees with Irwin-Lewis and Tatar that avant-garde artists used

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<sup>18</sup> For popular presentations of the case, see the reflections of Grossmann's lawyer in Frey, *Ich beantrage Freispruch*, 42-59; a novelized account of the events in Horst Bosetzky, *Die Bestie von Schlesiens Bahnhof* (Berlin: Jaron, 2004); and the observations of journalist Paul Schweder in Paul Schweder, *Die grossen Kriminalprozesse des Jahrhunderts: ein deutscher Pitaval* (Hamburg: Kriminalistik, 1961), 259-65; a brief summary of the facts of the case are available in Jan Feustel, *Raub und Mord*, 12-17; and Hans Heinicke and Karl Weien, *Das Kriminalmuseum: der smarte Kern der polizeihistorischen Sammlung Berlin, Der Buchzwilling Nr. 1* (Berlin: Wort- & -Bild-Specials Heinicke, 1990). For a contemporary medical analysis see Gunther Geserick, Klaus Vendura, and Ingo Wirth, *Zeitzeuge Tod: Spektakuläre*

*Ille der Gerichtsmedizin*. (Leipzig: Militzke, 2009); a less than rigorous popular history is presented in Matthias Blazek, *Carl Grossmann und Friedrich Schumann—Zwei Serienmörder in den zwanziger Jahren*, (Stuttgart: Ibidem-Verl, 2009). Grossmann was one of three Weimar murderers, along with Haarmann and Kürten, who served as "contemporary models" for the fictional child-killer Beckert in Fritz Lang's *M*. Todd Herzog, *Crime Stories: Criminalistic Fantasy and the Culture of Crisis in Weimar Germany*, (New York: Berghahn Books, 2009), 118.

<sup>19</sup> E.g. Bosetzky, 121-135; Blazek, 14.

<sup>20</sup> Feustel, *Raub und Mord*, 4.

<sup>21</sup> Exceptions include Elder, *Murder Scenes*; and Kompisch, *Bestien des Boulevards*.

*Lustmord* imagery to express anger at the concept of the New Woman, these historians are certainly correct that the German public was generally fascinated by *Lustmord* and ideas of social degeneration.<sup>22</sup>

One notable exception to the paucity of academic studies of the Grossmann case is Sace Elder's *Murder Scenes*. Elder analyzes the Grossmann case at length and focuses on the relationship between the police, their witnesses, and the Berlin newspapers. Her focus is first and foremost on how the public understood the victims of sexual violence, and in this effort she considers how Berlin papers constructed sensationalized narratives to explain to readers Grossmann's horrible actions. Concentrating particularly on the victims in her reading, Elder argues that these press narratives functioned primarily to "reinforce widely held assumptions about the moral and social geography of the metropolis."<sup>23</sup> Elder implies that rather than seriously investigating Grossmann's crimes, papers relied on normative, misleading assumptions about class and gender when constructing their stories of the victims.<sup>24</sup> Thus, rather than enlightening the reader, these stories actually masked the real social conditions which had enabled Grossmann's violence.<sup>25</sup>

Elder makes a convincing argument here: when read with an eye towards social norms, these sensational Grossmann press narratives certainly do locate the victims' fates

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<sup>22</sup> Beth Irwin Lewis, "Lustmord: Inside the Windows of the Metropolis," in *Berlin: Culture and Metropolis*, eds. Charles W. Haxthausen, and Heidrun Suhr (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1990), 111-40; Tatar, *Lustmord*. For analysis of the legal and social consideration of sexual violence during the Kaiserreich, see Tanja Hommen, "Körperdefinition und Körperfahrung. 'Notzucht' und 'unzüchtige Handlungen an Kindern' im Kaiserreich," *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 26, no. 4 (2000): 577-602.

<sup>23</sup> Elder, *Murder Scenes*, 84.

<sup>24</sup> Elder, *Murder Scenes*, 14.

<sup>25</sup> In particular, papers ignored the tremendously limited options available to the women Grossmann hired as housekeepers. They similarly did not consider that the silence of Grossmann's neighbors to the sounds of violence in his apartment might speak to codes of urban behavior regarding violence against women in the area. Elder, *Murder Scenes*, 90, 92.

in their own, tragic decisions to step outside of acceptable gender roles. While my dissertation argues that in certain cases sensational accounts significantly challenge the authority of other experts (as demonstrated in Chapters 3 and 4), in other cases such reports can reaffirm broadly held social expectations in the face of disconcerting events. Similarly, cultural norms could cause reporters themselves to make incorrect assumptions about a case; in the Grossmann investigation, as Elder argues, some newspaper reports wrongly reported that the majority of Grossmann's victims had been prostitutes. This mistake in reporting was likely related to journalists' pre-conceived notions about the notorious location of the crime. Elder's work usefully demonstrates what these newspaper stories failed to explain to readers about the victims. In this chapter, I will explore what these articles told readers about the authority of the newspaper itself. Although this chapter relies on many of the same sources as Elder's work, I will focus primarily on the press's emphasis on location, what that conveyed about the capacities of the reporter, and how the political perspectives of different papers influenced the explanatory narratives they built.

I argue that Berlin press coverage of the Grossmann case demonstrates how this press asserted its own sort of expertise, a specialized knowledge of locations dangerous to the average person. This rhetorical device gave news articles two particularly important underlying messages, well-illustrated by the Grossmann coverage. First, the emphasis on the reporter's mastery of a dangerous place strengthened their other assertions about the nature of the killer himself. In this attempt to classify the killer, newspaper coverage borrowed from an eclectic variety of sources, including psychiatric knowledge, popular opinion, and criminological research.

Second, and just as importantly, this trope served as a distancing mechanism for the audience. By describing a location as dangerously alien, newspaper coverage also attempted to reassure readers that they were apart from rather than a part of this milieu.<sup>26</sup> In this assertion I borrow from the work of Marie-Christine Leps, who has made a similar argument with regards to English and French crime fiction in the nineteenth century.<sup>27</sup> In the narratives of 1920s reportage, the Berlin journalist traveled within threatening places such as the Schlesischer Bahnhof area and faced the dangers there. The reading audience in these articles only needed to worry about the vague menace of social degeneration, rather than Grossmann knocking at their door. As I noted above, the political perspective of a newspaper significantly influenced how that paper chose to present the Schlesischer Bahnhof area to its readers.

In asserting specialized authority over the location of the crime, newspapers also strengthened their claim to understand the criminal who inhabited it. In this case, newspaper attempts to categorize and define Grossmann offer interesting parallels to the efforts of criminologists and psychiatrists. I will thus compare the various press explanations for Grossmann's violence to the later writings offered by psychiatric and criminological experts on the subject. This analysis will suggest that the press's ability to build explanatory narratives could affect these experts' analysis as well. And, as with these papers' descriptions of Grossmann's crime scenes, the political orientation of a paper was a strong predictor of the terminology it would use to classify Grossmann.

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<sup>26</sup> It is important to note that the Berlin press did not deem the "good" parts of Berlin totally safe. Reports of the dangers of random street violence or traveling at night alone appeared multiple times in early Weimar reportage, e.g. *Deutsche Allgemeine Zeitung*, November 8, 1923; *Berliner Morgenpost*, April 22, 1920. Nevertheless, the dominant image from the Grossmann coverage was of a separate location for the crimes described.

<sup>27</sup> Marie-Christine Leps, *Apprehending the Criminal: The Production of Deviance in Nineteenth-Century Discourse* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1992).

This chapter examines the news coverage of this case with an eye towards John Hartley's argument that journalism is "the sense-making practice of modernity."<sup>28</sup> Detlev Peukert suggested that Weimar Germany represented a crisis of classical modernity, one in which explanatory narratives were particularly vital.<sup>29</sup> A central goal of press coverage is to make the report's object of study knowable to the reader. Yet, there is not just one way for a place like Friedrichshain, or a person like Grossmann, to be "made sense of." The Berlin press made sense of the Grossmann case in a variety of ways which could in fact contradict one another.

As noted above, a paper's political orientation was one clear indicator of its general approach to Grossmann coverage. Newspapers with moderate or right-wing political perspectives portrayed the Schlesischer Bahnhof area as a dangerous, degenerate location. Newspapers on the left did not treat the location as dangerous in the least. Articles on the right imagined Grossmann as a cannibalistic beast, while articles from left-wing publications used the criminological term *Lustmörder*. Certainly, significant nuance existed within this left/right divide. The moderate *Vossische Zeitung*, for example, was far more sympathetic than the right-wing *Neue Preußische Zeitung* to the motivations of working-class area residents, even as both papers often portrayed working-class areas as dangerous. Nevertheless, observing how trends in Grossmann reportage paralleled papers' political orientations suggests the degree to which political perspectives influenced sensational coverage of events that were not explicitly political.

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<sup>28</sup> John Hartley, *Popular Reality: Journalism, Modernity, Popular Culture* (London: Arnold, 1996), 32-33.

<sup>29</sup> For a discussion of the instability of relations between society and state in early Weimar and the social confusion/concerns that resulted from this, see Martin Geyer, *Verkehrte Welt: Revolution, Inflation, und Moderne, München 1914-1924* (Gottingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1998); for analysis of the effects of the war experience on popular concerns about social decline, see Richard Bessel, *Germany After the First World War* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), 241.

As events unfolded, the Berlin tabloids were easily the leading source of information for anyone seeking an explanation for these events. The case had attracted only minor interest from contemporary criminologists and psychologists.<sup>30</sup> Trans-regional publications like the *Frankfurter Zeitung* and *Vossische Zeitung* devoted only small summaries of Grossmann-related events. The Berlin Boulevard press, on the other hand, provided extensive coverage of the police investigation while often adding its own opinions about the case. Many of the articles I analyze here are sensationalist. They variously rely on emotional appeals to the reader, describe Grossmann's method of murder in detail, and imagine the bloody scenes of his crimes.<sup>31</sup> However, I am reading these texts with an eye towards their other key elements: their treatment of location and their analysis of the killer. I should also note that, as was standard for most local news reports at the time, almost none of these articles were associated with specific writers. Thus, I will refer to the papers themselves when discussing authorial intent.

Detailed descriptions of location were a central, organizing element in the Berlin press's reporting on the Grossmann case. The Berlin press's coverage titillated its audience with detailed descriptions of Grossmann's apartment while simultaneously reassuring readers by emphasizing the foreignness of this location. Thus, when the

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<sup>30</sup> Most notably, psychiatrist Arthur Kronfeld, "Bemerkungen zum Prozess gegen Karl Grossmann" in *Zeitschrift für Sexualwissenschaft* (Sept. 1922), 137-149; Magnus Hirschfeld, *Geschlecht und Verbrechen* (Leipzig: Schneider, 1930), 209-216; criminalist Curt Elwenspoek provided the police perspective on the case and seriously questioned the effectiveness of criminological expertise in Curt Elwenspoek, *Mord und Totschlag*; popular true crime writer Hans Hyan used a great deal of beast imagery in Hans Hyan, *Tiermenschen, Erinnerungen deutscher Kriminalisten* Bd. 2 (Berlin: Verlag Es werde Licht, 1924); the most substantial contemporary case study was probably criminologist Robert Heindl's famous "Der Berufsverbrecher" article, discussed below, Robert Heindl, "Das Berufsverbrechertum der Großstadt" in *Unser Berlin, ein Jahrbuch von Berliner Art und Arbeit* (Berlin, 1928), 140-157.

<sup>31</sup> For more description of this last aspect of the coverage, see Kompisch, *Bestien des Boulevards*, 67-69.

*Berliner Morgenpost* noted (incorrectly) that Grossmann's victims were prostitutes and referred to such killings as "isolated," this isolation could be read to refer also to the location where they had occurred—a place socially, if not physically, distant from the audience.<sup>32</sup> As Elder has noted, the common press assumption that these victims had been prostitutes suggests that journalists were themselves making assumptions about the case given its location near the Schlesischer Bahnhof, notorious for prostitution.<sup>33</sup>

Immediately after Grossmann's apprehension, Berlin's press began offering detailed coverage of the room in which the killings had occurred. These accounts functioned both to affirm the reporters' privileged access to the location and to establish the location as fundamentally foreign to readership. On the day following the morbid discovery, the *Berliner Tageblatt* gave readers a thorough guide to Grossmann's apartment. "The apartment contains a collection of knives, and a thorough search of the coal box reveals a large sum of money."<sup>34</sup> The next day even more detailed descriptions followed: "The living room, bedroom, and kitchen are covered in dirt and full of vermin; one can find under the bed a woman's bloodied petticoat, and in the corner a variety of women's clothing."<sup>35</sup> In its first story on Grossmann, the *Freiheit* spent more time describing the conditions of his apartment than it did the specifics of his crimes. The "stinking habitat" of the killer was an "extremely dirty room brimming with junk furniture."<sup>36</sup>

*Vorwärts*'s first report on Grossmann lingered on the "living room, bedroom, and kitchen bristling with dirt and disease." The paper acted as an explorer for the reader:

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<sup>32</sup> *Berliner Morgenpost*, August 24, 1921.

<sup>33</sup> Elder, *Murder Scenes*, 95.

<sup>34</sup> *Berliner Tageblatt*, August 22, 1921.

<sup>35</sup> *Berliner Tageblatt*, August 23, 1921.

<sup>36</sup> *Freiheit*, August 23, 1921.

“under the bed, in a bowl of water, one finds a woman’s undergarment, specked with blood.” The *Berliner Morgen-Zeitung* went into detail about “the large heap of garbage in the corner” of his room, full of “all sorts of bits of food, cheese, vegetables all blended with dirt.”<sup>37</sup> The *Kreuz-Zeitung* reported that one could only look aghast at “the dirt and vermin” littering the apartment; the paper then observed the similarity between the conditions of the apartment and the conditions of the surrounding areas.<sup>38</sup>

One effect of this reportage was to insinuate Grossmann’s low character by association with the conditions in which he lived; but such articles also obviously suggested that the reporter must have first-hand experience with the location to be able to describe it so specifically. Moreover, these descriptions coded the immediate location of the murders as utterly alien to the living space of the reader, whether that reader was upper, middle, or working class. Repeated accounts of filth and dirt ran counter to bourgeois norms of cleanliness and ordered living space. While members of the working class were certainly more accustomed to tight and sparse accommodations, the amount of loose garbage and blood-stained clothes described by the left-wing press would likely have made the location seem alien as well. The reporter could safely travel in this location, while the reader was given little reason to want to visit such a dirty, degraded space when he or she could rely on the newspaper’s account for all the relevant information.

It is not clear whether various reporters had actually been able to access the apartment, or if they were being supplied information from the police and neighbors, or if they were simply fabricating details for flavor. Regardless, the image that emerged in

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<sup>37</sup> *Berliner Morgen-Zeitung*, September 2, 1921.

<sup>38</sup> *Kreuz-Zeitung*, August 23, 1921.

each newspaper was that the reporter did indeed have access to this location. These reports made no mention of such qualifiers as “neighbors describe” or “police report” when presenting information about the Grossmann’s apartment. Conversely, such qualifiers often did appear when the papers discussed Grossmann’s habits and behavior. The implication, then, was that the reporter had developed first-hand a mastery of location and was also clever enough to safely speak to the other inhabitants of the Schlesischer Bahnhof.

While all Berlin papers gave detailed accounts of the filth in Grossmann’s apartment, when they described the Friedrichshain area in general and the Schlesischer Bahnhof neighborhood in particular, significant differences emerged in the coverage. The major Berlin papers on the left, most notably the *Vorwärts*, *Rote Fahne*, and *Freiheit*, did not expound about the location. They simply mentioned street or place names when necessary. These papers certainly did not belittle the appearance of the area.<sup>39</sup> Berlin’s moderate and right-wing papers, on the other hand, approached the Schlesischer Bahnhof area much as they had Grossmann’s room: this was a filthy, alien, and dangerous location.<sup>40</sup> This impression came through not only in the descriptions of the physical space, which was of course seen as crowded, unsafe, dirty, and degenerative.<sup>41</sup> It also appeared, as I will argue below, in these papers’ presentation of the area’s inhabitants,

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<sup>39</sup> E.g. *Rote Fahne*, August 23, 1921; *Vorwärts*, August 24, 1921; *Freiheit*, August 23, 1921.

<sup>40</sup> E.g. *BZ am Mittag*, August 24, 1921; *Berliner Lokal-Anzeiger*, August 23, 1921; *Kreuzzeitung*, August 25, 1921; *Berliner Morgenpost*, August 24, 1921. Kompisch observes that the *Vossische Zeitung* avoided negative discussions of Friedrichshain as a physical area and suggests that this means the paper presented the location positively. However, the *Vossische Zeitung* certainly did not shy away from criticizing the Schlesischer Bahnhof area as lacking civility and being generally untrustworthy. It seems likely that the paper’s lack of discussion of the physicality of the surrounding area had more to do with the paper’s brief, direct style of reportage during the case than with approval of Friedrichshain. Kompisch, *Bestien des Boulevards*, 66.

<sup>41</sup> E.g. *Berliner Lokal Anzeiger*, September 1, 1921; *BZ am Mittag*, August 28, 1921; *Berliner Morgenpost*, August 26, 1921; *Kreuzzeitung*, August 24, 1921. As I will discuss in this chapter’s conclusion, the differences between these presentations of the area suggest that Berlin papers were not creating a single sense of Berlin, but rather a set of competing ideas of the city.

Grossmann's body count, and even the way that these papers imagined Grossmann's victims. For these moderate and right-wing papers, this was not a safe location; it was a bounteous hunting ground for urban predators such as Grossmann. The *Morgenpost* described how Grossmann "went searching in the streets"<sup>42</sup> for his victims. Other reports imagined Grossmann picking up unsuspecting and economically destitute victims at locations near his house such as the small park at Andreasplatz.<sup>43</sup> This sort of reportage, by creating the Schlesischer Bahnhof as a very dangerous area, also implied that not everyone could venture into such a location and provide coverage of the events there.

This Berlin press discourse about the terrible conditions in Friedrichshain both drew from and reinforced other expert concerns about the city's poorer districts.<sup>44</sup> This coverage had interesting parallels to the in-depth reportage on pre-war Berlin offered by the *Großstadt Dokumente*, edited by Hans Ostwald.<sup>45</sup> These pieces had also portrayed the poor parts of Berlin as a difficult-to-access location, best reached by the intrepid investigative reporter rather than the average citizen. However, Ostwald's works often evinced sympathy for the inhabitants of these locations and allocated some blame for their conditions to Berlin's better-off inhabitants. The right-wing reportage of the Schlesischer Bahnhof did not display similar sentiment.

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<sup>42</sup> *Berliner Morgenpost*, August 23, 1921.

<sup>43</sup> E.g. *Berliner Lokal Anzeiger*, August 23, 1921; *Berliner Morgenpost*, August 23, 1921; *BZ am Mittag*, August 26, 1921.

<sup>44</sup> Excellent compilations and analysis of such discourses are available in Andrew Lees, *Cities, Sin, and Social Reform in Imperial Germany* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2002); and Andrew Lees, "Berlin and Modern Urbanity in German Discourse, 1845-1945," *Journal of Urban History* 17, no. 2 (1991): 153-180.

<sup>45</sup> See particularly the first in the series, Hans Ostwald, *Dunkle Winkel in Berlin* (Berlin, 1905), which focused on the problem of homelessness in Berlin. For more discussion of Ostwald's work, see Richard Evans, *Tales from the German Underworld: Crime and Punishment in the Nineteenth Century* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), 166-177.

Instead, the picture the right-wing press painted of the area seemed to support the harsh critiques of the effects of urban life articulated by several theorists uneasy with urbanization. Georg Simmel's classic essay on the metropolis and modern life was a particularly nuanced and lucid expression of concern about city living. Simmel presented life in an urban center as fundamentally different from life in the country—living in the anonymity and uneven rhythms of such a dense population could alter human psychology, encouraging distraction and egoism.<sup>46</sup> Numerous social theorists and theologians condemned urbanization far more bluntly.<sup>47</sup> Fears included the loss of familial ties and national tradition;<sup>48</sup> the inevitable biological collapse of the middle class population;<sup>49</sup> moral collapse and the decline of Christianity;<sup>50</sup> the growth of selfishness, lust, and materialism;<sup>51</sup> and the decline of genius and aesthetics.<sup>52</sup> While many of these tracts attacked urbanization and the large city as a whole, the right-wing newspaper reports negatively describing the Friedrichshain district localized these complaints. Rather than the entire city being degenerate or amoral, the place where Grossmann had

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<sup>46</sup> Georg Simmel, "The Metropolis and Mental Life," in Georg Simmel, David Frisby, and Mike Featherstone, *Simmel on Culture: Selected Writings* (London: Sage Publications, 1997).

<sup>47</sup> Urbanization also produced critiques from the medical expertise it simultaneously empowered. For example, during the Kaiserreich and early Weimar periods, Berlin was the central site for German neurological and psychological investigations into neurasthenia, with experts theorizing that industrialized urban life produced nerve-shattering shocks to many individuals. See Andreas Killen, *Berlin Electropolis: Shock, Nerves, and German Modernity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006). For an example of a counterdiscourse to the idea of Berlin as an alienating urban space, see An Paenhuysen, "Berlin in Pictures: Weimar City and the Loss of Landscape," *New German Critique* 37, no. 1 (2010): 1-25.

<sup>48</sup> This was the primary concern of the first major anti-urban writing in Germany, Wilhelm Riehl, *Die Naturgeschichte des Volkes als Grundlage einer deutschen Social-Politik*. 3 Bde. (Stuttgart: Cotta, 1854), I, 75-78.

<sup>49</sup> Otto Ammon, *Die natürliche Auslese beim Menschen: auf Grund der Ergebnisse der anthropologischen Untersuchungen der Wehrpflichtigen in Baden und anderer Materialien* (Jena: G. Fischer, 1893).

<sup>50</sup> Heitmann, Ludwig. *Grossstadt und Religion* (Hamburg: C. Boysen, 1913), 39-46.

<sup>51</sup> Jakob Ernst, *Sommerfrische und Großstadt: Betrachtungen und Bedenken* (Stuttgart: Belser, 1901).

<sup>52</sup> Julius Langbehn. *Rembrandt als Erzieher* (Leipzig: C.L. Hirschfeld, 1922), 111-115.

committed his crimes exhibited these qualities. There was another, more civilized Berlin as well: the Berlin where the readership lived, and from where the reporter traveled.

In imagining Friedrichshain for their readership, Berlin papers in the middle and right of the political spectrum not only emphasized the physical squalor of the place; they also created an extremely negative portrayal of the area's denizens. These other residents of the Schlesischer Bahnhof neighborhood generally appeared as an unruly and even dangerous mass. Such an image further enforced the idea that Friedrichshain was a hazardous location for the layperson to explore, and thus strengthened the reporter's claim to expert knowledge of the place. Several days after Grossmann's arrest, police returned with him to his apartment for further investigation of the scene. According to the *Berliner Morgenpost*, an "agitated" crowd of "thousands of residents" massed in front of the apartment building. Without the efforts of the police, "Grossmann would have been lynched."<sup>53</sup> The *Morgenpost* did not explicitly condemn such an expression of outrage, but this report should also not be read to condone the crowd's unruliness. The article quite clearly approved of the Berlin police's handling of the case, noting that authorities had suspected Grossmann for three weeks and had even questioned him before being forced to release him on lack of evidence. The state's policing and investigative apparatus, in this account, was working. From this perspective, the threat of a public lynching was certainly not something to be celebrated. The *BZ am Mittag* was even more blunt about the "throng of people" [*Menschenmenge*] that "quickly jammed traffic

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<sup>53</sup> *Berliner Morgenpost*, August 23, 1921.

on the street forcing the police to disperse it.”<sup>54</sup> By comparison, the left-wing *Vorwärts*, which also discussed the police returning to the scene of the crime with Grossmann, made absolutely no mention of a crowd gathering and needing to be dispersed.<sup>55</sup> The image in the moderate and right-leaning press of the Friedrichshain public as an unruly mass that required police intervention was not replicated on the left.

Several moderate and right-wing papers also scrutinized the citizens of the Schlesischer Bahnhof neighborhood for failing to report Grossmann’s crimes earlier.<sup>56</sup> The *Kreuzzeitung* reported that for months neighbors had witnessed Grossmann carrying small, wrapped packets to the Köpenicker Brücke and throwing them into the water. Certainly, the paper suggested, these observers should have had suspicions when body parts began showing up in nearby waterways.<sup>57</sup> The *Vossische Zeitung* offered a similar reaction when relating accounts from neighbors “who for months heard nightly sounds from Grossmann’s room.”<sup>58</sup> When, a month into the case, one of Grossmann’s neighbors was arrested (and eventually released) on charges that she had known about Grossmann’s actions and had blackmailed him rather than turn him in, the moderate and right-wing press was quick to assume and report her guilt.<sup>59</sup> The *Berliner Morgen-Zeitung* went so far as to imagine a cynical conversation between Grossmann and a “Frau Itzig,” where she demanded money for her silence about his deeds.<sup>60</sup> The picture that emerged in these press accounts was of a callous, exploitative and selfish population.

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<sup>54</sup> *BZ am Mittag*, August 23, 1921.

<sup>55</sup> *Vorwärts*, August 23, 1921.

<sup>56</sup> *Berliner Morgenpost*, August 23, 1921.

<sup>57</sup> *Kreuzzeitung*, August 22, 1921.

<sup>58</sup> *Vossische Zeitung*, August 30, 1921.

<sup>59</sup> *Berliner Morgenpost*, September 17, 1921; *Berliner Volkszeitung*, September 16, 1921;

<sup>60</sup> *Berliner Morgen-Zeitung*, September 17, 1921.

By presenting Friedrichshain's inhabitants in this way, newspapers borrowed from and further popularized a particular criminological discourse about the degenerative effects of particular locations/masses of people. An excellent example of this expertise was criminologist Arthur Kronfeld's analysis of the Grossmann case, published in 1922. Kronfeld served from 1919-1926 as head of the Department for Psycho-sexual Maladies (*Abteilung für seelische Sexualeiden*) in Magnus Hirschfeld's Institut für Sexualwissenschaft. Commenting on the Grossmann case once it had gone to trial, Kronfeld opined that while the victims' deaths were tragic, they had simply been declared "unfit in the struggle for survival."<sup>61</sup> This entire social milieu represented a "low sphere" full of "emotional apathy" and indolence.<sup>62</sup> This sort of harsh social-Darwinist analysis was representative of a particular strain of medicalized criminology that had gestated in the late nineteenth century.<sup>63</sup> According to such analysis, the murderer and his prostitute victim were both carriers of social degeneration, both products of either a degraded environment or inherent physiological weaknesses. In presenting the Schlesischer Bahnhof neighborhood as a dangerous location of degenerates, press reports both emphasized the value/exclusivity of their own work and helped to popularize criminological conceptions of this particular public.

While these papers' political orientations often predicted their general approach to Grossmann coverage, another line of demarcation was the distinction between the

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<sup>61</sup> Kronfeld, "Bemerkungen zum Prozess," 142.

<sup>62</sup> Kronfeld, "Bemerkungen zum Prozess," 138.

<sup>63</sup> For an excellent analysis of this criminological tradition, see Peter Becker, "Weak Bodies? Prostitutes and the Role of Gender in Criminological Writings of 19<sup>th</sup> Century German Detectives and Magistrates," *Crime, Histoire, and Societies* 3, no. 1 (1999): 45-69.

subscription-based and street-based press. This difference was most notable in the press's discussion of Grossmann's death count. During the police investigation following Grossmann's capture, all of Berlin's papers were very interested in exactly how many women Grossmann had killed.<sup>64</sup> However, there was a marked difference between the way that the major subscription-based papers and the major street-sale papers approached the body-count question. The established, subscription-based papers maintained that Grossmann had murdered three or four women, an estimate in keeping with official police announcements. Such reportage was consistent across the political spectrum of these papers: both the left-wing *Vorwärts* and *Rote Fahne*, the moderate *Vossische Zeitung* and *Berliner Tageblatt*, and the right-wing *Kreuzzeitung* consistently remained with police estimates on the number of victims.<sup>65</sup>

Quite different was the *Boulevardpresse* treatment of the issue. As noted in Chapter 1, these papers aggressively competed with one another for the street market. Perhaps not surprisingly, then, the *Boulevardpresse* engaged in journalistic one-upmanship over the body count, repeatedly increasing the number of women they suspected Grossmann had killed. The large numbers this discourse produced could only further associate the Friedrichshain area with mortal danger. The *Lokal-Anzeiger*, almost immediately after the story broke, wrote darkly of "a great number of vanished women" in the area.<sup>66</sup> A few days later, the paper printed a list of seven suspected victims, along with the note that "at least 20 more females" had been seen in Grossmann's company

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<sup>64</sup> A perverse interest in the exact body count of various serial killers continues today, as evidenced by the centrality of the information on a number of web-sites describing such killers. For a print example of this phenomenon in the Grossmann case, see the unfortunate reverence allotted to such numbers in Peter Haining, *Cannibal Killers: The Real Life Flesh Eaters and Blood Drinkers* (London, 2008).

<sup>65</sup> E.g. *Kreuzzeitung*, September 2, 1921; *Rote Fahne* August 30, 1921; *Vorwärts*, August 27, 1921; *Berliner Tageblatt* August 29, 1921; *Vossische Zeitung*, August 24, 1921.

<sup>66</sup> *Berliner Lokal-Anzeiger*, August 23, 1921.

(“out of pure desperation and hunger”) and could now not be accounted for.<sup>67</sup> Within the week, the paper had increased Grossmann’s body count with certainty to “15 victims.”<sup>68</sup>

Not to be outdone, the *BZ am Mittag* used a similar line of investigation in its coverage. In one of its largest articles on the case, “Woman-killer Grossmann in Jail,” the paper used the economic conditions faced by poor Berliners to speculate on the number of victims Grossmann had ensnared: “the number of women in the Schlesischen Bahnhof region facing such dire straights and feeling such starvation that they would return home [with the killer] is unknown. But we can provisionally guess that it was more than 100.”<sup>69</sup> This outlandish number, not repeated in any other papers, was bettered the next day as the *BZ am Mittag* boosted the number of women taken by Grossmann to 150.<sup>70</sup> It is worth noting that the paper was likely describing the total number of women whom Grossmann had hired as housemaids (still likely a serious overestimate), but a quick read of the article gave the impression of an overwhelming number of murder victims in the area. Grossmann himself, speaking to Dr. Strauch, one of two court physicians on the case, expressed dismay at the newspaper coverage he had received. Showing a complete lack of regret for his crimes, Grossmann complained his offenses “were being exaggerated in completely outrageous ways” by the press.<sup>71</sup>

The difference in the way that more traditional, subscription-reliant papers and the *Boulevardpresse* addressed Grossmann’s body-count offers at least one data point for a question posed by sociologist Michael Schudson. Schudson has usefully noted a tension in various analyses of the history of journalism between, on the one hand, the idea that

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<sup>67</sup> *Berliner Lokal-Anzeiger*, August 26, 1921.

<sup>68</sup> *Berliner Lokal-Anzeiger*, August 29, 1921.

<sup>69</sup> *BZ am Mittag*, August 25, 1921.

<sup>70</sup> *BZ am Mittag*, August 26, 1921.

<sup>71</sup> Quoted in Kompisch, *Bestien des Boulevards*, 64.

press commercialization produced reports more interested in provoking audience reaction than providing truth; and on the other hand, the argument that the commercialization of the press has democratized and liberated it, allowing it to escape the repressive power of the state and speak greater truth to that power.<sup>72</sup> While by the time of the republic all of Berlin's major papers were commercialized to some extent, there was still significant difference between subscription-based and street/ad-sales based reportage in 1921. In the case of Grossmann, the papers less dependent on immediate sales, such as the *Vossische* and *Berliner Tageblatt*, produced much more reliable information about Grossmann's crimes than did the papers most dependent on street sales, the *BZ am Mittag* and the *Lokal-Anzeiger*. In this particular case, then, the more commercialized Berlin newspapers produced less reliable information for their readership than did the more traditional broadsheets.

However, as discussed above, these distinctions between subscription- and street-paper reportage did not affect the Berlin press's emphasis on their mastery of the location of crimes. The *Vossische Zeitung* may have covered the Grossmann case in far more restrained language than did the *Berliner Lokal-Anzeiger*, but both papers were sure to describe the location of crimes in detail while playing up the perils of the area.<sup>73</sup> This interest in location mapped across the political spectrum as well as the profit-model spectrum. In essence, all of these papers asserted that their own discourse contained privileged knowledge of the Grossmann case that stemmed especially from a mastery of location; after this commonality, these newspapers molded their coverage in the ways that best supported their own political interests and profit motives.

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<sup>72</sup> Michael Schudson, "News, Public, Nation," *American Historical Review* (April, 2002): 485.

<sup>73</sup> E.g. *Vossische Zeitung*, August 23, 1921; *Berliner Lokal-Anzeiger*, August 23, 1921.

The *Boulevardblatt BZ am Mittag* also emphasized the general danger of the Friedrichshain area indirectly, through a fantastical life story narrative of one of Grossmann's possible victims. Shortly after Grossmann's apprehension, the paper related the story of nineteen-year-old Emma Baumann, who had apparently "abandoned" her upstanding family in Mecklenburg and during her travels had foolishly wandered to a "dirty, dangerous" part of Berlin, the area surrounding the Schlesischer Bahnhof. Without knowledge of this strange location, in the *BZ am Mittag*'s imagining, the innocent nineteen-year-old had met Grossmann on her very first day in Berlin and subsequently been killed by him.<sup>74</sup> Certainly, this story provided a moral rebuke to the victim for having left the protection of her family, but it also implied that the neighborhood around the Schlesischer Bahnhof was so perilous to the untrained traveler that even a single day within it could prove fatal.

The *BZ am Mittag*'s Baumann narrative was largely speculative, however. The Berlin police never charged Haarmann with Baumann's death, although they suspected him in her disappearance. Instead, the *BZ am Mittag* took two facts known at the time of publication, that Baumann had left her home in Mecklenburg for Berlin and that she had subsequently been reported missing in the Friedrichshain district, and built a cautionary tale from it. This narrative certainly painted the victim as tragically complicit in her own demise, but this was not all it did. The story also perpetuated the idea of Berlin as two cities—one a location for the "civilized" reader of the story, and the other an overcrowded morass of desperate, debased, and occasionally murderous people. An innocent girl in such a location would be as good as dead. The further implication, given that the *BZ am Mittag* and Berlin's other papers reported daily from this supposed den of

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<sup>74</sup> *BZ am Mittag*, August 26, 1921.

iniquity, was that the agents of these papers could explore and understand this place and report accurate findings about it to the reader.

This Baumann story exemplifies a narrative form that appeared relatively often in this coverage.<sup>75</sup> Todd Herzog has made the intriguing argument that in the early twentieth century both criminal fiction and criminal case studies began to doubt their ability to deduce the cause of criminal behavior.<sup>76</sup> Herzog's work does not consider the sort of sensationalized press narratives that appeared in the Grossmann case, however. These narratives did not attempt to plumb the depths of Grossmann's mind, beyond basic observations of his sexual perversity, but they did give readers an explanation for why the crime had occurred. In moralizing accounts such as the story of Baumann, the murderous criminal functioned foremost as a punishment to the victim for stepping outside of proper social boundaries. In attempting to explain horrible murders to the reader, these newspapers produced explanatory narratives that did not suffer from the same crisis of craft as the Weimar crime fiction and professional case studies that Herzog examines.

As the Berlin press staked claim to a masterful knowledge of the location of Grossmann's crimes, it also endeavored to explain the criminal himself to readership. In claiming an expert awareness of the Friedrichshain location, press narratives had nurtured a distinction between the reporter's ability to travel in certain places and the general public's implied capacity to do the same. In their varied explanations of Grossmann's

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<sup>75</sup> E.g. *Berliner Volkszeitung* September 16, 1921; *Berliner Morgenpost*, August 23, 1921 and December 14, 1921; *BZ am Mittag*, August 26, 1921; *Berliner Lokal-Anzeiger* September 4, 1921.

<sup>76</sup> Todd Herzog, "Crime Stories: Criminal, Society, and the Modernist Case History," *Representations* 80, no. 1 (Fall, 2002): 35.

being and nature, however, Berlin's newspapers did not suggest that they possessed the same sort of exclusive knowledge regarding Grossmann as an individual. Rather, when the press discussed the killer himself (his mind and body, rather than the place he inhabited), it drew on a variety of different explanations produced by expert disciplines like criminology and psychiatry, as well as broader public sentiments which were usually dismissed by experts. In Chapter 4, I consider how the press could produce an image of the killer that challenged this expertise; in the case of Grossmann, however, we will see how these newspapers drew from pre-existing diagnoses.

This dynamic could only help to popularize psychiatric concepts like the *Lustmörder*, even if experts themselves complained that the public misunderstood and over-diagnosed *Lustmord*. Arguing that the public misunderstood the concept and should not attempt to apply it is, of course, a classic example of the expert's attempt to maintain his knowledge as exclusive and specialized: not just any yokel off the street could correctly diagnose a *Lustmörder*! Criminologist Peter Gast made just such a complaint in 1930, when he suggested that the popularization of *Lustmord* by the press threatened to dilute what should be a very limited, specific category of diagnosis.<sup>77</sup>

Importantly, this sort of press-based diagnosis of the killer was not simply a one-way transfer of information from expert to press. As the press developed narratives based in part on psychiatric ideas of the *Lustmörder* or criminological concepts of environmental degeneration, its reports also informed later expert analysis of the Grossmann case. For example, as we will see, criminologist Robert Heindl eventually diagnosed Grossmann based on the assumption that the butcher had sold the flesh of his

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<sup>77</sup> Peter Gast, *Die Mörder* ed. Franz Exner, *Kriminalistische Abhandlungen* V. 11, (Leipzig: E. Wiegandt, 1930).

victims for profit.<sup>78</sup> This idea had developed in the press independent of the actual facts of the case. Moreover, this rumor was most likely untrue. As this example suggests, the symbiotic relationship of psychiatric/criminological expertise and reportage did not necessarily produce more accurate stories and could instead obscure the actual facts of a case.<sup>79</sup>

In their attempts to define Grossmann, these newspapers did not have immediate expert guidance, and their own norms for murder coverage were an uneasy fit for the case. As noted earlier, criminologists and psychiatrists spent much less time analyzing Grossmann than they did later cases such as Haarmann and Kürten. The vast majority of independent expert work on Grossmann appeared several years after the case rather than during it. Meanwhile, Berlin's newspapers had covered numerous murders in the late Kaiserreich and early Weimar Republic years, and certain norms of reportage had emerged. In many criminal trials, the liberal and socialist papers eagerly critiqued the government for overly harsh prosecutions and expressed sympathy for arguments that the criminal had been driven by desperate circumstance.<sup>80</sup> The Grossmann case, however, presented a man who had killed several women in brutal fashion over an extended period of time. Such an individual did not immediately slot in to the Berlin press's standard categories of criminals, and the local papers had to develop ways to classify the murderer.

Different Berlin papers labeled Grossmann in distinctly different ways. As with the disparities in the presentation of Friedrichshain, the differences between papers'

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<sup>78</sup> Heindl, "Das Berufsverbrechertum," 141.

<sup>79</sup> Elder has demonstrated that this was the case in the press's presentation of Grossmann's victims. Elder, *Murder Scenes*, 88-94.

<sup>80</sup> Siemens' superb study discusses this dynamic in great detail. If anything, the press in Berlin was more sympathetic to these arguments than were the city presses of Paris and Chicago. Daniel Siemens, *"Metropole und Verbrechen. Die Gerichtsreportage in Berlin, Paris, und Chicago, 1919-1933"* (Stuttgart: Steiner, 2007).

classification of Grossmann often mapped onto their political positions. The major papers of the left, the *Vorwärts*, *Freiheit* and *Rote Fahne*, all referred to Grossmann as a *Lustmörder* from the outset of their coverage.<sup>81</sup> Moderate papers such as the *Berliner Tageblatt* and *Vossische Zeitung* repeatedly chose with the term “*Frauenmörder*”<sup>82</sup> with the occasional “*Massemörder*” thrown in for good measure. Only on the right, particularly in the *Lokal Anzeiger*, did Grossmann consistently appear as something less than human.<sup>83</sup>

The boundaries of these terms were somewhat permeable: the socialist and communist papers did occasionally use *Frauenmörder*, although *Lustmörder* was far more prevalent, particularly in headlines; and the moderate and right-wing papers eventually referred to *Lustmord* more often as well. While I argue that using *Lustmörd* as a category of analysis suggests a psychiatric approach to classifying Grossmann,<sup>84</sup> none of these papers provided extended psychological investigations of the murderer’s motives. Such a psychoanalytic approach, often expected in our current media environment, was almost completely absent in Berlin’s newspapers in the 1920s. Nevertheless, choosing to term Grossmann a *Lustmörder* implied very particular assumptions about the case: the murders were sexual in nature, and the perpetrator likely did not have full control over his perverse impulses. Notably, the left-wing papers that used the term did not define *Lustmörd* in their articles, suggesting the extent to which their readership was comfortable with the meaning of this diagnosis.

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<sup>81</sup> *Freiheit*, August 29, 1921; *Rote Fahne*, August 23, 1921

<sup>82</sup> E.g. *Berliner Tageblatt*, August 23, 1921; *Vossische Zeitung*, August 28, 1921.

<sup>83</sup> E.g. *Berliner Lokal Anzeiger*, August 23, 1921; September 1, 1921.

<sup>84</sup> This can be read as an extension into the press of what Foucault termed “the psychiatrization of criminal danger.” By this phrase Foucault suggested the scientific apparatus that emerge around the legal system to distinguish between the criminal and the “normal” person, opening the criminal to being disciplined and known. Michel Foucault, “The Dangerous Individual” in *Politics, Philosophy, Culture*, ed. Lawrence Kritzman (New York: Routledge, 1988), 128.

I should note here that while Berlin's major left-wing papers explained Haarmann as a criminal and Friedrichshain as a location in very similar ways, this similarity should in no way suggest that the papers provided identical narratives of the events. As described in detail last chapter, the *Vorwärts* and *Rote Fahne*, the official organs of the MSPD and KPD, respectively, had developed a visceral animosity towards one another during the 1919 street-fighting in Berlin. This mutual dislike constantly informed their reports, with the papers often singling out each other, rather than the political representatives of each party, for scathing criticism. While this dynamic would influence their Haarmann coverage (discussed next chapter) to an even greater extent, it was also present here.

As Grossmann hung himself, most papers were crippled by the printer's strike. The *Rote Fahne*, however, continued to publish. It took advantage of the opportunity, returning to its earlier critiques of the government in general and the *Vorwärts* in particular. The paper decried the "incompetence of a government that would let a prisoner hang himself."<sup>85</sup> It further singled out the "bourgeois media's lurid fascination" with Grossmann, suggesting that papers like the *Vorwärts* which extensively covered the case cared only for titillation rather than truth. Kompisch has suggested that the *Rote Fahne* was hypocritical in accusing other papers of sensationalism in a case it had reported on as well.<sup>86</sup> However, the *Rote Fahne*'s tone during this coverage had been quite similar to that of the respected *Vossische Zeitung*, offering brief information-based reports on the latest events of the case. As noted above, this was the tone most common the subscription-based papers during this coverage.

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<sup>85</sup> *Die Rote Fahne*, July 6, 1922.

<sup>86</sup> Kompisch, *Bestien des Boulevards*, 64.

Despite the tension between the *Rote Fahne* and *Vorwärts*, Berlin's socialist and communist press generally did refer to Grossmann as a *Lustmörder*. This quasi-medicalized *Lustmörd* description drew on and further popularized an established criminological discourse.<sup>87</sup> This discourse assumed that men experienced constant internal strife between their will (*Wille*) and their sexual urges (*Trieb*). The *Lustmörder* was the man whose will failed and as a result violently transgressed the morals of his society.<sup>88</sup> One of Germany's preeminent sexologists, Magnus Hirschfeld, would eventually echo the left-wing press's diagnosis of Grossmann. In his massive diagnostic text *Geschlecht und Verbrechen*, Hirschfeld categorized Grossmann as an archetypal example of the sexual murderer. He explained that Grossmann's pathological sexual arousal at the sight of violence to a body stemmed from psychological disfunction.<sup>89</sup>

In analyzing Grossmann, these papers were also much more likely to use rhetorical techniques that appeared in psychiatric investigations of subjects. Most particularly, this included descriptions of interviews with the killer and physical observation of the subject. The *Freiheit*, for example, ran a large story entitled "The Interrogation of the *Lustmörder*" in which it described witness accounts of Grossmann's actions in the days leading up to the discovery of his murders.<sup>90</sup> The paper made special note that Grossmann seemed detached from his victims, to the extent that he could not even remember their names. The paper made a habit of describing Grossmann's demeanor when it reported on his interactions with investigators.

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<sup>87</sup> See for example Erich Wulffen, *Der Sexualverbrecher: ein Handbuch für Juristen, Verwaltungsbeamte und Ärzte; mit zahlreichen kriminalistischen Original-Aufnahmen* (Berlin: P. Langenscheidt, 1910), 454.

<sup>88</sup> Hania Siebenpfeiffer, "Böse Lust: "Gewaltverbrechen in Diskursen der Weimarer Republik (Cologne: 2005), 185-88.

<sup>89</sup> Hirschfeld, *Geschlecht und Verbrechen*, 209.

<sup>90</sup> *Freiheit*, August 27, 1921. *Vorwärts* also discussed the interview in detail: *Vorwärts* August 25, 1921.

Physiological descriptions were often tied to behavioral observations in these reports. The *Vorwärts* provided a detailed physical description of this “*Lustmörder*.” The paper noted that he stood “approximately 1.65 meters tall, rather lean and with a languid demeanor.... He has a small, unkempt moustache and wears no collar... his most distinguishing marks are scars on his forehead.”<sup>91</sup> The left liberal *Berliner Volks-Zeitung*, meanwhile, noted Grossmann’s sour expression and explained that this demonstrated that he was “predisposed to perverse acts.”<sup>92</sup> This sort of description echoed earlier analysis of subjects by criminal anthropologists. It also reproduced that previous expertise’s suggestion that an individual could be understood purely through close examination of his body.

Interestingly, these newspapers’ confidence that they could explain Grossmann through his appearance was inconsistent with much of the criminological work occurring during this time. Todd Herzog’s analysis has suggested that within criminological circles themselves, trust in the expert’s power to identify and classify the criminal based on his appearance collapsed, encouraging criminologists to critically reexamine their own investigative apparatuses.<sup>93</sup> Herzog’s argument is certainly supported by criminalist Kurt Elwenspoek’s own analysis of criminal cases which included Grossmann’s. Elwenspoek scoffed, “you believe that one must be able to read a murderer’s depravity in his face? Amateur superstition!”<sup>94</sup> Thus, while these left-wing newspapers were reproducing the logic of earlier criminological expertise, they were in fact empowering an approach that had fallen out of favor with the contemporary criminological scene. Maren Hoffmeister

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<sup>91</sup> *Vorwärts*, August 23, 1921.

<sup>92</sup> *Berliner Volks-Zeitung* August 23, 1921.

<sup>93</sup> Todd Herzog, *Criminalistic Fantasy: Imagining crime in Weimar Germany*. (Ph. D. diss, University of Chicago, 2001), particularly part 2.

<sup>94</sup> Elwenspoek, *Mord und Totschlag*, 17.

has noted that juridical expertise from the time had similar faith in the power of this observational approach, as it relied heavily on reading the body of the accused individual.<sup>95</sup>

The *Rote Fahne*'s attitude to the case was even more clinical than the *Vorwärts*' approach. The paper enjoyed a wide readership well beyond the Berlin area, and its brief, extremely direct articles about Grossmann-related developments were similar in style, if not content, to the approaches of other Berlin-based trans-regional papers like the *Vossische Zeitung*.<sup>96</sup> Unlike the more breathless proclamations of *Boulevardpresse* papers like the *BZ am Mittag* and the *Lokal-Anzeiger*, the *Rote Fahne* reported only on the police's pronouncements and offered some brief editorial analysis of Grossmann's psyche. These short discussions of the killer's nature relied heavily on psychiatric terminology.

While the *Rote Fahne* maintained a clinical demeanor, it also interspersed such analysis with occasional reactions that seemed more suited to a layperson. After the police had officially charged Grossmann with a second murder, the paper immediately classified him as "a *Lustmörder*"<sup>97</sup> and "a pathologically abnormal person."<sup>98</sup> Clearly, this was the language of the medical expert. Yet in the same breath, it also compared the murderer to an "abnormally-developed sadistic beast [*Scheusal*]" who committed crimes to "graze [*weiden*] on the suffering of his victim."<sup>99</sup> Thus, while the *Rote Fahne* in general maintained a detached perspective on Grossmann, it at times it slipped into the

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<sup>95</sup> Maren Hoffmeister, "Lustmord: Widerständige Körper im Deutungssystem Justiz," in *Körper und Recht. Anthropologische Dimensionen der Rechtsphilosophie*, ed. Ludger Schwarte and Christoph Wulf (Munich: Fink, 2003), 339-355.

<sup>96</sup> The main trans-regional paper not based in Berlin, the *Frankfurter Zeitung*, was also particularly brief in coverage and willing to see e.g. *Frankfurter Zeitung*, August 25, 1921.

<sup>97</sup> *Rote Fahne*, August 25, 1921

<sup>98</sup> "ein pathologisch abnormaler Mensch" *Rote Fahne*, August 26, 1921.

<sup>99</sup> *Rote Fahne*, August 25, 1921

sort of language one might expect in expressions of popular disgust. The result was the sort of hybrid description that could combine “abnormal” with “beast.”

The politically moderate papers’ application of the term *Frauenmörder* to Grossmann did not have the same medical implications that *Lustmörder* did. Moderate papers like the *BZ am Mittag*, the *Berliner Morgenpost*, and the *Berliner Tageblatt* frequently covered murders in the early days of the Weimar Republic, and they usually used the term “*Frauenmord*” to describe cases where the victim was a woman.<sup>100</sup>

Labeling Grossmann a *Frauenmörder* did not mark him as a medical abnormal, nor did it dismiss him from society entirely. Rather, the term placed him in a category occupied by previous killers on which these papers had reported.

*Frauenmord* was generally how these papers covered Grossmann’s actions: when these articles discussed the crimes themselves rather than their location, they focused on the *Frauen* and on the *Mord*.<sup>101</sup> When these papers created narratives from these events, their articles usually focused on what they presented as the weak and vulnerable female victims (their circumstances, their motivations for entering Grossmann’s apartment, etc).<sup>102</sup> They also went into explicit detail about precisely how Grossmann had murdered these women. For example, the generally august *Vossische Zeitung* expounded at length about how “after he hit her three times on the head, he jammed her pocketbook in her mouth and thus suffocated her.”<sup>103</sup> The *Berliner Tageblatt* wrote that “on the body there

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<sup>100</sup> For detailed discussion of the increasing importance of crime coverage in Berlin reportage, see Elder, *Murder Scenes*, 24-28

<sup>101</sup> See for example *Berliner Tageblatt*, August 22, 1921; *Berliner Tageblatt*, August 24, 1921; *Berliner Morgenpost*, August 22, 1921; *Berliner Morgenpost*, August 25, 1921.

<sup>102</sup> Elder provides detailed analysis of such coverage and its implications in producing a dubious public understanding of the victims, in Elder, *Murder Scenes*, 92-101.

<sup>103</sup> *Vossische Zeitung*, August 24, 1921.

was a long transverse cut, as if the victim was to be scalped.”<sup>104</sup> When discussing Grossmann’s motivations, these stories might mention his perverse sexual appetite, and they certainly considered him morally reprehensible. Yet they also often mentioned his possible profit motive, discussing how he had sold the clothes of his victims to his neighbors. When, as noted above, the *Boulevardpresse* papers began to increase Grossmann’s body count, the term *Massenmörder* became somewhat more common in these papers, but the general dynamics of their reportage remained the same.<sup>105</sup>

On the political right, papers such as the *Berliner Lokal-Anzeiger* and *Kreuzzeitung* were much more likely to refer to Grossmann in fully dehumanizing language and to ascribe to him additional horrifying acts.<sup>106</sup> The *Kreuzzeitung* reported that Grossmann had been “burning pieces of the bodies.”<sup>107</sup> The *Lokal-Anzeiger*’s coverage was particularly aggressive: Berlin’s premier conservative *Boulevardblatt* reported extensively on the case following Grossmann’s arrest. This reporting produced a very different image of Grossmann than the left-wing press’s vision of an abnormally developed *Lustmörder* or the moderate press’s blunt *Frauenmörder*. In *Lokal-Anzeiger* coverage, Grossmann was a “degenerate” who preyed on pathetic victims driven by need and hunger.<sup>108</sup> Grossmann’s motivation in his crimes was vague but threatening—he was

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<sup>104</sup> *Berliner Tageblatt*, August 22, 1921.

<sup>105</sup> See for example the extended description of Grossmann’s third murder in *Berliner Morgen-Zeitung*, September 17, 1921.

<sup>106</sup> It should be noted that, particularly early on in coverage, the phrase *Frauenmörder* did appear in these papers, e.g. *Berliner Lokal-Anzeiger*, August 24, 1921. Nevertheless, the image of the criminal that emerged here, particularly in the *Lokal-Anzeiger*, was different in important ways from what papers in other political spectrums presented.

<sup>107</sup> *Kreuzzeitung*, September 2, 1921.

<sup>108</sup> *Berliner Lokal-Anzeiger*, August 23, 1921.

“driven by dark impulses.”<sup>109</sup> He was, quite simply, a “monster” (*Unhold*) and a “brute” (*Wüstling*).<sup>110</sup>

The *Lokal-Anzeiger* went further still, however. This paper provided the journalistic origin point for the rumor of Grossmann’s cannibalism, a likely-untrue claim that would, by the end of decade, become a central facet in the Berlin media’s memory of the case.<sup>111</sup> As the *Lokal-Anzeiger* darkly intoned towards the end of the initial coverage, and unsupported by any official announcements, “the mass-murderer Grossmann is suspected, after the dismemberment of the murdered women, of having prepared them as fleshy treats” (*meschlichen Genuss*). The article went on to report that “he apparently, after separating the flesh from the bone, prepared some as veal, some as corned beef, some as sausage, and then sold them nearby at the Schlesischen Bahnhof.”<sup>112</sup> Whether this report had been manufactured by the newspaper or had come from rumors on the street, it did not catch on in other newspapers at the time. Only with the revelation of Denke’s cannibalism in 1924 (discussed in the next chapter), did Berlin’s papers come to a broad agreement that Grossmann had cannibalized his victims. The claim still appears in recent popular accounts of the case.<sup>113</sup>

I have suggested thus far that the political positions of each paper were strong predictors of that paper’s specific take on both the location of the crime and the killer himself, even as all papers confirmed their general expertise of place. I further assert that both the left- and right-wing descriptions of the killer and his location were internally consistent. That is to say, Berlin’s socialist newspapers had universally avoided

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<sup>109</sup> *Berliner Lokal-Anzeiger*, September 9, 1921.

<sup>110</sup> *Berliner Lokal-Anzeiger*, August 23, 1921.

<sup>111</sup> E.g. *Rote Fahne* December 24, 1924; *Vossische Zeitung* December 28, 1924.

<sup>112</sup> *Berliner Lokal-Anzeiger*, September 1, 1921.

<sup>113</sup> E.g. Geserick, *Zeitzeuge Tod*, 7; Haining, *Cannibal Killers*, 18.

describing the Friedrichshain area in negative or frightening terms, as most of its population likely read at least one of these publications. These papers imagined Grossmann as a *Lustmörder*, a medically abnormal and perverse individual whose actions did not automatically implicate the surrounding population in his crimes. The moderate and right-wing papers, however, had been eager to describe the *Schlesischer Bahnhof* as a dangerous and degenerate place. It would be no surprise for such a location to produce either a man who killed women and sold their clothes for profit, or a degenerate, monstrous beast. Both these images of the killer fit comfortably into the picture of an overcrowded district full of uncivil people and weak, helpless women just waiting to be victimized.

While most psychiatric and criminological experts did not address the Grossmann case at the time, there was one notable exception that will provide a useful comparison with these newspaper accounts of Grossmann as an individual. Criminologist Arthur Kronfeld's essay, mentioned briefly above, appeared shortly after the conclusion of Grossmann's trial. In it Kronfeld offered a critique of the case similar to the complaints of later non-state-affiliated expert observers in the Haarmann and Kürten trials. Kronfeld's criticism, like that later criticism, functioned primarily to define his own knowledge as specialized expertise. He suggested that the forensic investigation into the killer had been "insufficiently resolved."<sup>114</sup> The state's physicians had misunderstood what really drove the killer, and only the correct application of knowledge (Kronfeld's own disciplines of criminology and sexology) to Grossmann could reveal the truth about

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<sup>114</sup> Kronfeld, "Bemerkungen zum Prozess," 147.

the criminal's mind. Kronfeld dismissed the findings of the court's examining physicians Dr. Störmer and Dr. Strauch, both of whom had affirmed that the defendant understood the difference between right and wrong, meaning that Grossmann was clearly sane and fit for trial. Kronfeld, simply by observing the defendant in court, decided that Grossmann was "clearly an *epileptoide Imbezille* with severe moral defects" and "a sadistic and hypersexual disposition" who, while clearly needing to be removed from society, also required further, expert analysis.<sup>115</sup>

It is useful to consider what Kronfeld's complaints tell us more generally about claims to expertise, because here we find useful parallels to newspaper's presentation of location. When Kronfeld suggested that the individual female witnesses should be interviewed by a medical professional (i.e. someone with Kronfeld's specialized training) because the judge's presence made women too nervous to answer truthfully, he both affirmed his own expertise and criticized ability of juridical expertise to reach the truth of the case.<sup>116</sup> In this account, the judge's (and lawyers') specialized training was a hindrance rather than an aid for reaching the truth. Only the specially trained criminologist/sexologist could explore the mind of the killer and the witness to discover truly useful information. The press's claims to mastery of location in the Grossmann case had a similar logic. By emphasizing the danger of the location, whether through direct descriptions of dirt and crime or through fables about the fates of innocents who travelled in this area, newspapers were claiming that their reporters had a specialized capacity to safely explore (and thus understand) such a place. A claim to expertise must exclude other practices of knowledge accumulation from the object of the investigation.

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<sup>115</sup> Kronfeld, "Bemerkungen zum Prozess," 147.

<sup>116</sup> Kronfeld, "Bemerkungen zum Prozess," 143.

The press's analysis of Grossmann, which drew in part from psychiatric and criminological discourse about the nature and motivation of criminals, also fed back into and influenced this discourse. Writing in 1926, criminologist Robert Heindl discussed the Grossmann case extensively in his famous "professional criminal" essay. Heindl explicitly approved of the sensational press's coverage of the case, because he believed it focused the reader's attention on an important case. "The degeneration of morals" that could result from sensationalism was far less dangerous "than the sterile work of the criminal police."<sup>117</sup> In this assessment Heindl was not alone among criminological experts: writing in the *Vossische Zeitung* a year later, Berlin's Deputy President of Police Bernhard Weiss celebrated the arrival of "a grand, crime-hungry readership."<sup>118</sup> Such a mobilized readership could only help the police when it called for help with investigations, Weiss theorized. A public unsatisfied by straightforward facts needed "complete descriptions of the latest criminal activities and personalities" that sensationalist reporting could provide.

Heindl's own analysis of Grossmann seems to have been substantially influenced by the Berlin press's narrative fantasy of Grossmann's cannibalism. Heindl claimed that Grossmann was an excellent example of a professional criminal because his motives had been solely economic.<sup>119</sup> Heindl had reached this conclusion after discovering that Grossmann had sold his victims' flesh and clothing for profit. For Heindl, this profit motive was Grossmann's primary interest in committing his crimes, and it also explained why he had mutilated his victims. However, the idea that Grossmann was a cannibal, and particularly that he sold his leftovers to unsuspecting neighbors, was a press discourse

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<sup>117</sup> Heindl, "Das Berufsverbrechertum," 118.

<sup>118</sup> Bernhard Weiss, "Kriminalensationen" *Vossische Zeitung*, January 16, 1927.

<sup>119</sup> Heindl, "Das Berufsverbrechertum," 141.

begun in the *Lokal-Anzeiger* which truly gained ground only well after his death and was quite detached from the facts of the case.

The actual police investigation had never suggested that Grossmann sold his victims' flesh. While most papers at the time had noted that Grossmann was a butcher, the most likely negative association for this term would have been readers' memories of the First World War's hardships, when an effective British blockade created massive food shortages. In that context, butchers were sometimes rumored to be withholding food from other civilians.<sup>120</sup> Although the *Vorwärts* mentioned that neighbors had purchased meat from Grossmann,<sup>121</sup> I found only two 1921 press reports which discussed the possibility that Grossmann had been selling the remains of his victims to customers. One was a mention, towards the end of the coverage of Grossmann's arrest, in the *Berliner Morgen-Zeitung*, which went on to note that there was "no certain evidence" to support "these rumors."<sup>122</sup> The other was the aforementioned bald assertion in the *Berliner Lokal-Anzeiger* that Grossmann had sold flesh of his victims.<sup>123</sup> As will be discussed in more detail in the next chapter, the idea of Grossmann as a cannibal who made others complicit in his own crime blossomed in the Berlin press during the Haarmann and Denke cases of 1924. Thus, Heindl was basing the heart of his expert analysis on a press narrative that was almost certainly incorrect and at the very least had developed largely independent of the actual criminal investigation.

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<sup>120</sup> For a description of the experiences of Berliners in this period, see Belinda Davis, *Home Fires Burning: Food, Politics, and Everyday Life in World War I Berlin* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000).

<sup>121</sup> *Vorwärts*, September 3, 1921.

<sup>122</sup> *Berliner Morgen-Zeitung*, September 3, 1921.

<sup>123</sup> *Berliner Lokal-Anzeiger*, September 1, 1921.

Berlin's newspapers covered the Grossmann case in ways that claimed that their own reportage was a sort of expert discourse. First and foremost, this involved detailed descriptions of locations, particularly the lair of the murderer himself. Across political divides and regardless of different styles of reportage, articles consistently emphasized the foreignness of Grossmann's abode and the reporter's masterful knowledge of the place. This was not a location that any sane reader would want to visit, but it was a location that the reporter knew perfectly. The Weimar Berlin press consistently implied that their knowledge of locations was not broadly available. In short, these papers were creating a unified vision of the *newspaper*, even as their presentations of Berlin varied dramatically. This vision was in keeping with the professionalization of German journalism discussed in Chapter 1: this was a press that believed newspapers had both the power and the duty to educate readers even as they described events.

While establishing this central, organizing idea of their discourse's value, these papers produced a variety of different explanations for the murderer and his environment. Rather than a single press reading of this event, we find a multitude of narratives. I argue that in this case, both a paper's political motivations and its style of reportage (subscription or street sales-based) were good indicators of how a paper would choose to shape its narrative. The tendency for political affiliation to affect a newspaper's presentation of both Friedrichshain and Grossmann suggests that, although these papers all asserted that their knowledge of these places was specialized, in fact they often drew on popular tropes and other expert discourses to construct their vision of Berlin. Of course, early criminology and psychiatry themselves had not sprung *sui generis* from the

heads of experts, but had often coded social prejudices as “expert;” I suggest that a similar dynamic occurred here. Thus, discussions of the neighborhood surrounding Grossmann’s apartment were quite different on the left and the right. The moderate and right-wing papers described the location and its inhabitants as alien and dangerous. Socialist and communist papers, meanwhile, made no such mention of the dangers or degenerative qualities of the Schlesischer Bahnhof area.

I suggest that the difference between these papers’ approaches to the Friedrichshain district can be explained by their readership. By readership I mean less the actual reception of this reportage, and more what these various papers imagined their readership to be: these papers were creating very different narratives about the nature of Berlin as a city, and this difference stemmed largely from a distinction in who they understood themselves to represent. The vast majority of the Friedrichshain population was working class, and these were the primary readership of papers like *Die Rote Fahne*, *Vorwärts*, and *Freiheit*. Certainly, these papers had no wish to insult their readership with fantastical descriptions of the horrors of a working class area.

Moreover, the reporters for right-wing or moderate papers like the *Lokal-Anzeiger* and *BZ am Mittag*, which went into such detail about the degraded location of Grossmann’s apartment, were continuing to establish this area as a separate world, a place where their readers would not want to travel if they could rely instead on the reporter’s expert analysis. This conceit would not work in the context of a socialist paper like *Vorwärts*, because many of its readers lived in just such a location and could easily claim a sort of locational expertise of their own. The socialist papers had no qualms

about detailing the horrors of Grossmann's room itself, because this was a place that their readers could not easily access.

Thus, while the two-cities motif appeared in Berlin papers across the political spectrum, what actually constituted these two cities differed quite a bit from paper to paper. For example, the *Kreuzzeitung* contrasted the positive image of a bourgeois, bürgerlich Berlin with the frightening image of degenerate, criminal, working class Berlin, while the *Rote Fahne* told the tale of the valiant, oppressed working class's struggle against the privileged, exploitative sections of Berlin. Both these papers presented their readers with a city divided into the world the reader knew and the world the reader could not easily access. The key difference was what, exactly, constituted the dangerous, alien location that the reporter could safely explore.

This finding challenges Peter Fritzsche's argument that Berlin's newspapers worked primarily to create a unified image of Berlin for the city's urban readership, an image that transcended class divisions.<sup>124</sup> This case study suggests that quite the opposite occurred: these papers were not creating a unified vision of the city, but rather they were forming very different ideas of the city that worked in similar, if opposing, ways. Left-wing papers like *Rote Fahne* and *Vorwärts* avoided belittling the Friedrichshain area and did not condemn its inhabitants. Right-wing papers like the *Lokal-Anzeiger* and *Kreuzzeitung*, as well as moderate papers like the *BZ am Mittag*, imagined a location dangerous for the bourgeois reader to explore.

Importantly, while Fritzsche's argument has echoes of Benedict Anderson's famous description of imagined communities, Anderson's argument is certainly in

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<sup>124</sup> Peter Fritzsche, *Reading Berlin, 1900* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996), especially 233. For a similar argument, see also Kaspar Maase, *Grenzloses Vergnügen: Der Aufstieg der Massenkultur 1850-1970* (Frankfurt/Main: Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag, 1997).

keeping with my findings here.<sup>125</sup> These papers may not have been creating a unified imagined community across Berlin, but they were certainly helping to foster a group of different, mutually opposed communities within the city. This was true even within the left-wing papers. As we saw in the previous chapter and will continue to observe, the *Vorwärts* and *Rote Fahne* ultimately had very different perspectives about what, exactly, constituted the true socialist community of Berlin.

While Berlin's reportage on Grossmann's crimes emphasized the reporter's exclusive access to knowledge of strange locations, reporters avoided such insinuations when categorizing the killer himself. In the effort to identify and thus explain Grossmann, different papers chose notably different labels for the murderer. Again, these decisions tended to hew along political boundaries. The right often described Grossmann in monstrous terms and attributed even more horrific acts to him. For papers on the left, the phrase of choice was *Lustmörder*. This term recalled psychiatric expertise and branded Grossmann as an abnormal sexual predator.

The left's use of this term offers broader parallels with some of the sexologists who also championed the diagnosis. Magnus Hirschfeld, who would also eventually diagnose Grossmann as a *Lustmörder*, was extremely uncomfortable with Germany's use of the death penalty. On multiple occasions he complained that the state had executed defendants who were not mentally competent to stand trial, and the *Lustmörder* diagnosis sometimes featured in these complaints. Meanwhile, papers like the *Rote Fahne* and *Vorwärts* had staunchly opposed the death penalty during the creation of the Weimar constitution, and they continued to lobby against it as the decade wore on. In Chapter 3's

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<sup>125</sup> Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1991).

discussion of the Haarmann trial, I will consider in greater depth how the Berlin press could use the *Lustmörder* label to call into question the defendant's competence to stand trial. For now, let me note that the term was a method of mobilizing psychiatric expertise against the wishes of the judicial and policing system to execute an individual. The rapidity with which the left-wing press adapted the term in the Grossmann case suggests first and foremost their comfort with the social milieu of sexologists who had developed the term. But it may also indicate their awareness of the power of the term to thwart the will of the court in executions.

Finally, this case provides an excellent example of the power of the sensationalist genre to uphold state interests and social norms. Many papers, across all political spectrums, narrated the story of a horrible killer who terrorized his helpless female victims, victims whose fate was tragic but who had chosen to spurn proper social protections, putting themselves in danger.<sup>126</sup> In this version of the story, the state policing and investigative apparatus appeared as a hero. According to these stories police investigators had worked tirelessly to capture the killer and ensure a thorough investigation of his deeds before his trial.<sup>127</sup> Even the normally belligerent *Rote Fahne* seemed to approve of the initial stages of the investigation.

However, the sensationalist press's efforts to uphold social norms and state power in the Grossmann case does not mean that the sensational genre always worked this way in the Weimar Republic. The following studies of the Haarmann, Denke, and Kürten cases will provide useful counterpoints to the Grossmann case. While, again, in these cases newspapers worked to establish their discourse as expert, their use of

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<sup>126</sup> Elder, *Murder Scenes*, 88-101.

<sup>127</sup> E.g. *Berliner Morgenpost*, August 23, 1921.

sensationalism often ran counter to the interests of the courts, police, and criminological and psychiatric experts. In the cases of Haarmann and Denke, sensationalism provided powerful tools to challenge the competency of the judicial system and the police. In the case of Kürten, meanwhile, the press's sensational description/imagery of the killer came to compete with the diagnoses of psychiatric experts.

## CHAPTER THREE

### FRITZE HAARMANN AND KARL DENKE: SENSATION AND THE STATE

In his bestselling 1922 book *The Decline of the West*, historian and philosopher Oswald Spengler bemoaned the German press's pernicious and overwhelming influence on the gullible public: "What is truth? For the masses, that which they continually read and hear." Certainly, Spengler admitted, an individual might investigate an event and discover facts for himself, but "the other, public truth of the moment, which alone matters for effects and successes in the real world, is today a product of the Press. What the Press wills, is true. Its commands evoke, transform, interchange truths. Three weeks of press work, and the world has acknowledged the truth." Moreover, argued Spengler, the reading public was so malleable that at the newspapers' whim the "reader-mass will storm through the streets and hurl itself upon the target indicated .... A hint from the press-staff, and it will become quiet and go home."<sup>1</sup>

This sort of a claim about the perverting power of the press appeared consistently in critiques of the press during the Weimar Republic.<sup>2</sup> Journalists had influence "greater

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<sup>1</sup> Oswald Spengler, *Der Untergang des Abendlandes: Umriss einer Morphologie der Weltgeschichte* (Munich: Beck, 1922), ii. 579-581.

<sup>2</sup> Eg Wilhelm Kaupert, *Die deutsche Tagespresse als Politicum* (Freudenstadt: O. Kaupert, 1932); Georg Bernhard, "The German Press" in *Der Verlag Ullstein zum Welt-Reklame-Kongress 1929* (Berlin, 1929); Hildegard Kriegk, *Die politische Führung der Berliner Boulevardpresse* (Berlin: O.O, 1941), 41; Peter Fritzsche, *Reading Berlin, 1900* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996), 179.

than the influence of priests and scholars.”<sup>3</sup> Occasionally, even the more solemn German newspapers would themselves decry the corrupting influence of other papers. The *Frankfurter Zeitung*, for example, scolded the press’s eagerness to cover executions, claiming that such coverage “awakens evil desires and encourages taking pleasure in cruelty.”<sup>4</sup> State officials were similarly suspicious of sensational press coverage’s influence on the public; some criminal psychologists went still farther, suggesting that the apparent increase in serial killing during the decade stemmed from increased newspaper coverage of murders.<sup>5</sup> In his massive study of criminal behavior, famed criminologist Erich Wulffen explained that “the extensive newspaper reporting of murders and the terrible murder stories in the penny-dreadfuls... affect the imagination and feelings of the reader in the most grotesque manner.”<sup>6</sup>

Common to these critiques was the idea that other individuals were more affected by the press than was the analyst himself. This dynamic is not unique to Weimar Germany, and it has been explored in recent media studies research. This research argues that the “third person effect,” in which decision-makers believe that the public is easily swayed by the press, can lead those decision-makers to take action that they would not otherwise attempt.<sup>7</sup> Thus the press in effect can motivate action that quite outstrips its

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<sup>3</sup> Joseph Eberle, *Grossmacht Presse. Enthüllungen für Zeitungsgeschichte Forderungen für Männer* (Vienna: Herold, 1920), 19.

<sup>4</sup> *Frankfurter Zeitung*, Oct 8, 1926.

<sup>5</sup> See for example Bernhard Fulda, *Press and Politics in the Weimar Republic* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009); Kurt Koszyk, *Zwischen Kaiserreich und Diktatur. Die sozialdemokratische Presse von 1914 bis 1933* (Heidelberg: Quelle & Meyer, 1958) 26-27; or Richard Evans, *Rituals of retribution: Capital Punishment in Germany, 1600-1987*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 540-48

<sup>6</sup> Erich Wulffen, *Kriminalpsychologie. Psychologie des Täters* (Berlin: Langenscheidt, 1926), 428.

<sup>7</sup> This concept was pioneered by W. Phillips Davison in “The Third Person Effect in Communication,” *Public Opinion Quarterly* 47 (1983): 1-15; for good overviews of the research, see also Elisabeth Noelle-Neumann, “Wirkung des Massenmedien auf die Meinungsbildung” in *Das Fischer-Lexicon Publizistik Massenkommunikation*, eds. Elisabeth Noelle-Neumann, Winfried Schulze, and Jürgen Wilke (Frankfurt: Fischer Taschenbuch, 2009), 518-571; Julie L. Andsager and H. Allen White, *Self versus Others: Media Messages and the Third Person Effect* (Mahwah: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2007). A “first person

actual influence on the broader public.<sup>8</sup> The prevalence of warnings about the dangers of the popular press during the 1920s certainly suggests that third person effects were in play and indicates those newspapers' agenda-setting ability during this period.

As I argued in my discussion of the Grossmann case in Chapter 2, despite the sorts of fears expressed about the Berlin press, this press could in fact affirm social norms and state interests in its coverage. This was not always the case, however. In this chapter I will examine the role of the press in the cases of serial killers Fritz Haarmann and Karl Denke. These cases demonstrate the degree to which ideological coverage was the norm even in cultural sensations. Both cases also demonstrate the capacity of this reportage to challenge court and police interests. In the Haarmann case, journalist Theodor Lessing's reportage launched powerful critiques against several aspects of the state; in the Denke case, Berlin's sensationalist press produced a critique of the republic's political leadership through its broader narrative of cannibalism in Germany.

The Haarmann case also demonstrates how Berlin reporters and newspapers could deploy sensation in overtly political ways, ways only tangentially related to the actual events, to push their own particular and varying political agendas. In the Grossmann case, papers' political sympathies often influenced how they chose to describe the location of the crime and the killer (how they constructed the idea of Berlin). In the Haarmann case, however, we find the press actively mobilizing the Haarmann case to support particular political arguments. This journalistic style of reportage proved to be a

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effect," conversely, would involve an individual being strongly affected by a media report but believing that the general public is much more indifferent to it.

<sup>8</sup> Richard Perloff, "Third Person Effect Research 1983-1992, A Review and Synthesis," *International Journal of Opinion Research* 5, (1993): 167-184.

particularly effective literary form for challenging the claims and power of the court and the police.

In fact, the criminologist Wulffen had written his critique of the press following the trial of Haarmann. The Haarmann trial, held in Hannover in December 1924, became a national sensation. Haarmann was homosexual and had murdered over twenty adolescent boys, immediately inspiring a horrified fascination in readers. The events of the trial itself demonstrate both how journalistic discourse could threaten the judiciary's assertion of authority, and the way that Berlin newspapers opportunistically adapted crime sensation to their own pre-established narratives in support of their own political claims.

As the trial progressed, against the express wishes of the court, journalist and psychology professor Theodor Lessing, along with a local communist paper, published stories emphasizing that Haarmann had committed his murders while working for the Hannover police as an informant. Lessing went further still, challenging the court as well as the police force. He lobbied for an expert, external psychiatric examination of Haarmann, as he asserted that the expert witnesses used by the prosecution were extremely biased, making the entire event nothing more than a show-trial to justify Haarmann's execution. The court banned him from the trial for his troubles.

The Berlin paper, meanwhile, offered extensive coverage with distinctly different inflections. Papers selected facts from the trial and wrote them into their own pre-existing political causes. On the left, socialist and communist papers warred over the culpability of the police, courts, and penal system in the murders. Meanwhile, the conservative and bourgeois papers mobilized the trial in opposition to homosexual rights

generally, and sometimes against the repeal of Paragraph 175, the German law outlawing homosexuality, specifically. Several of the more politically moderate papers mirrored the expert psychiatric debate by considering the legality of the death penalty in the case, given Haarmann's apparent mental illness.

In examining press coverage of Haarmann with an eye towards its political motivations and its ramifications for the press's relationship to state institutions, this chapter should add to both Haarmann scholarship as well as scholarly studies of the press's political power and function in the Weimar Republic. Although some earlier scholarship employed the Haarmann case, without close study of the press, to discuss its implications for broader political trends in the republic,<sup>9</sup> the bulk of recent Haarmann studies consider press coverage for what it reveals about the development of *Lustmord* as a cultural concept.<sup>10</sup> Certainly, press coverage of Haarmann provides a wonderful case

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<sup>9</sup> Richard Evans deployed the case to discuss the history of the death penalty in Weimar, Evans, *Rituals*, 530-36, while Richard Plant mobilized it as part of a discussion of the struggle for homosexual rights, Richard Plant, *The Pink Triangle: The Nazi War against Homosexuals* (New York: H. Holt, 1986), 30-52

<sup>10</sup> E.g. Hania Siebenpfeiffer, "Böse Lust: "Gewaltverbrechen in Diskursen der Weimarer Republik." (Cologne: Böhlau, 2005); Isabella Classen, *Darstellung von Kriminalität in der Deutschen Literatur, Presse und Wissenschaft, 1900 bis 1930* (Frankfurt am Main: Lang, 1988); Beth Irwin Lewis, "Lustmord: Inside the Windows of the Metropolis," *Berlin: Culture and Metropolis*, eds. Charles W. Haxthausen, and Heidrun Suhr (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1990), 111-40; Martin Lindner, "Der Mythos 'Lustmord': Serienmörder in der deutschen Literatur, dem Film und der bildenden Kunst zwischen 1892 und 1932," *Verbrechen--Justiz--Medien: Konstellationen in Deutschland von 1900 bis zur Gegenwart*, eds. Joachim Lindner, and Claus-Michael Ort (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1999), 273-305; Thomas Kailer, "Werwölfe, Triebtäter, minderwertige Psychopathen: Bedingungen von Wissenspopularisierung: Der Fall Haarmann," in *Wissenspopularisierung: Konzepte der Wissensverbreitung im Wandel*, ed. Carsten Kretschmann, *Wissenskultur und gesellschaftlicher Wandel* 4 (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 2003), 323-59; Stefan Andriopoulos, "Ungeheuer, Vampire, Werwölfe: Fiktionale Strategien der Horrorliteratur in kriminologischen Darstellungen von Serienmördern," in *Serienmord: Kriminologische und kulturwissenschaftliche Skizzierungen eines ungeheuerlichen Phänomens*, eds. Frank J. Robertz, and Alexandra Thomas (Munich: Belleville, 2004), 314-29; Maren Hoffmeister, "Der Körper des Täters in der Deutung des Lustmords," *Kriminologisches Journal* 35, no.3 (2003): 212-23, and "Emotionen im Fokus des deutungsmusters Lustmord," *Paragrana* 20, no.1 (2011): 121-127; Eva Bischoff, "'Between Animal Instinct and Morality': The Construction of White Masculinity in Medico-psychiatric Discourse in Weimar

study for research into the cultural development of the idea of *Lustmord*. Hania Siebenpfeiffer, for example, uses newspaper reports on Haarmann in her discussion of how the invented category of *Lustmord* came to be typed as a particularly masculine crime. Eva Bischoff's work considers Haarmann from a Deleuzian perspective, arguing that the press's use of beast imagery was a key example of how this discourse established a violent and bloody hegemonic white male masculinity. Kerstin Brückweh's work uses the media of the Haarmann case to try to discover how the German public imagined and understood serial killers.<sup>11</sup>

This cultural analysis of the press's presentation of Haarmann as the prototypical *Lustmörder* can result in useful and compelling analysis of that category of deviance. It seems less useful in creating a nuanced understanding of the press in this sort of case, however. For one, much of this work elides differences among various papers' coverage in order to argue for a particular hegemonic *Lustmord* discourse. Moreover, in studying newspaper discourse solely with an eye towards its cultural construction of the *Lustmörder*, this work almost uniformly (and understandably, given its focus) ignores the political motives which also drove the press in its coverage. While the press was certainly invested in creating a particular image of Haarmann, press coverage served more direct ideological interests as well.

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Germany," *Historicising Whiteness: Transnational Perspectives on the Construction of an Identity*, ed. Katherine Ellinghaus, Melbourne University conference and seminar series 15 (Melbourne: RMIT Publishing, 2007), 427-35, and "Mee/at Your Neighbors: Dangerous Encounters in Weimar Germany," *Perspectives on Endangerment*, eds. Graham Huggan, and Stephan Klasen (Hildesheim: Georg Olms, 2005), 97-108. For a focus on film presentations, see Karl Juhnke, *Das Erzählmotiv des Serienmörders im Spielfilm: Eine filmwissenschaftliche Untersuchung: Mit einem Geleitwort von Prof. Dr. Kiefer* (Wiesbaden: Deutscher Universitäts-Verlag, 2001); or Angelica Schwab, *Serienkiller in Wirklichkeit und Film: Störenfreid oder Stabilisator? Eine sozioästhetische Untersuchung*, Nordamerikastudien 1 (Hamburg: LIT, 2001).

<sup>11</sup> Kerstin Brückweh: *Mordlust. Serienmorde, Gewalt und Emotionen im 20. Jahrhundert*. (Frankfurt/Main: Campus, 2006).

Moreover, *Lustmörd* analysis of Haarmann's press coverage often classifies this coverage as "sensationalist," using the term in a pejorative manner.<sup>12</sup> As I have argued in previous chapters, considering sensationalism this way obscures more than it reveals about the press. The existence of titillating details in a press account does not *ipso facto* mean that the account represents pure commercial cynicism or offers nothing more than an appeal to the reader's base instincts. Newspaper reportage attempted to realign chaotic masses of impressions and facts into explanatory narratives that gave order to the event. Different papers could, and as we shall see did, construct different narratives with the same facts, all with the aim of imparting very particular messages to the reading audience.<sup>13</sup> The descriptor "sensationalist" risks the same sort of misleading dismissal of such coverage that marked the contemporary criticism of the papers. This is not to say that the Haarmann trial coverage did not include melodrama and emotional appeals to readership, as it most certainly did, but rather that dismissing such coverage as "sensationalism" (in the pejorative sense of the word) is not useful. In fact, as my examination of Lessing's reporting on Haarmann will indicate, sensational language could be quite effective for motivating the audience against the courts or the police. Thus, while this type of press analysis of the Haarmann case successfully demonstrates the prevalence of the *Lustmord* concept in Weimar culture, it leaves unexplored variations within newspaper coverage as well as the political motivations of the reporters and editors in covering the case.

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<sup>12</sup> Eg Maria Tatar, *Lustmord: Sexual Murder in Weimar Germany* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), 43.

<sup>13</sup> For an analysis along these lines in the American context, see Andie Tucher, *Froth and Scum: Truth, Beauty, Goodness and the Ax Murder in America's First Mass Medium* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1994).

Recently there have been a few promising developments in scholarship examining Berlin tabloids as political actors, even if this research generally ignores cultural events like the Haarmann trial in favor of overtly political coverage of elections, bills, and political protests. As noted in the introduction, some earlier historical work on Berlin papers emphasized the market's power to depoliticize through mass culture, arguing that the democratizing potential of mass culture overcame social and political boundaries that might otherwise separate reading publics.<sup>14</sup> For example, in his study of the Berlin press in the early twentieth century, Fritzsche suggests that the mass press functioned to create a sort of city-wide identity beyond class, allowing "the emergence of an emphatically urban and increasingly democratic polity."<sup>15</sup> The most recent generation of Weimar press scholars has moved towards more explicitly political analysis of these daily papers, often by focusing on individual newspapers themselves. This scholarship most often assesses the degree to which the various papers could influence the political climate of the Weimar Republic, although this work at times also considers politically-motivated conflicts between editors and their publishers, which could create coverage at odds with the publisher's political interest.<sup>16</sup>

As a result of this research, a picture of a more politicized Berlin press has emerged. This press held notable sway on which figures were deemed politically important and on how the public perceived the parliamentary process.<sup>17</sup> While this

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<sup>14</sup> See for example Kaspar Maase, *Grenzloses Vergnügen: Der Aufstieg der Massenkultur 1850-1970* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag, 1997); Fritzsche, *Reading Berlin*.

<sup>15</sup> Fritzsche, 233.

<sup>16</sup> Fulda, *Press and Politics*; Matthias Lau, *Pressepolitik als Chance. Staatliche Öffentlichkeitsarbeit in den Ländern der Weimarer Republik* (Stuttgart: F. Steiner, 2003); Bernd Söseemann, *Theodor Wolff, Ein Leben mit der Zeitung* (Munich: Econ Ullstein List & Co, 2000); Bernd Söseemann, *Das Ende der Weimarer Republik in der Kritik demokratischer Publizisten. Theodor Wolff, Ernst Feder, Julius Elbau, Leopold Schwarzschild* (Berlin: Colloquium-Verlag, 1976).

<sup>17</sup> See particularly Fulda, *Press and Politics*, 104-145.

analysis has been a useful corrective for idealized notions of the unifying power of the press, the extent of its analysis has understandably been limited to explicitly political content. Research into sensationalist reporting, meanwhile, has tended to argue that to the extent that sensationalism represented political content, this content affirmed and supported the state's authority.<sup>18</sup> As my earlier analysis of Grossmann demonstrated, sensationalist reportage could certainly support claims by state institutions like the police and the judiciary. However, I will demonstrate that in the Haarmann case, we find different press-state dynamics.

This chapter will demonstrate that newspapers and reporters could mold major cultural events to advance political agendas and create considerable tension between reporters and the justice system. After a description of the case itself, I will examine the reporting of Theodor Lessing, particularly his famous account of the Haarmann case, *Haarmann, Die Geschichte eines Werwolf*. I will then discuss the different approaches various Berlin papers took in explaining the significance of Haarmann: on the left a debate over the state's culpability in the killer's actions; on the right, the continuation of a campaign against providing rights to homosexual; and in the center, occasional discussion of the justness of the death penalty.

As with the Grossmann case, this analysis of the Berlin press's political reading of Haarmann suggests the variety of newspaper narratives that appeared in such coverage. Yet, these papers could also mold disparate events into a single, politically-inflected story that was relatively consistent across the ideological spectrum. The case of the cannibalistic killer Karl Denke, who was apprehended just days after the completion of

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<sup>18</sup> This dynamic was much more prevalent in early modern sensationalist writing; see e.g. Joy Wiltenburg, "True Crime: The Origins of Modern Sensationalism" in *The American Historical Review* 109, no. 5 (Dec. 2004): 1401.

the Haarmann trial, will provide a useful contrast to conclude the chapter. In this case, we will see how the Denke case was incorporated into an evolving press narrative including both Grossmann and Haarmann, about an apparent outbreak of serial killing in Weimar Germany.

The Haarmann case began to capture the popular imagination when five human skulls wash up on the shores of the Leine between May and June, 1924.<sup>19</sup> Police dragged the river, discovering more than 500 human bones which they later confirmed had come from at least 22 separate bodies.<sup>20</sup> The police asked the local media to publish information about these skulls in the hopes that the public could provide further information to authorities.<sup>21</sup> Investigators eventually came to suspect Haarmann, a petty criminal and con artist who had been arrested for violent, sexually-related crimes several times before the First World War. Almost immediately upon his release in 1918, Haarmann had been reported in the disappearance of a 17-year-old boy, Friedel Rothe. Rothe's friends had last seen him with Haarmann, and police, under pressure from the family, had raided Haarmann's apartment. Discovering Haarmann with a semi-naked

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<sup>19</sup> General histories of the Haarmann case itself include Friedhelm Werremeier, *Haarmann, Nachruf auf einen Werewolf* (Cologne 1992); Kathrin Kompisch & Frank Otto, *Bestien des Boulevards. Die Deutschen und ihre Serienmörder*, (Leipzig, 2003); Kathrin Kompisch, *Die öffentliche Rezeption sozialer Devianz in der Weimarer Republik. Der Fall Fritz Haarmann*, (Hamburg, 2001). For analysis of the case from the time, Peter Brauer: *Der Fall des Massenmörders Haarmann aus sexualpathologischer Sicht*, (Hannover, 1924); Hans Hyan, *Massenmörder Haarmann. Eine kriminalistische Studie*, (Berlin 1924); W. Schneider, (ed), *Der 24fache Mörder Vor Dem Schwurgericht: Einziger Ausführ. Bericht D. Verhandlg Vor D. Schwurgericht*, (Hannover 1925); Carl Schomburg, (ed): Wilhelm Küttemeyer (ed), *Aufklärung über den Massenmörder Haarmann in Hannover* (Hannover: Niedersächs, 1924); and Bernhard Weiß, "Der Fall Haarmann" in *Archiv für Kriminologie* 76 (1924):161-174; Iwan Katz, *Zum Fall Haarmann* (Hannover, 1924).

<sup>20</sup> Friedhelm Werremeier. *Haarmann. Der Schlächter von Hannover. Die grauenvollen Verbrechen des berühmten Serienmörders* (Cologne: VGS Verlagsgesellschaft, 1992), 35.

<sup>21</sup> Theodor Lessing. *Haarmann: Die Geschichte eines Werwolfs*. ed. Rudolf Leonhard. *Außenseiter der Gesellschaft: Verbrechen der Gegenwart* 6 (Berlin: Die Schmiede, 1925), 61.

teenage boy (not Rothe), they charged Haarmann with sexual assault, and he spent another nine months in jail.<sup>22</sup> With this case and several other complaints in mind, the police placed Haarmann under surveillance. They apprehended him after one of his victims escaped and complained to the police that Haarmann had held a knife to his throat.

Upon investigating Haarmann's apartment, officers discovered numerous sets of clothes that had belonged to the victims. While Haarmann tried to argue that he had simply found the clothing, a friend of one victim came forward to state that he had seen Haarmann take the young man to the circus shortly before his disappearance. Following an interrogation that used illegal torture, Haarmann confessed to murdering somewhere between 50 and 70 young men.<sup>23</sup> In Haarmann's account, following his release from prison in 1918 and again in 1920 after the sexual assault charges, he had been killing young male commuters, runaways and occasionally male prostitutes he had picked up at the central railway station and brought back to his apartment on the seedy Rote Reih. After reaching climax with his victims, Haarmann would bite through their necks, killing them, and later dismember the bodies and throw the remains into the river. Likely attempting to clear up as many missing persons cases as possible, the state had hoped to charge Haarmann with 147 disappearances, but the authorities could ultimately only argue for Haarmann's guilt in 27 cases.<sup>24</sup>

The Haarmann case was particularly delicate for the Hannover police, because Haarmann, a local resident, had been an informer for the police for more than four years,

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<sup>22</sup> Kompisch, *Bestien*, 28. Haarmann later confessed he had actually hidden the decapitated head of the sought victim Rothe in his closet just before the police arrived.

<sup>23</sup> Christine Pozsár and Michael Farin, *Die Haarmann-Protokolle*. (Reinbek: Rowohlt, 1995). 64.

<sup>24</sup> Lessing, *Geschichte*, 47.

precisely while he was committing his murders. In fact, the period between 1920 and his apprehension in 1924 was by far the longest he had spent out of jail since his youth. This freedom had been a direct result of his position as a police informant. Moreover, Haarmann had an extensive history of interaction with both the psychiatric and penal system. At the age of 16, in 1895, Haarmann had begun experiencing blackouts and seen a psychiatrist; a year later, he was charged for the first time with “acts of indecency” on children and placed in an asylum, eventually being transferred to a hospital on Hannover as “dangerously deranged.”<sup>25</sup> When the doctor there deemed him “incurably deranged” he was returned to an asylum. In 1897 he escaped the asylum and fled to Switzerland, before eventually returning to Hannover and attempting an army career. However, his blackout spells led to his dismissal as “mentally deficient and unsuitable for work,” and he then turned to a criminal career as a confidence man, extortionist, and thief.<sup>26</sup>

This was the individual that the Hannover police had cultivated as an informant following the war. Indeed, Haarmann had received high praise for his performance in this role. After hearing about local robberies, he would track down the thief and offer his apartment as a location to temporarily store the stolen goods, before telling local inspectors when to show up at the apartment to arrest the thief. He even convinced a former police commissioner to start a joint detective agency with him, for which Haarmann received an official police card. Haarmann would use this card as proof of his official capacity when stopping and chatting up potential victims at the railway station, helping him to convince his victims to return to his apartment.<sup>27</sup> The Hannoverian court

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<sup>25</sup> Lessing, *Geschichte*, 24.

<sup>26</sup> Lessing, *Geschichte*, 26.

<sup>27</sup> Werremeier, *Haarmann*, 45.

thus had myriad reasons to fear the public discovery of the exact extent of Haarmann's ties to the police force.

As the trial approached, the Hannover court did what it could to keep this police culpability secret. That the Hannover court would take these actions to protect the police and limit the dissemination of information should not be surprising: the German judiciary during this decade was notable for its conservatism. While German society in general had become more open and democratic in the Weimar Republic, most of its judges had been appointed during the Wilhelmine period with a particular eye towards political reliability. Moreover, Articles 102-4 of the Weimar constitution made it illegal for the government to dismiss judges, ensuring an unrepresentatively conservative presence on the bench. As such, the German judiciary was, as a rule, extremely weary of "subversiveness" from supporters of socialism and quite eager to impose the death penalty, particularly to defendants on the left.<sup>28</sup>

The court thus substantially restricted press access to the trial, citing Paragraph 176 of the Legal Constitution. This rule put the allocation of seats in court at the discretion of the presiding judge, who was tasked with removing anyone found to be presenting "untrue and unfactual" reports.<sup>29</sup> Only reporters from nine local papers were allowed into the courtroom, as well as two reporters for large wire services. Moreover, the court expressly forbade "any talk of misdemeanors on the part of the police and authorities;" in Lessing's words, the judge was "attempting to proof-read public opinion

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<sup>28</sup> For a discussion of the conservative nature of the Weimar judiciary, see Ralph Angermund, *Deutsche Richterschaft 1919-1945* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag, 1990), 19-44; Gerhard Fieberg (ed), *Im Namen des Deutschen Volkes, Justiz und Nationalsozialismus* (Cologne, 1989), esp 15-20; Konrad Jarausch, *The Unfree Professions: German Lawyers, Teachers, and Engineers, 1900-1950* (New York, 1990).

<sup>29</sup> Pozsár, *Die Haarmann-Protokolle*, 56.

and to decide the legal case at the same time.”<sup>30</sup> No representatives from the major Berlin papers were permitted, meaning that these papers all had to rely on the same basic information coming from the wire reporters (the implications of this will be discussed in detail below).

In addition to this small assortment of local reporters, the court allowed access to three other writers: famed physician and sexologist Magnus Hirschfeld, there as an expert witness; Hans Hyan, a renowned crime writer of the period; and Theodor Lessing, a relatively unknown journalist and professor of psychology at Hannover University.<sup>31</sup> Until he was removed from the court, Lessing would provide limited trial coverage for *Die Prager Tageblatt* (a paper deemed un-radical and thus unthreatening), although he ultimately also penned reports for a Berlin daily, *Das Tagebuch*. Eventually, the judge banned Lessing from the courtroom. Following this dismissal, the journalist and psychologist wrote an excellent and exhaustive report on the trial proceedings, *Haarmann, Die Geschichte eines Werwolf*, published by Die Schmiede in Berlin as part of the series *Außenseiter der Gesellschaft: Verbrechen der Gegenwart*.<sup>32</sup>

Lessing’s *Haarmann* text is particularly worth examining in this context, because in it Lessing melded psychological and journalistic expertise to explain the case and construct his own arguments. While numerous psychiatrists and psychologists wrote

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<sup>30</sup> Lessing would later refer to these local reporters as “only the harmless line writers from local small papers” who “deliberately misled the public and supplied... the most appalling rubbish” Lessing, *Geschichte*, 70, 126.

<sup>31</sup> Lessing’s history is presented in Rainer Marwedel, *Theodor Lessing: Eine Biographie* (Darmstadt: Luchterhand, 1987); for the Haarmann case specifically, see Martina Keilson-Lauritz, “Theodor Lessing und der Fall Haarmann,” in *‘Sinnggebung des Sinnlosen’: Zum Leben und Werk des Kulturkritikers Theodor Lessing (1872-1933)*, ed. Elke-Vera Kotowski, Haskala Wissenschaftliche Abhandlungen 31 (Hildesheim: Olms, 2006).

<sup>32</sup> For a discussion of this series, and particularly its unstable use of genre, see Todd Herzog, “Crime Stories: Criminal, Society, and the Modernist Case History” in *Representations* 80 (2002): 34-61.

opinions on the case for specialist journals in specialized language,<sup>33</sup> Lessing wrote in an open, journalistic style which still allowed him to assert and deploy his psychological expertise when appropriate. This text is now the best-regarded account of the trial's events. An investigation of Lessing's motives and agenda will reveal why the journalistic style and format he chose was better suited to his goals than that of the psychiatric analysis genre.

Similarly to the Grossmann press accounts discussed in the previous chapter, Lessing's text asserted first and foremost a mastery over the physical space studied by the reporter. Lessing begins his account with an extensive description of the areas of town where, he says, "crooks, fences, and prostitutes, over whom the town authorities had no kind of control, traded as never before."<sup>34</sup> By going into truly extensive detail about such sordid locations, including measurements on the heights of the windows and cupboards in Haarmann's apartment, Lessing implies that he travels and reports from areas where even the police are hapless.<sup>35</sup> He spends similarly exhaustive detail in discussing the courtroom itself while underscoring the restricted access to the location.<sup>36</sup>

At the same time, Lessing also occasionally deploys elements of psychiatric analysis. His descriptions of Haarmann himself, for example, spend extended space exploring the killer's mannerisms and the characteristics he believes they reveal. In fact,

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<sup>33</sup> E.g. Küttemeyer, *Massenmörder Haarmann*; Richard Herberz, *Verbrecherdämmerung. Psychologische Deutung und weltanschauliche Perspektiven der jüngsten Mordfälle Haarmann, Angerstein, Denke usw.*, (Munich, 1925); Reichel: "Ein Lichtbildvortrag über Haarmann," in *Deutsche Juristen-Zeitung* 1926, Heft 5, p 35; Friedländer, "Kritisches zum Fall Haarmann," *Die Umschau* 3 (1925): 46-48; "Fritz Haarmann – Eine Krankengeschichte. Aus in der Krankenakte der Göttinger Heil- und Pflegeanstalt befindlichen Abschriften" in *Die HaarmannProtokolle*, 55-119

<sup>34</sup> Lessing, *Geschichte*, 15.

<sup>35</sup> Lessing, *Geschichte*, 47.

<sup>36</sup> Lessing, *Geschichte*, 71. It is worth noting that he also writes at times in the melodramatic voice which often marked crime reporting, e.g. "it was as if all the demons of the underworld had gathered round to conceal the crime" or "at the sight of her son's clothig, Frau Speichert broke down. For the first time ever, Haarmann lowered his eyes" Lessing *Geschichte*, 56, 106.

Lessing positions his own psychological expertise as superior to that of the court's experts: "Haarmann's most striking feature, which unfortunately was ignored by the experts, who were not aware of it, was his many automatisms and stereotypes. By automatisms I mean those expressions which occur involuntarily, which gradually become habitual."<sup>37</sup> While writing in a journalistic frame, Lessing used conventions from both journalistic and psychiatric writing to locate himself as simultaneously a journalistic expert of the physical space of Hannover and as a psychiatric expert of the killer's body.

Having positioned his own claim to expertise, Lessing used his report to target the three pillars of state expertise on display in the case: the police, the psychiatric expert, and the juridical system itself. Unlike the critics of the press who claimed that sensationalist journalism inspired killers, Lessing located the origins of Haarmann's madness deeper, within German society itself. As he put it, "youngsters who had survived the war had learnt that it was 'all right' to kill the enemy for a coat or a pair of boots, the 'enemy' being everyone else."<sup>38</sup> The cause of this social malaise was not an increase in democracy or freedoms, as right-wing criticisms of the republic usually contended. Rather, for Lessing the problem was the failure of the apparatuses of state, starting with the police.

Lessing had sympathy for the individual police officers patrolling the street; in his analysis, the fault lay with the system rather than the individuals who inhabited it. The structural fallout of war and the reduction of police power resulting from the Treaty of

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<sup>37</sup> Lessing, *Geschichte*, 20.

<sup>38</sup> Lessing, *Geschichte*, 17. The Berlin lawyer who hoped to represent Haarmann discusses Lessing's beliefs in society's culpability in Erich Frey, *Ich beantrage Freispruch aus den Erinnerungen des Strafverteidigers Erich Frey* (Hamburg: Blüchert, 1959), 80.

Versailles meant that “the amount of money provided by the state for police investigations into missing persons was (and is) so derisory that it was impossible to mount a thorough search into disappearances.”<sup>39</sup> Lessing’s reporting thus aimed to remove the public assumption of competence which is so necessary to the popular influence of the police force. In his own summation, “The word ‘authority’ is just a word, behind which stands human beings.”<sup>40</sup>

For its part, the court continued its desperate attempts to keep Haarmann’s police connections hidden from public view; court ushers provided the judge with a constant supply of the day’s papers.<sup>41</sup> Yet as the trial progressed and it became clear that Haarmann had in fact worked as an informant and carried official identification, Lessing, as well as the local Hannover communist paper, the *Niedersächsische Arbeiterzeitung*, disobeyed the court’s orders and published accounts of this information that savaged the local police force for its complicity.<sup>42</sup> As Lessing wryly put it, “the truth of the matter is that Haarmann’s murderous activities between 1918 and 1924 were possible only because he was under constant police supervision.”<sup>43</sup> The topic of Haarmann’s informant role came to dominate the coverage of the case among the big left-wing papers in Berlin, as will be discussed in detail below.

After the press revealed the extent of the police’s preexisting relationship with the killer, the Hannover police denied any culpability in Haarmann’s actions. The police chief told local reporters that “it must be remembered that these terrible events have taken

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<sup>39</sup> Lessing, *Geschichte*, 34

<sup>40</sup> Lessing, *Geschichte*, 36

<sup>41</sup> Pozsár *Die Haarmann-Protokolle*, 216.

<sup>42</sup> The circulation of the small *Niedersächsische Arbeiterzeitung* reportedly jumped from 8,000 to 35,000 during this coverage, Plant, *Pink Triangle*, 47.

<sup>43</sup> Lessing, “Zwischenfall im Haarmann-Prozess,” *Das Tage-Buch*, December 20, 1924.

place in the oldest and most overcrowded part of the town in a quarter in which the most degenerate part of the working class has its dwelling place. Everyone involved, including most of the poor victims, is more or less delinquent and morally inferior.”<sup>44</sup> Here we find parallels with the presentation of the Friedrichshain area by right-wing papers in the Grossmann case. The police chief’s statement drew a petition of complaint from residents of the “degenerate” area and further hardened feelings for the police (Lessing commented that “the only difference between Haarmann and the lower police officials was that he was more intelligent”);<sup>45</sup> the *Frankfurter Zeitung* suggested that the victims deserved “not contempt, but rather compassion.”<sup>46</sup> This police statement revealed the essential position of the police and prosecution on where blame should fall for these horrible crimes: Haarmann was a product of the slums and his actions were the degenerate result of that sordid milieu. He could thus be tried, and more importantly executed, just as any other criminal of those slums.<sup>47</sup>

While his criticism of the police earned Lessing no favors from the court, it was likely his stance on the prosecution’s psychiatric expertise that eventually led to him being banned from court.<sup>48</sup> The primary psychiatric expert called by the prosecution was

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<sup>44</sup> *Hannoverscher Kurier*, December 8, 1924; Werremeier, *Haarmann*, 112.

<sup>45</sup> Lessing, *Geschichte*, 51.

<sup>46</sup> *Frankfurter Zeitung*, December 8, 1924.

<sup>47</sup> Following the trial, the police issued a dubious apology of sorts for this statement, explaining that “the previous press release gave the impression that everyone in the area of the criminal Haarmann was depraved or morally feeble... but as should be clear from context, this comment only applied to the circle of homosexuals, black-marketeers, and fences... not to credible folks or the families of the victims.” *Volkswille*, January 20, 1925.

<sup>48</sup> Brückweh makes a compelling case along these lines, noting that reporters from papers that were, like Lessing, reporting Haarmann as a police informant were allowed to remain in the courtroom; only Lessing was actively criticizing the psychiatric evidence. Brückweh, *Mordlust*, 138.

Professor Ernst Schultze, a psychiatrist at Göttingen University. Psychiatry had been an accepted feature of criminal jurisprudence since before the turn of the century, and by the 1920s, medical, eugenic and psychiatric language had become much more influential in assessing criminals.<sup>49</sup> However, psychoanalytic analysis in court was much less common than psychiatry based around biological determinism, and this case proved no different.<sup>50</sup>

Schultze had examined Haarmann from August 18 through September 25, 1924, and he found Haarmann a perplexing case. The doctor was unable to draw any conclusions about Haarmann's sexuality, as the accused man's statements were "too contradictory," although Schultze wrote that "an organic brain disease is to be ruled out."<sup>51</sup> Schultze also seems to have scrupulously avoided any discussion of Haarmann's apparent epilepsy, which would have disqualified him from facing the death penalty.<sup>52</sup> Schultze requested that the legal authorities postpone the trial for further examination, but the prosecutor's office responded with a telegram explaining that "popular feeling" would not allow such a delay. One of his colleagues noted that any testifying expert "would be glad if he could hand [Haarmann] over for punishment, if he can manage to reconcile this with his psychiatric conscience."<sup>53</sup>

With what Lessing perceived to be clear marching orders from the prosecution ("why bother paying for the trial when the death sentence is preordained?"<sup>54</sup>), Schultze reported his conclusions that while Haarmann was "a pathological personality" and

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<sup>49</sup> Frey, *Ich Beantrage*, 51-57.

<sup>50</sup> Evans, *Rituals*, 527.

<sup>51</sup> Ernst Schultze, *Aerztliches Gutachten* (October 1, 1924), in Christine Pozsár, *Haarmann-Protokolle*, 463-477.

<sup>52</sup> Siebenpfeiffer, "Böse Lust," 32-37.

<sup>53</sup> Werremeier, *Haarmann*, 124.

<sup>54</sup> Lessing, *Geschichte*, 115.

“abnormal and inferior,” he was still “fit to stand trial.”<sup>55</sup> Lessing sarcastically called these comments “gems” and used them as a launching point for a broader critique of psychiatry in the service of the court. Schultze’s testimony clearly illustrated “the absolute ignorance of medical psychology and its marked reliance on a state of awareness of one’s actions in the face of subconscious atavistic background of physical urges.”<sup>56</sup> Attempting to meet the legal standard of fitness for trial in this case “is about as pointless as asking whether water is best measured in meters or square rods.”

Lessing’s expressed frustrations with medical psychology provide insight into his motivations for writing his account primarily as a journalist rather than in the style of the psychological expert. He railed against the danger of “regarding complicated matters as simple and simple matters as complicated, which medical psychology with its obsession with incorporation and its hard-to-define and aged Greek-Latin expressions (schizophrenic, hysterical, dementia praecox, etc) cannot help but do.”<sup>57</sup> Clearly, Lessing felt that psychological investigation had great potential; analyses of Haarmann’s psyche and motivations appear quite often in his accounts. His complaint, rather, was against “the unbearable sexual-pathological prattle about sadism and masochism and so forth;” he contended that “after a hundred years today’s psychiatry and psychology will have dated” and that instead “we must agree, soul to soul, to empathize and imagine, leaving behind premature phraseology and scientific explanations.” His journalistic style allowed him considerable room for empathy while discouraging the sorts of phrases that

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<sup>55</sup> Schultze, *Gutachten*, 477.

<sup>56</sup> Lessing, *Geschichte*, 70. For a discussion of Lessing’s vision of Haarmann as an atavistic force, see Jay Michael Layne, *Uncanny Collapse: Sexual Violence and Unsettled Rhetoric in German-Language Lustmord Representations, 1900-1933* (Ph.D dissertation, University of Michigan, 2008), esp. 180-82.

<sup>57</sup> Lessing, *Geschichte*, 39.

psychiatric expertise relied on to contrast itself from the general public discourse on the case.

If a temporary term was necessary to capture the essence of Haarmann in the public consciousness, rather than medical definitions “one should call to mind the age-old Germanic myths of the wolf-figure which became human... the legend of the werewolf.”<sup>58</sup> This was indeed the sort of monster terminology that sometimes appeared in press accounts of the serial killers Grossmann, Haarmann, Denke, and Kürten. Lessing understood such phrasing as a way to describe what he believed to be Haarmann’s atavistic urges so that the public would comprehend this at a profound level, a level that would outlast contemporary medical terminology. Lessing’s aim in his coverage was thus to make his psychological speculations easily consumable for the lay reader, rather than obscuring them with what he considered excessive medical terminology. He seems to have understood the style of journalistic reportage as ideal for accomplishing this aim.

Lessing also used his text to lambast the German asylum system and the state’s psychiatric expertise. In his opinion, Haarmann’s asylum experience in 1896 had played an important role in his later murders: “once in the mental institution, the young man must have suffered some kind of psychic trauma which affected him for the rest of his life.” Although Lessing agreed that Haarmann should not be automatically trusted, “I was convinced by his recurring fear of the mental asylum which caused him to plea repeatedly, ‘hang me, do anything you like to me, but don’t take me back to the loony

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<sup>58</sup> Lessing, *Geschichte*, 40.

bin!”<sup>59</sup> While psychiatrists and criminologists sometimes accused press reports of inspiring murders, Lessing’s reporting instead implicated the penal and juridical structures that these experts often served.

As an alternative to the existing psychological expertise at the court’s disposal, Lessing proposed using psychoanalysis to examine Haarmann. He repeatedly petitioned the court to consider having Alfred Döblin or Sigmund Freud interview the defendant.<sup>60</sup> The court, however, dismissed these suggestions out of hand.<sup>61</sup> On the eleventh day of the trial, state anger at Lessing’s reporting and critiques of the trial had reached the point that the prosecution experts refused to submit testimony in his presence, and the judge ordered Lessing to leave the court. When Lessing protested, the judge responded “You are here as a reporter, not an author. We will not tolerate psychologists in court!”<sup>62</sup> The trial ended several days later, with Haarmann sentenced to death, and he was guillotined in Hannover prison on April 15, 1925 in front of approximately 40 witnesses.

Not surprisingly, Lessing’s deepest antipathy was reserved for the judicial system itself. He expressed amazement at Haarmann’s repeated release following his numerous crimes, describing this as “typical of the 20<sup>th</sup> century penal system, whenever Haarmann was released from jail both his craftiness and his crimes increased.”<sup>63</sup> In no uncertain terms he argued that “the faulty legal system and poor psychiatry were also responsible

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<sup>59</sup> Lessing, *Geschichte*, 25. Lessing’s concerns here echoed the concerns of the Lunatics Rights movement. This bourgeois-led but legitimately socially inclusive group argued that medical/psychiatric experts were incompetent, and needed state regulation through both judicial review and popular commissions. See Ann Goldberg, “A Reinvented Public: Lunatics Rights and Bourgeois Populism in the Kaiserreich.” *German History* 21 (2003): 159-182.

<sup>60</sup> Lessing, *Geschichte*, 118.

<sup>61</sup> Weimar courts were generally very suspicious of psychoanalysis and reluctant to see it deployed in examining witnesses. Kerstin Brückweh, “Unerwünschte Expertise: Theodor Lessing und der Fall Haarmann 1924/25,” in *Lustmord: Medialisierungen eines kulturellen Phantasmas um 1900*, eds. Susanne Komfort-Hein, and Susanne Scholz (Königstein: Helmer, 2007), 154-57.

<sup>62</sup> Lessing, *Geschichte*, 128.

<sup>63</sup> Lessing, *Geschichte*, 30. Or again, “It is impossible to judge a snake without also putting the marsh from which the snake obtained its nourishment on trial,” Lessing, *Geschichte*, 120.

for thirty murders.”<sup>64</sup> In Lessing’s view, the German judicial system and laws made the discovery of the truth in court *less* rather than more likely: “even the wisest man would pass a misjudgment in court, enclosed in frozen perseverance. One can judge correctly or incorrectly in life, but the law consists of defining the question in such a way that no correct decision be made.”<sup>65</sup>

Lessing’s aim in constructing his case study, then, was to challenge and subvert the expertise that had undergirded the Haarmann trial. In its attempt to quickly convict and execute Haarmann without broad public discovery of the killer’s police connections, the Hannover state had relied on the public authority of the police, who claimed Haarmann was a degenerate product of a degenerate location, and on psychiatric expertise, which assured the public that this man was fit to stand trial and deserving of death. In response, Lessing’s text pointed out the incompetence and obliviousness of the police department which had employed the very man murdering its city’s inhabitants; the untrustworthiness of testimony provided by a psychiatric expert under the thumb of the prosecution; and the abject failure of a system which had repeatedly released Haarmann before his killings began.

To accomplish this goal, Lessing had used aspects of multiple genres, sometimes deploying psychological expertise in analyzing the person of the killer, but most often writing in the guise of the truth-seeking journalist. This was a voice that asserted mastery of a topic yet also purported to speak for, and to, the people, avoiding the medical jargon that so annoyed Lessing. Lessing’s text also makes quite clear what he deems to be responsible and irresponsible journalism: he has nothing but contempt for those local

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<sup>64</sup> Lessing, *Geschichte*, 124.

<sup>65</sup> Lessing, *Geschichte*, 68, 71.

reporters who were allowed in the courtroom but did not publish information about Haarmann's informant role. These "reporters" (whom he used inverted commas to describe) had been paralyzed by "professional ambition, self-justification and the feeling of 'playing God.'"<sup>66</sup> By implication, then, true journalists should write for the good of the people with little regard for themselves. Lessing's reporting in this case provides us an excellent case study of the discursive power of the journalistic style to challenge and subvert state expertise.

The Berlin press provided extensive and sensational coverage of the Haarmann trial as well (Hannover was just a 4 hour train-ride from Berlin, and several of Haarmann's victims had hailed from Berlin), but with a variety of distinctly different political motives. Because the court refused to permit Berlin reporters in the courtroom, the major Berlin papers relied on the coverage provided by the wire reporters for the major agencies: these papers thus constructed their stories using identical information. However, rather than providing similar coverage or drawing parallel conclusions, the Berlin papers used these same facts to push drastically different arguments. While this coverage was certainly sensationalist, these papers simultaneously configured the events to support their own pre-existing ideological agendas. The Socialist *Vörrwärts* and Communist *Rote Fahne* read the story in ways that continued the vicious dispute between those two papers, a conflict that dated back to the 1918 Revolution. On the right, meanwhile, conservative papers such as the *Kreuzzeitung* and *Deutsche Allgemeine Zeitung* cynically exploited the case to argue that homosexual rights must not be

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<sup>66</sup> Lessing, *Geschichte*, 130.

expanded lest Germany fall into ruin; some bourgeois papers made similar arguments. Several moderate papers, like the *Berliner Tageblatt* and *Vossische Zeitung*, paid more attention to the debate surrounding the death penalty.

Within the realms of psychiatric and juridical expertise, much analysis of the Haarmann trial involved questions about the fairness of the death penalty in the case. Lessing, as discussed above, had suspected that Haarmann was unfit to stand trial, and at the very least believed that he required further psychological investigation. This argument continued a decades-old struggle between defenders and critics of capital punishment. While socialist leadership had hoped to abolish the death penalty during the founding of the Weimar Republic, it persisted in the Criminal Code for cases of murder.<sup>67</sup> In the Haarmann case, debate focused particularly on Paragraph 51 of the Weimar Criminal Code, which decreed that an individual could not be put to death if she/he had no control over his/her actions at the time of the crime (i.e. if the accused had diminished capacity/*verminderten Zurechnungsfähigkeit*).<sup>68</sup>

Paragraph 51 was actually rather restrictive, as it required momentary madness at the time of the crime, which in practice meant that only people who committed murder on a single occasion were likely to be declared unfit. Serial murderers, by the very repetition of their crimes, did not fit easily into the paragraph's specifications.<sup>69</sup> While most psychiatric authors agreed that the death penalty for Haarmann was warranted, several viewed the case similarly to Lessing, contending that Hamburg had merely hosted

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<sup>67</sup> For an excellent discussion of the political debates over capital punishment during the formation of Weimar, see Evans, *Rituals*, 490-507.

<sup>68</sup> A useful analysis of the evolution of murder charges in German penal code is presented in Swen Thomas, *Die Geschichte des Mordparagraphen : eine normgenetische Untersuchung bis in die Gegenwart* (Bochum: Brockmeyer, 1985), especially 239-276.

<sup>69</sup> For a discussion of using Paragraph 51 in criminal defense cases, see Frey, *Ich Beantrage*, 385-405.

a show-trial and that Haarmann should have been sent to an asylum rather than the executioner's block.<sup>70</sup> Haarmann himself had said repeatedly that he greatly preferred death to another trip to the asylum.<sup>71</sup>

Most of the Berlin press was not especially vexed at the question of the death penalty in the Haarmann case; it was primarily the politically moderate papers, such as the *Berliner Tageblatt* and *Vossische Zeitung* which addressed the issue in the course of their summaries of events. In stark contrast to Lessing's reportage,<sup>72</sup> the moderate Berlin papers which did discuss the death penalty had very little doubt over the necessity of Haarmann's death. For the *Vossische Zeitung*, "the significance of the death penalty for Haarmann is straightforward: to gain justice for the bloodshed."<sup>73</sup> The *Berliner Tageblatt* took a more sensational tone, claiming that in this case cultural criticism and social-political debate went out the window: "the justification for the death penalty for Haarmann is also that society must be protected from a terrible danger.... When the dark aspects of nature spit forth such a beast, it rages and we must exterminate it."<sup>74</sup> While

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<sup>70</sup> A useful overview of this debate is provided by Christine Pozsár: "Psychiatrischer Kommentar zu den 'Haarmann-Protokollen,'" in *Die Haarmann-Protokolle*, 565-634. For representative expert arguments from the time about the death penalty specifically in the case of Haarmann, see Kütemeyer, *Massenmörder*; Hertz, *Verbrecherdämmerung*; Reichel, "Ein Lichtbildvortrag," 35; Friedländer, "Kritisches" 46-48; "Fritz Haarmann – Eine Krankengeschichte. Aus in der Krankenakte der Göttinger Heil- und Pflegeanstalt befindlichen Abschriften" in *Die Haarmann-Protokolle*, 55-119; Ernst Schultze, "Aerztliches Gutachten" (October 1, 1924), in *Die Haarmann-Protokolle*, 463-477. More generally, see also Carl Wilmanns: *Die sog. Verminderte Zurechnungsfähigkeit als zentrales Problem der Entwürfe zu einem Deutschen Strafgesetzbuch. Dreißig Vorlesungen über die sog. Geistig Minderwertigen im geltenden und künftigen Recht, im Strafvollzug und in der Irrenanstalt*, (Berlin: Julius Springer, 1927); E. Rittershaus, *Die Irrengesetzgebung in Deutschland nebst einer vergleichenden Darstellung des Irrenwesens in Europa. Für Ärzte, Juristen und gebildete Laien*, (Berlin, 1927); the idea that the mentally ill should be exterminated for the good of society was famously advanced in Karl Binding, Alfred Hoche, *Die Freigabe der Vernichtung lebensunwerten Lebens: ihr Maß und ihre Form* (Leipzig: F. Meiner, 1920).

<sup>71</sup> Lessing, *Geschichte*, 76.

<sup>72</sup> It is worth noting that, while Lessing was skeptical of the death penalty in this case, he appears to have favored eugenics in the matter: "it is regrettable that the pervert was not castrated after his ninth or tenth offence, as this would probably have prevented the murders he carried out in later years." Lessing, *Geschichte*, 24.

<sup>73</sup> *Vossische Zeitung*, December 18, 1924.

<sup>74</sup> *Berliner Tageblatt*, December 20, 1924.

Lessing's reportage had directly questioned the state's motives by suggesting the its ulterior motive of covering-up Haarmann's informant status, these papers implicitly justified the ultimate outcome of the case.

The *Berliner Lokal-Anzeiger* spoke of "the wish for atonement and retribution" that should not be prevented by Haarmann's mental condition.<sup>75</sup> The *BZ am Mittag* summed up the case bluntly: "Haarmann is of course ill, one sees that. Good—but does that mean that he should be pardoned and transferred to the mental hospital? That seems wrong, wouldn't you say—the beast should be beheaded 24 times!"<sup>76</sup>

The decision of most of the Berlin editorial staffs to downplay the death penalty issue is worth noting, as the Berlin media were certainly involved in the public death penalty debate during the 1920s.<sup>77</sup> While the socialist and communist papers had opposed the death penalty during the early Weimar constitutional debates, even moderate left papers had argued for its removal. The *Berliner Tageblatt*, for instance, lent its pages to anti-capital punishment German League for Human Rights members like Alfred Döblin.<sup>78</sup> In 1919 the paper's editorial staff had itself argued that removing capital punishment would represent a "renewal of spirit" for the troubled society.<sup>79</sup> The *Welt am Montag* made an even stronger claim about the death penalty's perverting power, suggesting that it "releases terrible instincts in people who otherwise consider themselves to be law-abiding citizens and are also regarded as such.... All the murderers put together do not possess as much evil-mindedness and common inquisitiveness as the pack of

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<sup>75</sup> *Berliner Lokal-Anzeiger*, December 17, 1924.

<sup>76</sup> *BZ am Mittag*, December 16, 1924.

<sup>77</sup> Evans, *Rituals*, 501-14.

<sup>78</sup> *Berliner Tageblatt*, February 1, 1927.

<sup>79</sup> *Berliner Tageblatt*, June 11, 1919.

hangmen and onlookers who attend executions.”<sup>80</sup> Meanwhile, right-wing papers like the *Deutsche Allgemeine Zeitung* had consistently and openly embraced the death penalty: “Capital punishment is no medieval retribution, it is a liberating, brief and painless, and therefore humane towards the offender.”<sup>81</sup>

The difference between the Berlin press’s simple acquiescence to the death penalty in this case and Lessing’s nuanced analysis might be explained by Lessing’s training and practice in psychology, which no doubt made him much more sensitive to questions about Haarmann’s sanity. Moreover, Lessing had the opportunity to observe Haarmann in person, while none of the Berlin reporters or editors could interact with the defendant first-hand. The broad press acceptance of the death penalty also indicates the extreme nature of the case and the public furor surrounding it, and may similarly suggest that some of the urgency of the anti-death penalty movement, intense in 1919, had dissipated by the middle of the 1920s. The Berlin paper which was most consistently suspicious of the death penalty for Haarmann was *Die Rote Fahne*, but this paper’s motives, as we shall see, had little to do with the psychiatric and legal intricacies of the case.

The coverage of the Haarmann case by the major left-wing Berlin papers, the *Vorwärts* and *Die Rote Fahne*, resumed the heated exchange between the publications

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<sup>80</sup> *Welt am Montag*, July 21, 1919. It is worth pointing out that, for all their differences, both critics and supporters of the death penalty couched their arguments in a lack of trust in the general public. Critiques, such as the article cited here, often claimed that the public was easily perverted, and that sanctioned state violence would only exacerbate the public’s negative tendencies. Supporters of the penalty, meanwhile, argued that it was a desperately needed corrective for a degenerating society and a shamed public see Evans. There are clear parallels here to the common Weimar critique of the press, that it dominated the easily-swayed masses.

<sup>81</sup> *Deutsche Allgemeine Zeitung*, November 10, 1929.

that dated back to the German Revolution of 1918. In fact, to best understand the stakes and motives in their coverage of Haarmann, it helps to recall the roles these papers played in the earlier events, discussed in more detail in Chapter 1. At the end of the First World War, *Vorwärts*, the official organ of Germany's Majority Socialist Party (MSPD), had insisted that the MSPD's assumption of political control in Germany represented the socialist revolution made manifest. In this narrative, the MSPD would achieve socialist change from within the structures of the German state.

The most trenchant critique of this story had come from the *Rote Fahne*, representing the German communists, which claimed that any "revolution" from within economic systems of control was a false revolution. In making such claims, the *Rote Fahne* exhibited a rhetorical power that outstripped the communists' organizational power at the time. Tensions in Berlin had come to a head in January 1919, when workers disenchanted with the MSPD seized government offices as well as the *Vorwärts* building. The MSPD leadership in turn approved brutal repercussions from right-wing paramilitary groups, including the murder of *Rote Fahne* writers and communist leaders Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht.

The tremendous ill-will between socialists and communists in Berlin, particularly between *Vorwärts* and *Die Rote Fahne*, persisted throughout the decade. As the SPD was often a member in majority coalitions in the government, *Vorwärts* continued the argument it had made during the revolution: SPD leadership and incremental change offered Berlin workers their best opportunity for a better life. Similarly, *Die Rote Fahne*, which had seen its readership continue to increase with the growth of the German Communist party, maintained its withering attacks on Socialist party members in the

government. These attacks were often more caustic than the paper's criticisms of the right-wing parties, in part to encourage working class readership to abandon German communism's closest competitor, but also no doubt in memory of the violent suppression of the Spartacists and *Die Rote Fahne* at the command of socialist leadership during the Revolution.

It was in this context that the papers addressed the Haarmann case. *Die Rote Fahne* used the events to continue its master narrative of the evil socialist influence on the Weimar Republic. The paper's editors elaborated on a complaint they had hinted at during Grossmann's suicide: that the killer's actions had been a direct result of the corruption and incompetence of the SPD's capitalist government.<sup>82</sup> Here the *Rote Fahne* rearticulated the message that had accompanied the paper's inception in 1918: the rise to power of the SPD in 1918 had simply been the cementing of the capitalist system and a method of preventing a true revolution to liberate the German people. Haarmann, in the paper's estimation, was a symptom of Germany's political sickness. As the paper put it, "the beast Haarmann, a blood-sucker who works on his own in a primitive way, lives in the shadow of the bloody weapons used by the capitalist state."<sup>83</sup> This passage contained monstrous imagery, but this imagery had been carefully constructed to attack the Weimar government. The idea of the blood sucker, the vampire, tied into communist critiques of the relationship between exploitative capitalist and exploited worker. By emphasizing the killer's and the state's "bloody weapons" the paper made a none-to-subtle appeal to

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<sup>82</sup> It should be noted that while this critique was ubiquitous in *Die Rote Fahne*, it was not unique to the paper; the right wing Berlin papers leveled similar attacks on the SPD government, although with far less frequency and vitriol, e.g. *Deutsche Allgemeine Zeitung*, January 2, 1925

<sup>83</sup> *Die Rote Fahne*, July 13, 1924.

the nation's suffering during the First World War and to the radical left's brutal experience in the bloody revolutionary aftermath.

Further inflaming the communist press, the police chief of Hannover was none other than Gustav Noske, the same SPD member who had led the government's bloody retaliation against the rebelling Berlin workers during in January 1919. Noske had been on vacation when the police's role became publicized, but upon his return he declared the *Niedersächsische Arbeiterzeitung*, the local communist paper which had been reporting on Haarmann's police connections, injurious to public safety and banned it. "It should be no surprise that the puppet master of the bloody Haarmann is the bloodthirsty Noske" exclaimed one *Rote Fahne* report.<sup>84</sup> The paper demanded the dismissal of Noske: "it remains a scandal that the police hire such criminal stool pigeons, using them against our party.... The campaign against the Communist Party has been led by stool pigeons of the Haarmann type.... We demand the resignation of Police Commissioner Noske."<sup>85</sup>

At every opportunity *Die Rote Fahne* drove home Haarmann's role as a police informant and the police's failure to end the killings earlier. This information meshed well with *Die Rote Fahne*'s standard critique of the republic. That Haarmann had been an informer was to be expected, the paper claimed. Because no honorable members of the working class would serve such a state, this state relied on "bloodhounds and criminals" to pursue its primary goal: persecuting the communists.<sup>86</sup> The paper developed a narrative of the corrupt "Haarmann-System" which aimed to instill "mass terror amongst the revolutionary Proletariat."<sup>87</sup> Here the paper was referencing the

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<sup>84</sup> *Die Rote Fahne*, December 3, 1924

<sup>85</sup> Plant, *Pink Triangle*, 47-48; *Die Rote Fahne*, December 14, 1924.

<sup>86</sup> *Die Rote Fahne*, December 19, 1924

<sup>87</sup> *Die Rote Fahne*, July 15, 1924

crackdown on “enemies of the Republic” that had followed the political murder of prominent Centre Party member Matthias Erzberger. While Erzberger’s death had come at the hands of the ultra-nationalist right-wing, much of the state’s coercive power had instead focused on the far left: more than seven thousand KPD supporters had been apprehended for political activities in 1923, for example.<sup>88</sup> The paper referred to the policemen who attacked workers as “Haar-men” and argued that “since no sane man would stoop to work for the Haarmann-Police, the system is forced to hire its tools and agents from the underworld.... The entire system is truly characterized by a mass murderer such as Haarmann.” *Die Rote Fahne* demanded “the release of all victims of the Noske-Haarmann police.”<sup>89</sup>

The *Vorwärts* responded to these *Rote Fahne* attacks as might be expected: in its telling of events, Haarmann was a terrible anomaly that the cynical and vicious communists were exploiting to weaken the state. “The crimes of Haarmann are monstrous to be sure; but is it not also monstrous to use these events to smear the SPD leadership? We know that the communists are not averse to a bit of blood themselves,” or “readers must guard against unreliable reports that seek only to discredit socialism nationally.”<sup>90</sup> The paper did criticize of the Hannover police for their handling of the case and their previous use of Haarmann (“an embarrassment that warrants close investigation and government action”) and agreed that “the families of the victims have every reason to complain at the police’s failure to capture the murderous Haarmann

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<sup>88</sup> W. Eissler, *Arbeiterparteien und Homosexuellenfrage. Zur Sexualpolitik von SPD und KPD in der Weimarer Republik*, (Berlin: R. Winkel, 1980), 103.

<sup>89</sup> *Die Rote Fahne*, December 17, 1924

<sup>90</sup> *Vorwärts* December 7, December 10, 1924.

sooner.”<sup>91</sup> However, it did not extrapolate from this critique that the state in general was at fault. Instead, the clear authority figure that emerged from this coverage was the well-meaning but individually incompetent Hannover official.

When *Vorwärts* discussed Haarmann the individual, the paper frequently used dehumanizing language; his deeds were “monstrous;” he was a “werewolf” and a “beast.”<sup>92</sup> This tendency was in no way unique to the *Vorwärts*, of course. Numerous Berlin papers used such monstrous imagery to describe Haarmann.<sup>93</sup> Nevertheless, in using this sort of rhetoric, *Vorwärts* actively distanced this criminal from Weimar society, suggesting that he was not so much a product of this environment as an anomaly that needed to be removed.<sup>94</sup>

*Die Rote Fahne* in turn attacked the tendency of the press (and particularly the *Vorwärts*) to define Haarmann as the monstrous outsider. According to *Die Rote Fahne*, the “bourgeois” press wished to claim that Haarmann was a “flesh-eater” and “blood sucker,” that he was incurably different, because these ideas absolved the capitalist system from any culpability in his actions.<sup>95</sup> The paper thus concluded that the court’s rush towards a death sentence conviction, and the Berlin press’s general support of the death penalty in this case, was driven by the fear that further investigation of Haarmann would reveal the sickness within Weimar culture itself. Also, in the *Rote Fahne*’s reasoning, removing the Haarmann case from the headlines would decrease the justified

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<sup>91</sup> *Vorwärts*, December 8, 1924.

<sup>92</sup> *Vorwärts*, December 7, December 12, December 15, 1924.

<sup>93</sup> For examples of sensational coverage, see *8-Uhr Abendblatt* December 20, 1924 (Haarmann as “Tier” and “Bestie”); *B.Z. am Mittag* July 2, 1924 (Haarmann as “Amokläufer”); *Kreuzzeitung* December 18, 1924, (Haarmann as “Unhold”)

<sup>94</sup> For the interesting argument that this imagery of the vicious beast was not the antithesis of Weimar male sexuality but its precondition, see Eva Bischoff, “Becoming Cannibal” in *Deleuzian Events & n-1; Writing/History*, eds. Hanjo Berressem, Leyla Haferkamp (Berlin: Lit, 2009).

<sup>95</sup> *Die Rote Fahne*, December 19, 1924

public outrage at the Hannover police, and thus reaffirm the oppressive system that guarded the capitalist order. Clearly, then, *Die Rote Fahne* and *Vorwärts* both adapted the events in Hannover into their pre-existing debate about the competency and working class sympathies of the SPD leadership. This fiery media conflict would persist until the republic's collapse.

The right-wing press, meanwhile, often used its coverage of the Haarmann case to warn of the dangers presented by homosexuality. Here papers such as the *Kreuzzeitung* and *Deutsche Allgemeine Zeitung* cast a particular eye towards the importance of Paragraph 175 of the German penal code. With the creation of modern Germany in 1870 had come Paragraph 175, which outlawed all male homosexual acts apart from mutual masturbation. During the Weimar Republic, this law was a cause of conflict between legislators and progressive members of the German medical establishment, as had been the case since the law's founding.<sup>96</sup> Such psychiatric luminaries as Richard von Krafft-Ebing, Magnus Hirschfeld, and Albert Moll argued for, at the very least, substantial

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<sup>96</sup> For a discussion of attempts during Weimar to abolish Paragraph 175, see Richard Plant, *Pink Triangle*, 30-52; and James Steakley, *The Homosexual Emancipation Movement in Germany* (New York: Arno Press, 1975); for a critical reassessment of the 175-centric approach these works take, see Glenn Ramsey, "The Rites of *Artgenossen*: Contesting Homosexual Political Culture in Weimar Germany," *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 17, no. 1, Masculinity and Homosexuality in Germany and the German Colonies, 1880-1945 (Jan., 2008): 85-109. The law's origin is discussed in Robert Beachy, "The German Invention of Homosexuality," *Journal of Modern History* 82, no. 4, Science and the Making of Modern Culture (December 2010): 801-838; for an excellent study of the Weimar sex reform movement more generally, see Atina Grossmann, *Reforming Sex: The German Movement for Birth Control and Abortion Reform, 1920-1950* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 3-136; for the overlap between sexual politics and politics in general during Weimar, see Susanne zur Nieden (ed) *Homosexualität und Staatsräson: Männlichkeit, Homophobie und Politik in Deutschland 1900-1945* (New York: Campus, 2005). The eventual repeal of Paragraph 175 (in 1994) is discussed in Erik N. Jensen, "The Pink Triangle and Political Consciousness: Gays, Lesbians, and the Memory of Nazi Persecution," *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 11, no. 1/2, Special Issue: Sexuality and German Fascism (Jan. - Apr., 2002): 319-349.

revision of the law, if not its outright repeal.<sup>97</sup> Hirschfeld, a gay, Jewish Social Democrat who was testifying in the Haarmann trial, was a driving force behind the sexual reform movement and particularly the challenges to Paragraph 175; he had founded the Scientific-Humanitarian Committee and the Institute for Sexual Research, both important for the sex reform movement.<sup>98</sup> Berlin enjoyed a particularly strong gay subculture during the Weimar Republic, and even before the 1920s this culture had been presented in published reports by sexologists.<sup>99</sup> Thus, the topic of homosexuality was particularly prevalent among the Berlin press, with the *Rote Fahne* generally supporting gay rights and right-wing papers decrying the movement. While the KPD actively opposed Paragraph 175, the SPD and left liberal DDP preferred incremental reductions in the law.<sup>100</sup>

Press critics of this gay rights movement deployed the Haarmann case to argue that the paragraph must be maintained. The *Göttinger Tageblatt* warned that “the Communists are bringing to the Reichstag a motion [to repeal Paragraph 175] that would protect homosexual criminals, that would allow them to run riot, that would have the further implications of benefitting Haarmann” (the logic here was not explained).<sup>101</sup> Here the paper bluntly tied support for reforming Paragraph 175 to Haarmann’s serial killing, obviously without basis.<sup>102</sup> This example is a particularly bald version of the right-wing

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<sup>97</sup> Beachy, 808.

<sup>98</sup> For an outstanding discussion of the sex reform movement during Weimar, see Grossmann, *Reforming Sex*, 3-135.

<sup>99</sup> E.g. Magnus Hirschfeld, *Berlins drittes Geschlecht* (Berlin: Seemann Nachf, 1905), essentially an insider’s guide to gay Berlin, and Hans Ostwald, *Männliche Prostitution im kaiserlichen Berlin* (Berlin: Seemann, 1906).

<sup>100</sup> Eissler, *Homosexuellenfrage*, 47, 65

<sup>101</sup> *Göttinger Tageblatt*, July 27, 1924.

<sup>102</sup> For further discussion of the strategy of stigmatizing movements or ideas by mapping them onto serial murder cases, see Phillip Jenkins, *Using Murder. The Social Construction of Serial Homicide* (New York: A. de Gruyter, 1994), 3-8.

press's attempts to associate Haarmann's murderous motivations with his homosexuality.<sup>103</sup>

Hirschfeld used the press to challenge this right-wing narrative. Writing for the liberal *Neue Berliner Zeitung*, he contended "it is absolutely devious for anyone to suggest that Haarmann's homosexual proclivities are accountable for his murderous deeds. The rate of heterosexual lust in serial murders well exceeds that of homosexual crimes."<sup>104</sup> The head of the League for Human Rights, conservative businessman Friedrich Radzuweig, also protested the right-wing press's coverage of Haarmann's sexuality. Radzuweig wrote to the newspapers protesting "the yellow journalism which tries to identify homosexuals with this feeble-minded criminal... The homosexual minority in our nation emphatically rejects these insulting remarks which equate homosexuality with criminality."<sup>105</sup> The press efforts of the right appear to have ultimately born fruit; the cause of legal equality for homosexuals was significantly set-back by the coverage of the Haarmann case.<sup>106</sup> In Hannover in particular, in the words of crime novelist Hans Hyan, "homosexuals anticipate and fear new persecution... they are leaving Hannover in great numbers."<sup>107</sup>

The Berlin press's coverage of the Haarmann case, then, varied substantially despite these papers working with the same material. While the language of such coverage was certainly sensational, Berlin's press also pursued different political agendas, shaping the facts of the case to make particular meaning of the Haarmann case

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<sup>103</sup> E.g. *Kreuzzeitung* December 5, December 8, December 12, 1924; *Deutsche Allgemeine Zeitung*, December 10, December 12, December 16, etc. Such assertions also appeared in moderate bourgeois papers, although less frequently, eg. *Vossische Zeitung*, December 5, 1924.

<sup>104</sup> Magnus Hirschfeld, "Warum Haarmann mordete," *Neue Berliner Zeitung*, December 16, 1924

<sup>105</sup> Quoted in Plant, *Pink Triangle*, 46-47.

<sup>106</sup> Jenkins, *Using Murder*, 183; Plant, *Pink Triangle*, 45-47.

<sup>107</sup> Hyan, *Massenmörder Haarmann*, 65.

for their readers. Just as Lessing had mounted powerful critiques of the state through his journalism, the *Rote Fahne* launched sensational attacks on the government, much to the frustration of the *Vorwärts*. In some cases, though, this sensational coverage supported the status quo: papers on the right used the case as a cudgel to beat back the Weimar gay rights movement.

Both the Haarman and Grossmann cases demonstrate that Berlin's papers could produce numerous competing narratives to explain the same events, and these narratives often ran along political lines. In the following two case studies, those of Denke (below) and Kürten (Chapter 4), I will consider how Berlin press coverage of sensational events could also develop a more unified narrative, often at the expense of the state. In the case of Denke, we will find that papers across the Berlin press's wide political spectrum constructed strikingly similar political narratives about the significance of cannibalism in Germany. The press also read this narrative back into earlier events such as the Grossmann case. In the case of Kürten, as we will see next chapter, a certain, relatively consistent image of the killer emerged which eventually challenged the diagnosis of the state's psychiatric experts.

Just days after the conclusion of the Haarmann trial, another shocking serial murder case took the Berlin newspapers by storm. The story of Karl Denke allowed the Berlin press to develop a cannibal narrative that incorporated both Grossmann and Haarmann. The Denke case also contained elements that led the press to challenge the competence of the state and call into question police expertise, all while simultaneously

strengthening the press's own claim to authority. The timeline of the story encouraged the press to draw wide-ranging conclusions about what the Grossmann-Haarmann-Denke series of murders said about broad economic and cultural trends in Weimar Germany.

On December 20, 1924, a coachman in Munsterberg, Silesia, heard cries for help coming from the home of Karl Denke, the organ player at the local church. Rushing in, the coachman found a young man staggering down the hall with a head wound. After reaching safety, the victim claimed that "Vater" Denke had attacked him with an ax. The police were immediately summoned, and they arrested Denke on suspicion of attempted murder, despite his neighbors' protests that he was a gentleman.<sup>108</sup> The following day, just before he was to be brought before the judge, Denke hung himself in his cell. Upon discovery of his body, the police searched Denke's home. In the dwelling they found identification papers for twelve traveling journeymen as well as assorted articles of male clothing. In the kitchen investigators discovered human flesh in huge jars of curing salts, and further searching yielded a ledger in which Denke had written the details of 30 people he had murdered and cannibalized over several decades. News of this horrible story reached Berlin several days later, on December 24.

The Denke case offered the Berlin press an excellent opportunity to write a coda, a series of ultimate explanations, to a string of (what they came to perceive as) cannibal murders which had started with Grossmann. The Denke case was particularly fertile ground for such press speculation. By the time the news of Denke arrived, the essential events of this case had already concluded. This provided the press with a rather different

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<sup>108</sup> Matthias Blazek, *Carl Großmann und Friedrich Schumann - Zwei Serienmörder in den zwanziger Jahren* (Stuttgart: Ibidem-Verl, 2009), 133.

scenario than the Grossmann and Haarmann cases: both of those events had evolved over the course of weeks if not months, and both had featured trials during which a great deal of personal information about the killer became available. Because Denke had killed himself directly after capture, before he could be interviewed and asked about his actions, Denke remained a cipher. The Berlin press had considerable latitude to interpret the meaning behind his murders. In addition to constructing these interpretations, the newspapers read their understanding of Denke back into the previous cases of Grossmann and Haarmann.

Whereas some earlier press reports had indicated that both Grossmann and Haarmann might have been cannibals, without any ultimate proof, Denke had quite clearly cannibalized his victims. His cannibalism was thus the focal point of the press coverage: for the press it both defined the killer and organized the avenues of inquiry reasonable for the case. The *Berliner Tageblatt* and the *Berliner Lokal-Anzeiger*'s initial headlines blared "Man-eater" while *BZ am Mittag* and the *Morgenpost* chose "cannibal."<sup>109</sup> *Vorwärts* represented the (relatively) more restrained approach, going with "mass murderer from Munsterberg."<sup>110</sup> Regardless of the appellation, the point of investigation remained set: what had driven Denke to eat people? Of course, one could argue that there was also the question of what had driven Denke to kill his victims in the first place. But this latter question, the question of the motivation for murder itself rather than the subsequent cannibalism, was almost totally subsumed in the Berlin press coverage by the question of why Denke needed to eat people.

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<sup>109</sup> *Berliner Tageblatt*, December 26, 1924, *Berliner Lokal-Anzeiger* December 26, 1924, *BZ am Mittag* December 26, 1924, *Berliner Morgenpost*, December 27, 1924.

<sup>110</sup> *Vorwärts*, December 30, 1924.

Absent in almost all of the press coverage was any attempt to apply the idea of the *Lustmörder* to Denke. This substantial departure from the previous serial murder coverage of Grossmann and Haarmann may well have stemmed from the age of Denke's victims, almost all of whom were over 40 years old.<sup>111</sup> Reporters assumed that one necessary aspect of *Lustmörd* was for the killer to find the victim sexually attractive. They did not appear to consider, however, that a type of person they did not personally find sexually attractive (a 45 year old journeyman, for example), might nonetheless have been attractive to the killer. As such, the potential sexual dimensions of the crime in particular and Denke's psychological motives more broadly were not a focus of coverage as they had been in the cases of Grossmann and Haarmann.

Instead, the press's emphasis on the most desperate form of consumption, eating your own kind, led coverage towards one of the central social and economic questions of the early years of the Weimar Republic: the experience of starvation. The Berlin public had experienced mass starvation twice over a six year period: first at the end of the war in 1918, and then again at the peak of hyperinflation in 1923. As the press dug into the facts of Denke's life, they discovered that Denke's experiences paralleled those of a considerable portion of the public: Denke had lost all his money during the inflation. Moreover, he was known as a regular church-goer who had lived in the same village his entire life. As the *Morgenpost* noted, he "always had dressed conservatively and did not stand out to anyone."<sup>112</sup> Certainly this demeanor and behavior was a far cry from that of a "werewolf" or "vampire" as Haarmann had been classified.

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<sup>111</sup> Michael Kirchschrager, *Historische Serienmörder menschliche Ungeheuer vom späten Mittelalter bis zum Ende des 19. Jahrhunderts* (Arnstadt: Kirchschrager, 2007), 153.

<sup>112</sup> *Berliner Morgenpost*, December 26, 1924.

Several Berlin newspapers began to read Denke not as fundamentally a monster, but as a man who had been driven to eat people out of desperate economic need. This explanation ignored the fact that the entries in Denke's journal of victims dated back to 1903, well before experiences of starvation.<sup>113</sup> Nevertheless, the *Tageblatt* wondered if "the terrible conditions of starvation and lack of money may have driven the man to cannibalism."<sup>114</sup> Similar speculation emerged in the *Vorwärts* and *Lokal-Anzeiger*.<sup>115</sup> While initial coverage in the *Kreuz-Zeitung* had drawn comparisons to Haarmann ("Another Haarmann?"), within a few days the paper was also considering whether the murders might have been driven by economic desperation.<sup>116</sup>

In spite of the rational origins some of the press ascribed to Denke's actions, his cannibalism made him into a monster in the view of the papers. He had become afflicted by "*Menschenfleisch-Psychose*" (madness for human flesh), making him no better than a beast, in the representative words of the *Rote Fahne*.<sup>117</sup> Moreover, the press often seemed to suggest that *Menschenfleisch-Psychose* could be transferred like a virus—eating the flesh of another human being would break down doors in a person that could not be restored. The *BZ am Mittag* reported breathlessly that Denke had sold his meat to an entire wedding party, which had dined on human flesh without knowing it.<sup>118</sup> These two narratives, the idea that the lust for flesh could spread quickly, and the explanation that the killer's actions had been a rational reaction to inconceivable economic hardship, together created a picture of a society on the brink of becoming monstrous.

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<sup>113</sup> Kompisch, *Bestien*, 79.

<sup>114</sup> *Berliner Tageblatt*, December 30, 1924.

<sup>115</sup> *Vorwärts*, December 31, 1924; *Berliner Lokal-Anzeiger*, December 28, 1924.

<sup>116</sup> *Kreuz-Zeitung*, December 25, 1924; *Kreuz-Zeitung*, December 29, 1924.

<sup>117</sup> *Die Rote Fahne*, December 25, 1924.

<sup>118</sup> *BZ am Mittag*, December 27, 1924.

The case also opened the police to criticism, much as the Haarmann case had. The *Vossische Zeitung* and *Rote Fahne* both wondered what had taken the police so long to discover this mass murderer living in a small town. The *Vossische Zeitung* suggested that only Denke's death had prompted the police to search his home; had he not hung himself, the paper argued, he would have been released and still be killing.<sup>119</sup> The *Rote Fahne*, unsurprisingly, went farther still, asserting that "the police of this republic have so much fighting to do against the communists, that the man-eater, just as was the case with Haarmann, can murder countless victims."<sup>120</sup> The government, from this perspective, had both created the conditions which produced cannibalistic murderers and then had ignored this problem to persecute their political opposition.

The *Vorwärts* obviously could not approve of this narrative. In a long survey of the cases of Grossmann, Haarmann, and Denke, the paper attempted to construct a different comprehensive explanation, one which in fact did seem to gain traction in other press coverage. Rather than laying the blame for the crimes at the feet of the current government, the *Vorwärts* suggested that the German experience in the First World War was to blame: "is it really a coincidence that all three of these cases occurred in Germany directly after the war? There is clearly a connection between the social chaos and these criminal acts."<sup>121</sup> The paper buttressed its argument by deploying some questionable anthropological ideas about the nature of primitive society and the tendency of crisis to

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<sup>119</sup> *Die Vossische Zeitung*, December 28, 1924. The more moderate papers focused their incredulity on the citizens of the town. The *Tageblatt* wondered "the most surprising thing is that these gruesome crimes could take place not in isolation, but in a dwelling with people all around" *Berliner Tageblatt*, December 30, 1924.

<sup>120</sup> *Die Rote Fahne*, December 30, 1924.

<sup>121</sup> *Vorwärts*, December 31, 1924.

produce cannibalism in these societies. Here, again, a paper co-opted an expert discourse in the creation of an explanatory narrative.

Of course, the conclusions that the paper drew were completely at odds with *Die Rote Fahne*: if the cause of these cannibalistic outrages was social unrest and violence, then the revolutionary resistance that had occurred in Berlin in 1919 was in part to blame for these later crimes. Moreover, any new calls to revolution and violence (such as those made by *Die Rote Fahne*) would only create more of these cases. “Does it not follow that if these acts were born and raised in the experience of war, that you should not trust the groups who wish to return us to unrest? Don’t civil war and revolution lead inexorably to cannibalism?”<sup>122</sup> These two papers thus continued the KPD/SPD debate in the context of the cannibalistic murders: the *Rote Fahne* claimed that society’s problems could only be solved by revolution against the corrupt state, and the *Vorwärts* asserted that political violence would produce social collapse.

The *Vorwärts* essay illustrated an important trend in the press coverage of Denke that cut across the entire Berlin press: these papers’ tendency to read a fully developed cannibal narrative backwards onto previous events. In the Denke case, the press applied its current understanding of Denke’s actions back onto the crimes of Grossmann and Haarmann. These men were now, unquestionably, cannibals, and their imagined motives also began to change. During the Grossmann coverage in 1921, no press discourse had portrayed Grossmann as a man created by his circumstances. Grossmann had appeared either as *Lustmörder*, woman-killer, or beast. The papers analyzing what they considered the Weimar cannibal phenomenon following Denke’s discovery in 1924, however, positioned Grossmann within a narrative of the effects of social and economic

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<sup>122</sup> *Vorwärts*, December 31, 1924.

hardship on the individual. Such arguments appeared not only in *Vorwärts* coverage, but also in the *Berliner Morgenpost*, *Berliner Lokal-Anzeiger*, and the *DAZ*.<sup>123</sup>

During the Denke coverage, the Grossmann, Haarmann, and Denke cases thus began to merge into a single master narrative. The Weimar Republic was a state in crisis, as exemplified by the rash of cannibalistic killers who might be mad but were also being driven by an economic crisis. Were the problems of the state left unaddressed, the implication was that more such murder sprees would follow. This story, in point of fact, did not actually promote an accurate assessment of the cases themselves: Grossmann and Haarmann were probably not cannibals, and none of the men had been driven primarily (if at all) by economic hardship. Nevertheless, the narrative did offer an explanation to a series of immensely disconcerting series of murders: it provided organization and order of events as well as sensational unease about the future.

The Grossmann, Haarmann, and Denke cases also allowed the press to interact with psychiatric and legal expertise and to assert itself as a legitimate discussant in these debates. In the case of Grossmann, the press asserted special knowledge about the area where the crime had occurred, and papers on the left had deployed psychiatric language to explain the killer. With Lessing's and the communist papers' coverage of Haarmann, these themes had emerged again, accompanied this time by a willingness to critique the police and judicial apparatus. After the discovery of Denke, the Berlin press sculpted the event into a coda for a series of cannibalistic murders that called into question the competence of the government and the police. The *Vorwärts* and *Rote Fahne* developed competing anthropological theories about the origins and nature of the cannibal in

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<sup>123</sup> *Berliner Morgenpost*, January 3, 1925; *Berliner Lokal-Anzeiger* January 2, 1925; *Deutsche Allgemeine Zeitung*, December 29, 1924.

modern society; these stories included instructions for preventing future manifestations of the problem. For *Die Rote Fahne*, this meant the overthrow of the corrupt government, while for *Vorwärts*, the prevention of social unrest and civil war would prevent further serial murder.

One of the press's key functions during the decade was to organize an overwhelming supply of facts into coherent stories that made sense of an event, and this is what the press was attempting with Denke. I do not want to overstate the similarities in the Berlin press's various Denke articles: these stories were not always consistent with one another. For instance, Denke could not be both a man driven to extreme but rational action by inconceivable economic desperation *and* a primitive monster. Nevertheless, for the week that Denke was in the news, across these occasionally contradictory narratives emerged a consistent frame for the stories, involving a cannibalism crisis in the Weimar Republic. While different papers drew different lessons about what was to be done, the underlying problem they narrated was strikingly similar across the political spectrum.

This examination of the Haarmann and Denke cases should make several points clear. First, as the analysis of Lessing's work demonstrates, reportage could provide a powerful counterpoint to state expertise. In the Haarmann case, the state was quite aware of this danger and actively worked to silence reporting on the particulars of the case which incriminated the Hannoverian state. This attempt ultimately failed despite the court's best efforts. Thus, while we saw in the Grossmann case that newspapers could reinforce and broadcast criminological and psychiatric expertise to the public even as

they claimed an expertise of their own, here we observe reportage that explicitly challenges and undermines the knowledge claims of juridical and psychiatric experts. Lessing's reporting also incorporated his own psychological training and observations, again demonstrating how the genres of reportage and psychological analysis could complement one another.

The exclusion of Berlin papers from the courtroom meant that these papers molded their coverage from the same basic set of facts reported from the wires; yet the major papers crafted vastly different narratives from this identical information. On the left, a brutal war of words, inspired by the left-on-left violence of the German Revolution, persisted. Haarmann offered new evidence for the communist press to assert the monstrosity of the Weimar government. The socialist press countered by scolding *Die Rote Fahne* for its opportunism and arguing that Haarmann was a complete anomaly.

The conservative papers focused on the lessons to be drawn from Haarmann's homosexuality. These papers used the case to argue that any further "moral slippage" in favor of homosexuals would produce more murder and mayhem. Finally, papers at the center of the political spectrum paid some attention to the juridical-legal debate about the death penalty and paragraph 51, and these papers generally supported execution in this case. More than simply sensationalizing the trial for public consumption, the Berlin papers used the facts of the case to create very different political narratives in the service of their own ideological agendas.

Finally, the discovery of the Denke case almost immediately following the conviction of Haarmann demonstrates how the press could also create overarching explanatory narratives that incorporated earlier stories, retroactively changing those

stories' messages. Haarmann, and especially Grossmann, had not been covered particularly often as cannibals. Yet, with the discovery of Denke, cannibalism was read back into their histories as a certainty. Here, the Berlin press created a problem (the idea of an outbreak of cannibalism) and then proposed a variety of political causes and their resultant solutions. In both the Haarmann and Denke cases, these newspapers worked as political actors, drawing out lessons and advocating positions based on their own political interests. In both cases, this work could articulate a significant challenge to the state, threatening to undermine its own claims to expertise and competence. The following study of the Kürten case will provide one more variation on this theme. During Kürten coverage, a similar idea of the killer emerged across the Berlin press's discourse, despite the variety in each paper's account of the crimes. This idea challenged the eventual diagnosis of psychiatric experts, and Kürten himself attempted to mobilize this press creation in his defense.

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **PETER KÜRTEEN: THE NARRATIVE OF SENSATION**

This dissertation has thus far argued that Berlin press coverage during the Weimar Republic claimed its own sort of specialized expertise of location, and that this press's coverage of non-political sensation was heavily politicized. The Peter Kürten case provides examples of these trends as well; I will argue that the various press narratives of the case, which were often organized around a description of the crimes' locations in Düsseldorf, created an idea of the killer that could be mobilized against the claims of the state's juridical apparatus. However, the Kürten case also illustrates the narrative dynamics of sensational coverage. In this coverage, the reporter himself emerges as a character in the drama, a heroic guide for the reader safe at home. This chapter, in addition to furthering my arguments that Weimar Berlin's sensational reportage asserted the expertise of the journalist, also considers how these sensational narratives functioned as a literary form.

For over a year, starting in February, 1929, Peter Kürten committed a series of murders, rapes, and arsons in Düsseldorf which both terrorized and captivated the city. By November, 1929, as the police investigation into these crimes wore on and Kürten started contacting the local press anonymously, most Berlin papers began providing

blanket coverage of the latest events from Düsseldorf. While the Grossmann, Haarmann and Denke cases had themselves created media sensations, coverage of those events paled in comparison to the attention garnered by Kürten's crimes and eventual capture. Many major Berlin papers, including the *Berliner Tageblatt*, *Berliner Morgenpost*, *Tägliche Rundschau*, and *Vossische Zeitung*, dispatched special correspondents to Düsseldorf for detailed on-site accounts of the police investigation. Moreover, while in the Grossmann, Haarmann, and Denke cases, the killers had been apprehended before the extent of their crimes became clear; in this case, the identity of the antagonist remained a mystery during the police search and media sensation. The killer's anonymity in the early stages of the investigation meant that press discussions of his motives and nature were as speculative as they were varied.

Lacking a clearly defined antagonist for their stories, Berlin papers often concentrated their coverage instead on establishing a sense of location for readers: on-site reporters generally portrayed themselves as mastering Düsseldorf as a physical place.<sup>1</sup> As in the Grossmann case, such articles created the reporter as the authority on the location itself. The reporter was the reader's savvy and trustworthy guide to what was, in the newspapers' own accounts, a location too deadly to be safely explored by the average reader. Several Berlin papers (particularly the bourgeois press, such as the *Tageblatt* and *Vossische Zeitung*) went even further in their coverage. The articles from these papers sometimes positioned the reporter himself as a character in the serial-killer saga: an

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<sup>1</sup> Eg *Vossische Zeitung* November 19, 1929; *Berliner Morgenpost* November 21, 1929; *Berliner Tageblatt* November 17, 1929; *Lokal Anzeiger*, November 20, 1929.

intrepid and savvy (yet empathetic) adventurer who served as a sort of foil for the mysterious, shadowy killer that terrorized the public at large.<sup>2</sup>

While in 1929 the identity of this killer remained a tantalizing mystery for the press, the police, and the public, press reports still constructed a set of possible identities for the villain. The killer's anonymity meant that reporters could craft him in whatever manner best suited their rhetorical needs in that moment. Thus, the character of the "*Düsseldorfer Mörder*," as he was named,<sup>3</sup> could exhibit contradictory aspects, often within a single article. The press was clear that the killer was human, yet the *Düsseldorfer Mörder* also consistently took on the supernatural qualities of a ghost. He was in one moment cold and detached in his killing,<sup>4</sup> at another a ravening beast who could not control his instincts.<sup>5</sup> All press accounts agreed, however, that he committed his crimes with near-preternatural foresight and planning, before vanishing unseen into the shadows. In this formulation, the quasi-supernatural *Düsseldorfer Mörder* proved well beyond the capacity of the hapless police to capture, or perhaps even to comprehend.<sup>6</sup>

This narrative of the ghost-like killer thus called into question the criminological expertise claimed by the police and, by extension, the competence of the state itself. The Berlin papers instead inserted their own claims to comprehend this killer who so befuddled the police. In addition to their own speculations about the *Düsseldorfer Mörder*, papers asserted their privileged position by inviting external experts to write

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<sup>2</sup> Eg *Vossische Zeitung*, November 24, 1929; *Lokal Anzeiger*, November 26, 1929.

<sup>3</sup> While Kürten's most common nickname now is "Vampire," this appellation was relatively uncommon in the actual press coverage at the time. Instead, "*Düsseldorfer Mörder*" was almost ubiquitous once it became clear to the press that the killings in Düsseldorf had been committed by one man.

<sup>4</sup> *Berliner Tageblatt*, November 17, 1929.

<sup>5</sup> *Berliner illustrierte Nachtausgabe*, November 15, 1929.

<sup>6</sup> *8-Uhr Abendblatt*, November 26, 1929.

columns commenting on the investigation and the perpetrator.<sup>7</sup> The press's speculations, as noted above, varied from paper-to-paper, but they differed substantially from the conclusions that court's medical expertise ultimately reached after Kürten's capture. The court's experts declared Kürten to be the textbook example of a sadist—an otherwise normal man who simply refused to control his vicious impulses— and thus deemed him legally executable for his crimes. Conversely, in their investigation coverage Berlin's papers had often presented him as a ghost and a sort of Jekyll/Hyde character, a monster who could pass as a normal human.<sup>8</sup> The papers articulated an image of the killer that could challenge the scientific expertise mobilized by the judicial system.

This press vision of the *Düsseldorfer Mörder* was an extension of the Berlin papers' conception of the city of Düsseldorf itself. Rather than analyzing the killer (an impossible task, given his invisibility), reporters instead extrapolated his nature from the physical surroundings of his acts: the crime scenes. In contrast to their coverage of the Friedrichshain area during the Grossmann case, here on-site reporters almost invariably presented Düsseldorf with gothic overtones, as a shadowy and haunted city.<sup>9</sup> The killer responsible for this scenario thus assumed the qualities appropriate for a phantom lurking among the public. Vitaly, these press speculations had power well beyond the newspaper pages themselves—they functioned as a competing explanation of the killer upon his capture. Kürten would mobilize these conceptions of himself to contest the court experts who attempted to locate him within their own explanatory category of sadist.

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<sup>7</sup> E.g. *Vossische Zeitung* November 16, 1929; *Berliner Lokal-Anzeiger* November 22, 1929.

<sup>8</sup> E.g. *Neue Preussische Zeitung*, November 19, 1929; *Berliner Morgenpost*, November 9, 1929; *Berliner Tageblatt*, November 17, 1929; *Lokal Anzeiger*, November 30, 1929.

<sup>9</sup> E.g. *Berliner Morgenpost*, November 21, 1929; *8-Uhr Abendblatt*, November 12, 1929, *Berliner Tageblatt*, November 22, 1929; *Vorwärts*, November 20, 1929.

The dynamics of press coverage shifted notably following Kürten's arrest in May, 1930. Once Kürten was apprehended and the state's evaluative apparatuses became involved, especially in the form of the consultant doctors tasked with diagnosing Kürten, the papers began interacting directly with the analysis provided by the psychiatric experts. Often the papers' coverage would support, or at least directly reproduce, the prosecution's claims, although articles occasionally might undermine or dismiss them.<sup>10</sup> The trial itself was certainly aimed to re-establish public confidence in state authority, in part through press coverage. In direct contrast to the Haarmann trial, where the the judicial system had clearly wanted to resolve the case as quickly as possible, the Kürten trial appeared designed for press sensation.<sup>11</sup> The trial occurred in the Düsseldorf town hall, specially modified to hold 50 physicians and psychiatrists and over 100 members of the press; notably, the building contained 15 phones with which reporters could contact their editors.<sup>12</sup> The trial lasted nine days, during which time the Berlin press exhaustively recounted the state's expert testimony and breathlessly retold lurid stories of Kürten's murders. Thus, while the press could challenge police competence and expertise by the assertion of its own expertise during the search for the killer, it was just as capable of reifying state authority following the killer's capture.

While the trial certainly continued the decades-long process of binding the evaluative power of psychological and criminological experts to the state's mechanisms of justice, it also allowed the Berlin press to strengthen claims to its own form of interpretive expertise. In this process, of course, "the press" was far from a unified voice.

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<sup>10</sup> E.g. *Berliner Tageblatt*, April 22, 1931; *Vorwärts*, April 18, 1931; *Berliner Tageblatt*, April 18, 1931.

<sup>11</sup> Yet, similarly to the Haarmann trial, the ultimate goal of the Kürten trial was to reassert the expertise and competence of the state, and particularly the police and judicial process.

<sup>12</sup> Elisabeth Lenk, *Leben und Wirken des Peter Kürten, Genannt der Vampir von Düsseldorf* (Munich: Rogner & Bernhard, 1974), 140.

Rather, different papers deployed the events to prove different claims about the problems facing German society and how to solve them. In addition to these broad speculations about society by the press, the Berlin papers also provided detailed coverage of the trial itself. In this sense, the press was both as a conduit for other expertise and a specialized discussant in its own right.

Just as Kürten's deeds, arrest, and subsequent trial and conviction generated tremendous contemporary interest, so too have these events caught the imagination of latter day scholars. Not only in criminological scholarship, but also in cultural studies and historical research, the Kürten case has produced a notable quantity of scholarship. Recent research into this case has generally taken one of two broad tacks. One approach reads Kürten in reference to the high literary and avant-garde representations of his deeds (and often the concept of *Lustmord* in Weimar Germany more generally),<sup>13</sup> while the

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<sup>13</sup> Notably Maren Hoffmeister, "Der Körper des Täters in der Deutung des Lustmords," *Kriminologisches Journal* 35, no.3 (2003): 212-23, and "Autopoiesis und Lustmord: Materialität des Rechts im Spannungsfeld zwischen dem Rechtssystem und populären Ideen," *Paragrana: Internationale Zeitschrift für historische Anthropologie* 15, no.1 (2006): 100-13. Alexandra Wenig, "Serienmord in Deutschland 1900-1945: Eine historische Betrachtung des Phänomens serieller Tötung," in *Serienmord: Kriminologische und kulturwissenschaftliche Skizzierungen eines ungeheuerlichen Phänomens*, eds. Frank J. Robertz, and Alexandra Thomas (Munich: Heyne, 1995); Beth Irwin Lewis, "Lustmord: Inside the Windows of the Metropolis," *Berlin: Culture and Metropolis*, eds. Charles W. Haxthausen, and Heidrun Suhr (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1990), 111-40; Isabella Classen, *Darstellung von Kriminalität in der Deutschen Literatur, Presse und Wissenschaft, 1900 bis 1930* (Frankfurt am Main: Lang, 1988); Jay Michael Layne, *Uncanny Collapse: Sexual Violence and Unsettled Rhetoric in German-Language Lustmord Representations, 1900-1933* (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Michigan, 2008); Maria Tatar, *Lustmord: Sexual Murder in Weimar Germany* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995); Arne Höcker, "Die Lust am Text: Lustmord und Lustmord-Motiv," in *Lustmord: Medialisierungen eines kulturellen Phantasmas um 1900*, eds. Susanne Komfort-Hein, and Susanne Scholz (Königstein: Helmer, 2007); Martin Büsser, *Lustmord—Mordlust: Der Sexualverbrecher als ästhetisches Sujet im 20. Jahrhundert*, (Mainz: Ventil, 2000).

other concentrates on the medical and criminological discourse that determined the killer's awareness of/control over his actions and thus his legal culpability.<sup>14</sup>

As productive as both approaches have been in enhancing understanding of Weimar culture and medico-juridical history, respectively, neither has substantially grappled with the function and complexity of the press in the Kürten case. In the *Lustmord*-focused analysis, newspapers often appear as a monolithic entry in the discourse, rather than as an array of conflicting and distinctly motivated voices.<sup>15</sup> Moreover, some such accounts view the newspaper more as the manifestation of the social id than as a strategic actor in its own right.<sup>16</sup> This analysis generally reduces Kürten newspaper reportage to pure sensationalism and does not consider whether papers' reports attempted to establish anything beyond simple titillation; they thus miss a significant dynamic of Berlin reportage in the 1920s.

Perhaps not surprisingly, the criminological analytic uses press coverage more rarely and with even less complexity. Such criminological analysis focuses on professional experts; this school of thought does not consider the reporter to be an "expert" in this sense. Rather, the criminological approach assigns the reporter and newspaper to the category of public/popular, a category to be contrasted to the expert.

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<sup>14</sup> See for example Kerstin Brückweh, *Mordlust. Serienmorde, Gewalt, und Emotionen im 20. Jahrhundert* (Frankfurt: Campus, 2006); Kathrin Kompisch & Frank Otto, *Bestien des Boulevards. Die Deutschen und ihre Serienmörder* (Leipzig: Militzke, 2003); Mark Benecke, *Mordmethoden: Ermittlungen des bekanntesten Kriminalbiologen der Welt* (Bergisch Gladbach: Lübbe, 2002); Frank Robertz, *Serienmord. Kriminologische und kulturwissenschaftliche Skizzierungen eines ungeheurlichen Phänomens* (Munich: Belleville, 2004); Eva Bischoff, "'Between Animal Instinct and Morality': The Construction of White Masculinity in Medico-psychiatric Discourse in Weimar Germany," in *Historicising Whiteness: Transnational Perspectives on the Construction of an Identity*, ed. Katherine Ellinghaus, Melbourne University conference and seminar series 15 (Melbourne: RMIT Publishing, 2007), 427-35, and "Mee/at Your Neighbors: Dangerous Encounters in Weimar Germany," in *Perspectives on Endangerment*, eds. Graham Huggan, and Stephan Klasen (Hildesheim: Georg Olms, 2005), 97-108.

<sup>15</sup> See for example Tatar, *Lustmord*, 34 or Layne, *Uncanny Collapse*, 24.

<sup>16</sup> E.g. Irwin-Lewis, "Lustmord," 115.

When these accounts do use newspaper articles in their analysis, they often treat these articles as unproblematic windows into popular sentiment.<sup>17</sup> Even the best anthology of Kürten source material includes only four newspaper articles in more than four hundred pages of medical and legal documents.<sup>18</sup>

This chapter aims to remedy this shortcoming in Kürten literature by considering the newspaper coverage of Kürten on its own terms. This coverage could indeed give voice to public fears or reproduce popular literary tropes in actual events, just as it also reproduced claims made by experts in the service of the court. However, the press consistently positioned itself as the reader's most reliable expert on Düsseldorf as a physical place, and this expertise bled into other claims the press might make, such as speculation about the nature of the killer himself. Moreover, as mentioned earlier, when on-site accounts from reporters appeared, the reporter functioned neither as a simple man on the street nor as a medical or psychological specialist, but rather as an almost heroic investigator who might uncover truths opaque even to the police. As will be discussed, in this case the killer himself would eventually deploy aspects of this press coverage to resist state expertise and to justify his own actions.

Kürten committed his first two Düsseldorf murders in February, 1929. The killings, while brutal, did not attract special attention in the Berlin press, in large part because the papers did not understand them to be the work of a single perpetrator. Thus, while the papers covered the events, they also molded them to their own standard tropes

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<sup>17</sup> E.g. Robertz, *Serienmord*, 152.

<sup>18</sup> Lenk, *Leben und Wirken*.

for covering a murder case outside the city. Reports on regional murder investigations were relatively common in this period and generally occupied a single paragraph located well off the first page, simply describing the manner of death and assuring the reader that the police were investigating the case. The coverage of Kürten's first murders followed this trend.<sup>19</sup>

Despite these broad similarities, different Berlin papers used different rhetorical devices to cover the February killings. For example, *Die Rote Fahne* was typically bare-bones in its coverage of a killing that did not seem politically motivated, yet it also managed to offer titillating details of the death, as it had increasingly come to do during the 1920s.<sup>20</sup> The paper offered a bluntly matter-of-fact account of the first murder: “yesterday, under a hedge on the corner of Kettwiger Street and Höherweg in the shadow of the *Vinzenkirche*, a passing worker found the still-burning body of an eight year old girl.”<sup>21</sup> Meanwhile, the *Berliner Tageblatt* declared the girl “a victim of a terrible *Lustmörder*” -- and to be fair, there was certainly evidence to support this claim.<sup>22</sup> The *Vossische Zeitung*, among the most august Berlin publications, lamented the terrible act but kept specific details of the killing to a minimum.<sup>23</sup> The Berlin press's moderate interest in these killings was temporarily sated by the arrest, several months later, of the mentally challenged man Stausberg; this man had assaulted two women and subsequently confessed to Kürten's crimes when accused by the police.

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<sup>19</sup> E.g. *Vorwärts*, February 11, 1929; *BZ Am Mittag*, February 12, 1929; *Neue Preussische Zeitung*, February 11, 1929; *Berliner Morgenpost*, February 10 1929; *Berliner Tageblatt*, February 10, 1929; *8-Uhr Abendblatt*, February 12, 1929; *Die Weltbühne*, February 10, 1929; *Berliner Lokal-Anzeiger*, February 11, 1929.

<sup>20</sup> For a description of the ways that the political press began to incorporate sensational techniques during Weimar, see Corey Ross, *Media and the Making of Modern Germany: Mass Communications, Society, and Politics from the Empire to the Third Reich* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 142-145.

<sup>21</sup> *Rote Fahne*, February 10, 1929.

<sup>22</sup> *Berliner Tageblatt*, February 10, 1929.

<sup>23</sup> *Vossische Zeitung*, February 10, 1929.

During the fall of 1929, as Kürten resumed killing and it became clear that a single murderer was at work, the dynamics of Berlin press coverage changed notably. With a mass murderer active in Düsseldorf, papers could not deploy their standard template for covering single murders. The press, as we have seen, had developed certain tropes to cover the Grossmann, Haarmann, and Denke cases. However, the Kürten case departed in two important ways from these previous newspaper sensations, and the metanarrative from the Denke case was not readily available. Unlike the cases of Grossmann, Haarmann, and Denke, this case had no hint of cannibalism. In the Düsseldorf murders, not only had the killer not eaten his victims, he had also preyed primarily on young children and women. The earlier theme of mass murderer-as-cannibal killer, and its implications of economic need and social collapse, could not explain these events.

Even more importantly, the serial killer's existence was known but his identity was still hidden. In each of the previously analyzed cases, the killer had been apprehended before the extent of his crimes had become clear. In those cases, then, the killer himself could serve as the locus of press analysis. Here, with the antagonist so unclearly defined, papers could project whatever image they needed onto the mysterious killer. As several scholars have rightly noted, this coverage sometimes deployed cultural tropes of *Lustmord* drawn from popular fantasy and the Haarmann case.<sup>24</sup> Just as often, however, the killer assumed a clearly secondary position to analysis of both the place of the murders and the chief investigator of these events, the reporter.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Layne, "Uncanny Collapse," 21; Tatar, *Lustmord*, 38.

<sup>25</sup> See especially *Berliner Tageblatt*, November 22, 1929; *BZ Am Mittag* November 28, 1929; *8-Uhr Abendblatt*, November 12, 1929; *Berliner Lokal-Anzeiger*, December 1, 1929.

Between August and November 1929, as Kürten committed six more murders and popular interest skyrocketed, Berlin papers significantly ramped up their coverage in Düsseldorf itself. Many Berlin papers dispatched reporters to act as on-site liaisons, providing detailed articles on the location of the crimes. These articles worked to create the physical space of Düsseldorf for the readers. In the press's formulation, Düsseldorf under the reign of the *Düsseldorfer Mörder* was a gothic ghost city. The city was "full of shadows" and "haunted" by "mysterious phantom."<sup>26</sup> At the exhumation of one victim's body, "a murder of crows flew from the edge of the forest and circled high over the grave" and "Düsseldorfers made pilgrimage through the wooded town to bear witness to the scene."<sup>27</sup> Residents "hid inside their homes"<sup>28</sup> and shied away at night from the "shadowy paths that twist through the woods."<sup>29</sup>

A November 19 article in the *Tageblatt* gives a good sense of the most common themes in Berlin reportage on Düsseldorf as a location. While describing the scene of one murder, the paper's unnamed "special correspondent" explains:

"From the Haniel-Mauer the large, well-lit Grasenberger Allee extends through the mountainous, wooded land to Erkrath. Right and left from the Chaussee, in the forests and in a peatbog, the lonely murder sites are located. This whole area is dotted with small groups of villas, this entire district of Düsseldorf is sequestered in the hills and woods. In the evenings this entire area is completely abandoned. Nobody travels alone through these streets, through these forest ways. Hundreds of detective constables place themselves behind the trees, in the sand pits and in the gardens of local dance halls, in the places where no man any longer dares to venture."<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> *Berliner Lokal-Anzeiger*, November 14, 1929.

<sup>27</sup> *Berliner Tageblatt*, November 17, 1929.

<sup>28</sup> *8-Uhr Abendblatt*, November 12, 1929.

<sup>29</sup> *Berlin Morgenpost*, November 20, 1929.

<sup>30</sup> *Berliner Tageblatt*, November 19, 1929.

This passage begins by conveying actual information about the physical location (the proximity to Erkrath, the important streets of the area) but builds quickly to a fantastical, empathetic sense of the area. The description shifts almost immediately from the street layout into the imagined sense of a city enveloped by the wild. The town is “sequestered” within forests and dotted with the scenes of horrible murders committed by the hidden killer who was regularly referred to as a “beast” in press reports. In this description the location is not a community but a collection of terrified and isolated individuals surveilled by the agents of the state (agents who have nevertheless failed to protect them). The reporter is certainly exaggerating by describing “hundreds” of police officials hiding in the area. Yet this sort of dramatic license was quite common in these reports, and it worked to build an emotional sense of the location that went well beyond simple street plans.

In addition to such detailed and generally fantastical descriptions of Düsseldorf, these press reports needed to narrate the murders themselves; yet the reporters lacked a built-in protagonist around whom the story itself could be centered.<sup>31</sup> As a result, many of these dispatches made explicit the implicit conceit of the on-site reporter. They cast the reporter himself as a sort of Theseus-in-the-Labyrinth. It was the heroic reporter who would wade through the “anxious eyes” and “uncertain stares” of the people of Düsseldorf to bring his findings to the reader.<sup>32</sup> In these reports, references to the darkness of the area appeared repeatedly, not simply in reference to the shadowy figure

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<sup>31</sup> As mentioned earlier, when the killer did appear as the central figure of a report, he often did so as a super-humanly competent killer who would be almost impossible to capture eg *Berliner Tageblatt*, November 16, 1929. Parallels between this figure and contemporary fantasies of serial killers (e.g. Hannibal Lector) are notable.

<sup>32</sup> *Berliner Tageblatt*, November 17, 1929.

of the killer, but also to the nature of Düsseldorf itself.<sup>33</sup> The *8-Uhr Abendblatt* wondered “can light come to the darkness?”<sup>34</sup> while the *Berliner Lokal-Anzeiger* referenced the “murders in the darkness.”<sup>35</sup>

While this language certainly intended to convey dread and foreboding to the eager reader, it also established the reporter as the objective, or at least most reliable, figure in the drama. The reporter became the reader’s guide to a land made fearful and foreign by a relentless, ghost-like killer. A November 16 article by HR Berndorff in the well-regarded *Vossische Zeitung* illustrates this dynamic especially well. The article begins by describing what is at stake in this case: “On the Haniel-Mauer a simple, small cross stands. Here lies Gertude Albermann, 5 years old, murdered by an unknown perpetrator for whom all of Düsseldorf desperately searches, and who has thus far murdered nine people, badly injured ten more, and who has become like a ghost in this beautiful, elegant city.”<sup>36</sup>

The police have only discovered this latest murder, Berndorff explains, because the killer contacted the press with a note. Here another theme common to Kürten press coverage appears: state officials are well-meaning but literally clueless and unequipped to handle a villain of this magnitude. Moreover, while many of these articles implied the role of the press as the foil to the killer, this report makes the relationship explicit: it is the press whom the killer has chosen to contact with notes of his latest transgression (Kürten had mailed a note to the local paper *Freiheit*, providing a map to the location of the victim’s body), and the press which has then informed the police of the letter.

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<sup>33</sup> E.g. *Vossische Zeitung*, November 19, 1929.

<sup>34</sup> *8-Uhr Abendblatt* November 12, 1929; *Vossische Zeitung*, November 19, 1929.

<sup>35</sup> *Berliner Lokal-Anzeiger*, November 11, 1929.

<sup>36</sup> *Vossische Zeitung*, November 16, 1929.

The article continues, describing the location of the killing in exhaustive and fantastical detail and carefully establishing the reporter as the authority on the location of the events analyzed. In this case, Berndoff describes the large factory nearby and the field “on which, on summer afternoons, the young children of industrial workers play” to the sounds of a phonograph, but which now, in autumn, is abandoned (even “covered with mist”). Here Berndorff has assumed the position of omniscient narrator: he was not present during the summer he describes, nor did he witness the murderer leading the young girl by the hand through the field, the scene he next describes. This imagery nevertheless creates the image of a narrator imminently familiar with these surroundings.

Such speculation about the shadowy murderer’s own experiences during the killings was relatively common in this style of report as well. “One dark night a figure leads a young child across this field by the hand,” Berndorff imagines here. A similar *Berliner Tageblatt* article suggests that “the murderer had gone about the murderous deed with an eerie practicality. He most likely lured his victim to the hill and there violated her.”<sup>37</sup> The reporter in these instances even seems to inhabit the killer’s body. In these accounts the reporter is, after all, the other character (besides the killer himself) who can safely travel in the killer’s domain.

Returning to Berndoff’s article, it is important to note that, despite moments where he is clearly speculating rather than strictly reporting, the reporter nevertheless writes with a strong sense of authority and certainty. This approach typified this sort of on-site press account.<sup>38</sup> Even though sections of the report are quite certainly imagined, rhetorically the reader is never invited to question the account’s accuracy. The Berndoff

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<sup>37</sup> *Berliner Tageblatt*, November 16, 1929.

<sup>38</sup> E.g. *Vorwärts*, November 11, 1929; *Neue Preussische Zeitung*, November 22, 1929; *Berliner Morgenpost*, November 28, 1929; *Vossische Zeitung* November 2, 1929.

character's reliability is matched by his apparent adventurousness. In this account he travels in Düsseldorf to the locations where all others (save the killer himself) fear to tread: after noting that nobody will dare the Chaussee area after dark, he then provides an account of the location after dark.

The second half of Berndoff's article reinforces the importance of the newspaper itself by focusing on the psychological damage done to the population by the killer.<sup>39</sup> In Berndoff's account, it is impossible to eat at a restaurant without someone inquiring about the killer. The police officials are "hiding behind every tree" but have been unable to apprehend the perpetrator. In the downtown of the city itself, protected by "the bright lamps of Königsallee," hundreds of men "camp in front of the windows of the newspapers in order to discover if there has been any news about the ghost [killer]." The picture for the audience in Berlin is complete: the once-happy outskirts of Düsseldorf are now the dominion of the ghost killer, for whom the police futilely search. Nobody dares to navigate these areas by night except (by implication) the reporter who describes the locations to the reader. The safe areas, i.e. those areas bathed in illuminating light, are the locations of the newspaper offices, where desperate Düsseldorf citizens gather to find out what is really happening. This account certainly reproduces various melodramatic forms and norms, but it is not simply fantastical sensationalism: it also asserts the reporter and the newspaper as the ultimate source of truth and the real foil to this shadowy and uncatchable killer.

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<sup>39</sup> That is to say, the primary goal of the latter half of the article is not to sing the praises of the newspaper, but the implication is that the newspaper is the most reliable source to which these desperate people can turn.

This article's portrayal of the terrified Düsseldorf public was typical to the genre. These citizens were regularly presented as a fearful mass trapped by darkness.<sup>40</sup> This darkness extended even to the police apparatus, which in several reports seemed so desperately paranoid that even the reporter came under suspicion of being the killer.<sup>41</sup> This is an intriguing conceit, given the occasional slippage noted earlier between the reporter's account of events and the killer's own experiences in committing the deed. In one report issued from the *Berliner Lokal-Anzeiger*, for example, the reporter describes arriving in Düsseldorf to begin coverage. He asks a local policeman for directions to the police station, and quickly becomes the object of suspicion for the officer: "walking away one feels the eyes of the police following with distrust."<sup>42</sup> The reporter then proposes an interesting parallel: "Several streets further on, still feeling unsure, one asks a passerby [about the location of the police station]. When one looks back after several more strides, he sees how suspicious eyes follow him." In this portrayal, the police and the Düsseldorf public behave identically. Given the standard presentation of this particular public as a sympathetic but terrified/clueless mass, such a comparison does not flatter the police. In contrast to these two groups gripped by paranoia, the reporter appears here as the experienced and intrepid outsider seeking the truth.

Moreover, because the reader knew that the reporter was obviously not the killer, any on-site reporter's suggestion that the police suspected the reporter of being the killer indicated both the police's desperation and their lack of competence to solve the crime. Such a suggestion could only be strengthened by references to the police's obligation to

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<sup>40</sup> See *Neue Preussische Zeitung*, December 7, 1929; *Berliner Tageblatt*, November 10, 1929; *Weltbühne* November 18, 1929; *8-Uhr Abendblatt* December 1, 1929; *Berliner Lokal-Anzeiger* December 2, 1929.

<sup>41</sup> *Vossische Zeitung*, November 16, 1929; *Vorwärts*, November 9, 1929.

<sup>42</sup> *Berliner Lokal-Anzeiger*, November 14, 1929.

investigate the hundreds of “clues” submitted by common citizens, items which turned out to be common everyday objects.<sup>43</sup> In these articles, the reporters explicitly questioned the the police’s capacity to competently investigate these crimes. As we have seen, these stories contrasted this character of the incompetent police officer with two highly capable figures: the humanized competence of the narrator/reporter (the reader’s guide to shadowy Düsseldorf) and the supernatural competence of the ghost who was terrifying the city.<sup>44</sup>

The reporter was not simply the master of the physical space of the crime; he also served as the empathetic keystone of several pieces on the crimes. This conceit often appeared in reports about local citizens gathering around crime scenes. One report from the *Berliner Illustrierte Nachtausgabe*, for instance, describes the “crippling uncertainty” that visitors to the Haniel-Mauer crime scene felt.<sup>45</sup> Visiting this location himself, the reporter is struck by the solemn silence of its inhabitants. After looking at the place where the body was discovered, he reverently observes that “with a shiver, like that caused by frost, one turns away.” The writer here associates himself with the fellow on-lookers at the scene, momentarily positioning himself as a member of the mourning public.

In this style of report, however, the writer often also claimed an insight into the minds of the worried public that far exceeded simple observation. The parallels here to the reporter’s awareness of the murderer’s own experiences are intriguing. For instance, later in the *Illustrierte Nachtausgabe* piece the reporter describes a mother who, at the

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<sup>43</sup> *8-Uhr Abendblatt*, November 21, 1929.

<sup>44</sup> E.g. *Berliner Tageblatt*, November 29, 1929; *Vorwärts* December 18, 1929; *8-Uhr Abendblatt* December 1, 1929; *Berliner Morgenpost*, December 1, 1929.

<sup>45</sup> *Berliner Illustrierte Nachtausgabe*, November 21, 1929.

door of her house, admonishes her seven-year-old daughter not to stay out long and to return to the house by five o'clock. "For a long while she watches the child leave before disappearing behind the door. With anxious concern she awaits the return of her daughter, and the nearer the hour of five o'clock approaches, the more alarmingly and restlessly her heart beats." The reporter here asserts knowledge of the mother's feelings and apprehensions even though she is hidden from the reporter's direct view-- and perhaps even imagined.

While the reporter felt the pain of the victims' families and sympathized with a local population immobilized by terror, he was also privy to the discourse of the police experts trying so desperately to capture the ghost killer. An important subgenre of Kürten coverage was the reporter's accounts of investigations by medical examiners. These articles were notable for their stridently objective tone. The reporter's medical report was disinterested and clinical.<sup>46</sup> This style departed drastically from the gothic and fantastic imagery used to describe crime scenes and from the melodramatic tropes that often appeared in stories about mourning victims. One report from the *Berliner Lokal-Anzeiger*, for instance, described the autopsy for the victim who had been the subject of the mourning described above. This report, however, spent no time lamenting the victim's unjust fate, but rather dispassionately noted the length of the cuts made to the torso, the number of stab marks, and the condition of the face.<sup>47</sup> Interestingly, whereas the reporter would at times offer unfounded speculation into the experiences of both the

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<sup>46</sup> E.g. *Neue Preussische Zeitung*, November 15, 1931; *Berliner Morgenpost* November 14, 1929; *Vorwärts*, November 14, 1929; *8-Uhr Abendblatt*, November 15, 1929.

<sup>47</sup> *Berliner Lokal-Anzeiger*, November 18, 1929.

killer and his victims/onlookers, such imagined experiences are always absent in these medical discussions.

The reporter thus effortlessly traversed three apparently incongruent terrains in these on-site reports: the shadowy avenues that housed the killer; the spaces of mourning which appeared after the killer's deeds, populated by the Düsseldorf public; and the areas of investigation, where the police and medical establishment mobilized their knowledge in pursuit of the murderer. The reporter's voice shifted notably depending on which of these three broad categories were addressed. It ranged from the fantastical (killer's space) to the melodramatic and empathetic (gatherings of citizens) to the coldly clinical (medical analysis). Similarly, the reporter himself seemed at different times to embody the killer and his victims.

While at a glance these approaches might seem to work at cross purposes, together they functioned to create the on-site reporter as the heroic individual who could guide any reader who wanted to explore the lurid tale. This narrator traveled seamlessly from the killer's haunts (where others feared to tread) to the halls of the experts where doctors and criminal investigators attempted to discover the killer's identity. But the reporter was not simply a cold, distant observer of these events; unlike the stereotypical doctor appearing in clinical accounts, the reporter also evinced the proper, human concern for the hapless victims and those they left behind. Such concern often took the form of classic melodramatic conceits. These reporters thus attempted to provide readers with maps not only to the physical space of the events, but the emotional space as well.

Several days after Berndorff's article in the *Vossische Zeitung*, that paper ran an article written by an external expert, demonstrating the other form of specialized claims that the Berlin newspapers made during this coverage. As noted above, Kürten had sent a note to the local *Freiheit* newspaper, describing the location of his latest victim. The *Vossische Zeitung* had acquired a picture of this message and reproduced it next to an article titled "Eerie letter from the Murderer: Savage, cold blooded—and also insane" (*geisteskrank*).<sup>48</sup> Whereas newspapers in this coverage uniformly relied on their own reporters to describe and analyze the physical space of Düsseldorf, in this case the *Vossische Zeitung* turned to "well-known Zurich graphicologist Dr. Max Pulver" to "analyze this text." Before discussing the article itself, the *Vossische Zeitung*'s decision to deploy a graphologist here merits further exploration.

Graphology, as a relatively new discipline, seemed to interest several papers at this moment: the *Berliner Tageblatt* ran an editorial at almost the same time, titled "The Limits and Dangers of Graphology."<sup>49</sup> While, as shall be demonstrated, the *Vossische Zeitung* endorsed graphology as a mode of analysis, the *Tageblatt* was concerned about the science's inconsistencies and presumptions.<sup>50</sup> Because it was a science "still in its development," the reader needed to "get to know its limitations." This extensive editorial, covering an entire page, not only described the discipline's advantages and shortcomings to the reader, but it also attempted to democratize the expertise: to make the science itself knowable and practicable by the reader. After walking the audience through the disciplinary history of graphology, the paper then reproduced two pieces of

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<sup>48</sup> *Vossische Zeitung*, November 19, 1929.

<sup>49</sup> *Berliner Tageblatt*, November 17, 1929.

<sup>50</sup> Interestingly, the *Tageblatt* article never directly references the Kürten case, although it would be quite a coincidence if the article appeared just as the Berlin press was discussing and analyzing the killer's handwritten note.

handwriting and demonstrated to the audience how these pieces might be analyzed by graphologists (e.g. what different aspects of the handwriting told the graphologist about the writer). The *Tageblatt* next invited the reader to try his/her own hand at such an analysis, and then left it up to the reader to decide the usefulness of the discipline.

The *Vossische Zeitung*, conversely, treated graphology as a legitimate source of specialized knowledge. In a brief introduction to the article, the paper argued that “graphology has already shown itself to be a practical auxiliary science of criminology in many cases.”<sup>51</sup> Unlike the *Tageblatt*, which explicitly questioned the discipline, the *Vossische Zeitung* instructed the reader to regard Dr. Max Pulver as an expert. Instead of relying on police claims about the note, then, the paper was introducing an expert external to the case with the aims of uncovering useful information about the killer. This approach of deploying scientific experts for analysis and speculation was not unusual in news coverage during Kürten’s murder campaign.<sup>52</sup>

The article itself was an interesting and amusing performance of expert knowledge. The expert Pulver could not simply state his opinion, especially while deploying such a recently minted form of expertise. Instead, Pulver needed first to establish his discipline as specialized, apart from commonplace speculation. Thus, in the article he spends the first, large paragraph of his analysis insisting that the shortcomings of the material he is examining might lead to inaccurate information: “the material supplied to me is technically not sufficient.” The problem is, for one, “that this is a reproduced copy of the message” as “for a comprehensive analysis one needs the original

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<sup>51</sup> *Vossische Zeitung*, November 19, 1929.

<sup>52</sup> See eg *Berliner Lokal-Anzeiger*, November 26, 1929; *Berliner Morgenpost* November 23, 1929.

document.”<sup>53</sup> Moreover “the quality of the reproduction” itself is lacking for an exact analysis. These disclaimers worked to insulate the expert’s specialized knowledge from reproof should the analysis ultimately prove incorrect. They also indirectly reasserted the author’s expertise—he could see the shortcomings of a reprint that likely looked perfectly suitable to the lay reader.

In spite of these hardships, Pulver manages to wring six more paragraphs of analysis out of the short missive. He speculates about the killer’s sex (male) and education level (uneducated, ultimately an incorrect analysis) based on the type of capital “L” the letter-writer uses. That the killer makes such a large “M” in “*Mord*” reveals to Pulver the savagery of his actions. The repetition of certain words is “typical of the schizophrenic” and in Pulver’s estimation the work as a whole is the product of a “mental abnormal” (*geistig Abnormer*). Notably, following Kürten’s arrest, experts for the court were intrigued that his handwriting had changed significantly when he had been writing about his murders—his writing at other times had been deemed quite “normal.”<sup>54</sup>

This contrasting treatment of graphology by the *Berliner Tageblatt* and *Vossische Zeitung* exemplifies the disparate approaches newspapers could take to expert disciplines, especially in sensational cases like this one. The *Vossische Zeitung*, by giving its pages over to an approved graphologist, implicated itself in a broader discourse of experts on the case. To the reader, the newspaper appeared to have access to the same sort of specialists that the papers had noted the police were employing in their search.<sup>55</sup> That such experts would offer analysis in the paper, alongside the on-site reports from correspondents, reinforced the newspaper’s coverage as specialized. The *Vossische*

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<sup>53</sup> *Vossische Zeitung*, November 19, 1929.

<sup>54</sup> Lenk, *Leben und Wirken*, 344.

<sup>55</sup> E.g. *Berliner Tageblatt*, November 26, 1929.

*Zeitung* approach also empowered the graphological expertise itself, positioning the discipline explicitly on its pages as a specialized and complex knowledge.

In direct contrast was the *Tageblatt*'s approach which invited the reader to question the so-called expertise of graphology. One key element to an expert claim is the idea that the common reader/viewer cannot understand the examined material in the same way that the expert can. The expert becomes a specialized translator through which complex information is made knowable to the general public. Thus, the expert's object of study must be mystified even as the expertise simultaneously claims to reveal the object to the layperson. In establishing themselves as experts of the location of Düsseldorf, the Berlin reporters had made precisely these sorts of rhetorical moves (emphasizing the dangers of the location for the average person, the police ignorance, etc). However, the *Tageblatt* article on graphology, by articulating explicitly the premises and norms of that discipline and then providing hand-writing examples to the readers and actively inviting their own personal analysis, directly undermined graphology as specialized expertise where the *Vossische* had bolstered it. This example demonstrates that newspapers could either cement or undermine expertise external to the paper itself—yet in both cases the newspaper positioned itself as a legitimate discussant within the expert debate.

The Berlin papers were interested in another aspect of the investigation as well: the exact nature of the *Düsseldorfer Mörder* himself. As discussed earlier, because the killer was anonymous, newspapers could project multiple, contradictory visions onto him

(often within the same article). The *Düsseldorfer Mörder* was both man and ghost, both “an exceedingly clever planner”<sup>56</sup> and a “beast in human form,”<sup>57</sup> simultaneously an almost artistic “poet of dread”<sup>58</sup> and “driven by animalistic and murderous lust.”<sup>59</sup> Essentially, the killer’s form was malleable to whatever an article’s narrative required of him at any given point. As such, he was most often defined in relation to either his victims (here the beast imagery was most prevalent) or the location of his acts (and here ghost-like imagery was common, befitting the general gothic setting most reporters deployed in describing Düsseldorf).<sup>60</sup>

Nevertheless certain consistent themes about the *Düsseldorfer Mörder* do emerge when analyzing these reports. In most reporters’ minds, the character was a murderous exhibitionist, consistently driven by the spectacle he was creating.<sup>61</sup> In one account, apropos of nothing in particular but inspired by the reporter’s discussion of the worried crowds of Düsseldorf, the killer showed “peculiar interest” in the publicity of his killings and took great thrill in the “process of making his work public.”<sup>62</sup> In another he was envisioned to “no doubt take pleasure in revisiting the scene of his ghastly deed” and observing the suffering it had caused.<sup>63</sup> None of these reports, however, gave consideration to the role the press might be playing if the killer was, indeed, driven by his own celebrity.

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<sup>56</sup> *Vorwärts*, November 17, 1929.

<sup>57</sup> *Berliner illustrierte Nachtausgabe*, November 15, 1929.

<sup>58</sup> *Berliner Tageblatt*, November 17, 1929.

<sup>59</sup> *8-Uhr Abendblatt*, November 11, 1929.

<sup>60</sup> *Neue Preussische Zeitung*, November 15, 1929; *Vossische Zeitung*, November 12, 1929; *Die Weltbühne*, November 29, 1929.

<sup>61</sup> Here, again, one might usefully explore the slippage between killer and reporter.

<sup>62</sup> *Berliner Tageblatt*, November 17, 1929.

<sup>63</sup> *Vossische Zeitung*, November 16, 1929.

The second vital theme in coverage, both before and after Kürten's capture, imagined the killer as a not-normal thing (be it beast or abnormal human) who could pass as human within Düsseldorf society. Before the killer's apprehension, for example, the *Berliner Illustrierte Nachtausgabe* speculated that "it is not impossible that this spree killer is a man who works day-to-day in an office in order to suddenly, with a bestial bedevilment, perpetrate a murder."<sup>64</sup> Here the nickname "Vampire" is worth exploring further. Kürten is now known popularly as "the Vampire of Düsseldorf;" indeed, "Vampire" is the moniker given Kürten in Lenk's excellent collection of primary sources on the case. At the time of the actual killings, this title was relatively uncommon, though. It first appeared in a *Berliner Tageblatt* article in August 1929, well before press coverage reached its zenith, yet rarely appeared during the November reporting frenzy.<sup>65</sup> The August article itself certainly did not insist that the killer was actually supernatural, but rather drew inspiration for the name from the rumor that the killer had consumed the blood of one of his victims. The vampire description saw sporadic play in 1929 and somewhat more use in the trial in 1931,<sup>66</sup> although the preferred nomenclature during this period remained the "*Düsseldorfer Mörder*."<sup>67</sup>

As scholars employing Foucauldian analysis have observed, this act of naming the murderer as monster is a method of distancing or excluding the perpetrator from society.<sup>68</sup> The staying power of the Vampire moniker (particularly following his capture, when the Vampire name persisted as the ghost/phantom metaphor so prevalent in pre-

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<sup>64</sup> *Berliner illustrierte Nachtausgabe* December 18, 1929.

<sup>65</sup> *Berliner Tageblatt*, August 27, 1929.

<sup>66</sup> Eg *Vorwärts*, April 12, 1931; *Vorwärts*, April 21, 1931; *Berliner Lokal-Anzeiger* April 20, 1931; *Rote Fahne*, April 16, 1931.

<sup>67</sup> Eg *Berliner Morgenpost*, April 20, 1931; *Vossische Zeitung*, April 14, 1930, *8-Uhr Abendblatt*, April 21, 1931; *Berliner Tageblatt*, April 14, 1931; *Berliner Lokal-Anzeiger*, April 20 1931.

<sup>68</sup> E.g. Höcker, "Die Lust am Text," 201.

capture coverage faded) may lie in the idea that Kürten was a monster who did not appear to be a monster. In the view of the newspapers, he was a monster who could pass in society (although the werewolf, Haarmann's moniker, is both man and beast, in its monstrous beast form it cannot pass unnoticed in society; the vampire is always a vampire and also able to pass). Even in extreme embodiments, such as Murnau's *Nosferatu*, the vampire generally manages to fool and even seduce his victims before their death. During his trial, Kürten's apparent normalcy was a constant theme of press coverage.<sup>69</sup>

An article in the *8-Uhr Abendblatt* from before Kürten's capture illustrates the idea that the *Düsseldorfer Mörder* was a monster hidden within society, and the piece further demonstrates the negative implications this narrative had for state authority.<sup>70</sup> In this article's formulation, the killer did not reveal "in his everyday behavior or actions any idea of the demonic whip that drives him forward. He is a 'man like you or me'.... As a man he might be a citizen, a friend, a colleague; as an un-man (*Un-Mensch*) he is a loner, an outsider." This killer "left no clues" and "had no assistants." Having established that the killer appeared normal but was (figuratively) possessed by some sort of demon, the article thought through the implications of this idea. The piece suggested that the most fascinating aspect of the case was not the killer himself, but rather the fact that the police apparatus had proven so utterly incapable of apprehending this demon-driven man.

Here was the thrust of the article, and the ultimate implication of the monster-within-society theme: the state's policing system would not be able to handle this

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<sup>69</sup> E.g. *Berliner Lokal-Anzeiger*, April 18, 1931; *Rote Fahne*, April 14, 1931.

<sup>70</sup> *8-Uhr Abendblatt*, November 26, 1929.

problem, because the killer was beyond such technocratic knowledge. The article details the lengths to which the police have gone, “using cars and telephones, photography and chemical analysis”: all for naught. “The doctor who proudly proclaims that the operation is proceeding brilliantly, but whose patient nevertheless dies, is not a good doctor.”<sup>71</sup> Similarly, “because the system is not an end in itself, the goal is success.” According to this logic, if the system could not apprehend this killer, it was not a system worth maintaining, or at least it was a system insufficient for the needs of current society. While few articles made this claim about state expertise so explicitly, the critique is implied in such coverage, and articles critical of the police appeared often during this period.<sup>72</sup>

Despite the press’s critical presentation of the Düsseldorf police, these papers did rely on police information to tell their stories. The popular Alexanderplatz police investigator Ernst Gennat observed this dynamic as he expressed ambivalence about the Berlin press’s presentation of the police in the Kürten case. On the one hand, Gennat believed that the press’s “news hungry” reporters had generated “public psychoses” in which citizens made false reports or accusations.<sup>73</sup> On the other hand, he believed that publicity could benefit a case by creating legitimate leads for investigators. He argued that a symbiotic relationship existed between the police and the press in the Weimar Republic: “the criminal police and the press are so dependent on one another, I don’t know if the criminal police depends more on the press or if the press relies more on the

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<sup>71</sup> The elision here between medical and criminological expertise is intriguing and probably not coincidental.

<sup>72</sup> See also, for instance, *8-Uhr Abendblatt*, December 14, 1929; *Rote Fahne*, November 22, 1929, *Berliner Morgenpost*, November 9, 1929; *Vossische Zeitung*, December 16, 1929; *Neue Preussische Zeitung*, November 27, 1929.

<sup>73</sup> Ernst Gennat, “Die Düsseldorf Sexualverbrechen (Fortsetzung und Schluss)” *Kriminalistische Monatshefte* 4, n.4 (1930), 82.

criminal police.” Thus, even though the Berlin press implied that the reporter’s specialized investigative skills trumped those of the bumbling police, in actual fact the press drew heavily from police sources even as the police employed the press to publicize certain information.

The *Düsseldorfer Mörder* did not, in fact, remain constantly beyond the grasp of the police. For several months following the explosion of press coverage in November, 1929, Kürten did continue his terrible activities in Düsseldorf, assaulting a series of people, fortunately without managing to kill any of his victims. Without murdered victims and grisly death scenes to describe, press coverage decreased from its heights of November 1929. This decrease was understandable, as even the police were not certain that the assault victims had been accosted by the actual *Düsseldorfer Mörder* or, for that matter, that the same man had committed any of these new attacks. Eventually, on May 24, 1930, the local police caught a break when one escaped victim of Kürten led the police to his location. After his arrest Kürten readily admitted to his deeds, and the media firestorm reignited.

The newspapers’ fascination with the nature of the killer during his spree had presaged what would become, for both the public and the court, the central question of the case following Kürten’s capture: how a man who appeared so “normal” could simultaneously be so monstrous. Upon his arrest, several papers noted the “average appearance” or “normal demeanor” of Kürten.<sup>74</sup> This initial intrigue increased when Kürten’s personal background became known. Unlike the previous “monsters” who had

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<sup>74</sup> *Berliner Morgenpost*, May 27, 1930; *Vossische Zeitung*, May 25, 1930.

elicited tremendous press coverage-- the socially isolated Grossmann, Haarmann, and Denke-- Kürten had been a successfully married man. His neighbors had not considered him especially strange, save perhaps for his extreme caution in securing his doors.<sup>75</sup> And yet, as became especially clear during trial testimony, Kürten had enjoyed the murders he had committed.

Following the immediate excitement of Kürten's capture, newspaper coverage of the case disappeared as the state's evaluative apparatus began its analysis of Kürten. However, echoes of the newspaper discourse about the *Düsseldorfer Mörder's* nature reverberated through the prosecution's own investigation, as Kürten himself began to co-opt the identity. In the year before his trial, four sets of medical experts examined Kürten. The first examiner was Karl Berg, a medico-legal expert who had conducted the forensic medical examinations on Kürten's victims during the police pursuit. After the trial, Berg would publish his findings in *Der Sadist*, one of the key Kürten texts for popular audiences, which will be discussed below. After Berg, three teams of physicians and psychiatrists, each led by a court-assigned expert, examined Kürten. The first study, from October through November of 1930, was led by Prof. Franz Sioli, director of the mental asylum in Düsseldorf. Following this observation was a second month-long examination, conducted by Dr. Max Raether, director of the mental asylum in Bedburg-Hau. Finally, Prof. Arthur Hübner, director of the mental asylum in Bonn, conducted an examination from December through March 1931.

This evaluative process was almost certainly informed by the critiques leveled against state authority during the killer's year-long evasion of capture. The central question that concerned the experts was Kürten's mental state/competence

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<sup>75</sup> *Berliner Tageblatt*, April 1, 1930.

(*Zurechnungsfähigkeit*). As noted in my earlier discussion of the Haarmann case, the German penal code exempted delinquents from full legal responsibility in special cases where a pathologically disturbed intellectual capacity was deemed to have robbed the perpetrator of his/her free will during the crime.<sup>76</sup> Were Kürten judged to have diminished responsibility for his actions, he would be exempt from the death penalty, but by trying, convicting, and executing Kürten, the state could reassert its authority and competence. As the Düsseldorf police chief wrote in a letter during the long wait caused by expert analysis of Kürten, “the long delay of the decision regarding the enforcement of the death penalty has created an obvious public unrest, and as time passes this will in all probability escalate and damage the authority of the state.”<sup>77</sup>

Fortunately for the judicial apparatus, judges could rely on expert opinions to clarify the question of reduced legal liability, and in this case the examining experts all agreed that Kürten, just like Grossmann and Haarmann before him, fit quite neatly into the category of “sadist.” As conceived by the famous and influential psychiatrist Richard von Krafft-Ebing, the sadist gained sexual pleasure by watching or actively engaging in the infliction of pain, which in extreme cases could mean the mutilation of the corpse and cannibalism.<sup>78</sup> The sadist was essentially afflicted with “excessive and monstrous pathological intensification” of an aggression that was inherent in normal (read: heterosexual reproductive) sexuality.<sup>79</sup> In this formulation, every man was in a constant struggle to master his aggressive impulses. As Krafft-Ebing summarized, “life is a never-ceasing duel between the animal instinct and morality. Only willpower and strong

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<sup>76</sup> *Reichsstrafgesetzbuch*, 1871, 51.

<sup>77</sup> Lenk, *Leben und Wirken*, 295.

<sup>78</sup> Richard Krafft-Ebing, *Psychopathia Sexualis: With Especial Reference to the Antipathic Sexual Instinct: A Medico-Forensic Study*, trans. Franklin Klaf (New York: Stein and Day, 1965), 53, 62.

<sup>79</sup> Krafft-Ebing, *Psychopathia Sexualis*, 56.

character can emancipate man from the meanness of his corrupt nature.”<sup>80</sup> According to this diagnosis, Kürten was fully legally responsible for his actions and could be put to death, as he had simply chosen not to master his sadistic impulses.

The experts reached this diagnosis through two methods: first by physical observation and second in discussion with Kürten himself. In the former case, the experts “read” the patient’s body through medical examination and observation of his daily routines. This was part and parcel of the psychiatric/medical claim to expert knowledge: through the application of his specialized knowledge, the psychiatric/medical expert understood the examined individual’s body as well as, if not better than, that individual understood him/herself. From this observation of Kürten the psychiatrists diagnosed alcoholism, megalomania, vivid imagination, brutality and abnormal sexuality, mental diseases, epilepsy, criminality, and intensified physical sensitivity.<sup>81</sup>

The psychiatrists’ actual interviews with Kürten proved especially interesting, as the experts here worked to reaffirm their diagnosis of “sadist,” while Kürten himself resisted this diagnosis and in fact mobilized aspects of a competing definition of himself: the definition of the *Düsseldorfer Mörder* established in the press reports discussed earlier. While the sadist was a man who simply refused to control his impulses, the *Düsseldorfer Mörder* was something else entirely—a criminal mastermind who was within yet completely apart from society, driven by completely uncontrollable urges and the irresistible appeal of publicity. Kürten, who was eager to participate in discussions

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<sup>80</sup> Krafft-Ebing, *Psychopathia Sexualis*, 3.

<sup>81</sup> Lenk, *Leben und Wirken*, 267-268; Karl Berg, *Der Sadist: Gerichtsärztliches und Kriminalpsychologisches zu den Taten des Düsseldorfer Mörders Peter Kürten: Mit zwei Artikelserien des Kriminal-Polizeirats Ernst Gennat und der Verteidigungsrede von Dr. Alex Wehner* (Munich: Belleville, 1931), 137-138.

with the psychiatrists and seemed excited to be the focus of scientific investigation,<sup>82</sup> claimed “sadistic, this is the direct opposite of what I was convinced of, that I would be God’s tool and would have to fulfill a mission and therefore suffer and bear hardship.”<sup>83</sup>

Kürten repeatedly asserted that the appeal of publicity had made his urges uncontrollable. “All stared at me,” he claimed, “as if I were some legendary animal.”<sup>84</sup> In one interview Kürten insisted that he had stood in the middle of an alarmed crowd and read a newspaper article about the *Düsseldorfer Mörder*’s latest crime, and had experienced sexual pleasure.<sup>85</sup> In another he claimed to have enjoyed asking his victims if they were concerned about the danger posed by the *Düsseldorfer Mörder* they had read about.<sup>86</sup> In yet another he described having fantasies of struggling with and capturing the notorious *Düsseldorfer Mörder* before being “overwhelmed by flowers” from the grateful Düsseldorf public.<sup>87</sup> While Kürten did not embrace every aspect of the *Düsseldorfer Mörder* character that the press had created, he nevertheless appeared to grasp segments of the identity as a means to challenge the psychiatric expert diagnosis of sadist-- a diagnosis which, of course, meant his state execution.

Kürten’s deployment of the *Düsseldorfer Mörder* identity was not necessarily cynical, although the psychiatrists themselves reached precisely this conclusion during the interviews. Kürten was almost certainly psychopathic, and it seems reasonable to assume that certain things he read about himself (and he clearly followed press coverage closely) resonated with him. Nevertheless, the psychiatric experts themselves needed to

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<sup>82</sup> Lenk, *Leben und Wirken*, 53.

<sup>83</sup> Lenk, *Leben und Wirken*, 222.

<sup>84</sup> Berg, *Der Sadist*, 152.

<sup>85</sup> Lenk, *Leben und Wirken*, 191.

<sup>86</sup> Lenk, *Leben und Wirken*, 172.

<sup>87</sup> Lenk, *Leben und Wirken*, 153.

diagnose Kürten in a way that made him legally culpable for his actions. As such, every apparent manifestation of irrationality or inconsistency on his part was judged as a clever tactic intended to foil an accurate diagnosis.<sup>88</sup>

Karl Berg, the medico-legal expert probably most intricately tied to the case, published the findings of his interviews with Kürten in the highly respected scientific journal, the *Deutsche Zeitschrift für gerichtliche Medizin* in 1931. Within a year this report had been translated into English and published as “The Sadist” and it has since been reprinted several times; it is one of the most prominent pieces of Kürten analysis. Berg, as the other examining experts did, essentially argues that Kürten is a textbook sadist and fully mentally competent for trial and execution. But Berg is also aware that the press coverage in the Kürten case has created a privileged diagnosis that competes with his own. He writes,

Whoever gets a picture of Kürten from newspaper reports about his horrible crimes has an impression of him as a callous, brutish man, as a beast in man’s clothing. The newspaper reader experiences merely and simply the frightening. However, whoever engages this same man and endeavors to distinguish between the Sadist Kürten and the Man Kürten will to his amazement discover, in addition to his many defects, also worthwhile attributes in a blend similar to other men, an accessible, friendly conversationalist, with a versatile set of knowledge, and an appropriate sense of judgment that might make one forget that we are sitting across from the *Düsseldorfer Mörder*.<sup>89</sup>

Berg makes several notable rhetorical moves here. First, he positions his own medical expertise in contrast to and competition with the imperfect, simplistic diagnosis presented by “newspaper reports.” This is an interesting contrast to the work of the journalist/psychiatrist Lessing during the Haarmann trial; as I argued in Chapter 3, Lessing believed that journalism’s ability to communicate clearly and with archetypal

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<sup>88</sup> Lenk, *Leben und Wirken*, 281.

<sup>89</sup> Berg, *Der Sadist*, 176.

ideas made it more effective than the jargon-filled psychiatric style for discussing crime. However, in Berg's view, press reports are only interested in the superficial, in the obvious actions of Kürten. His own expertise, meanwhile, allows him to truly "engage" this man and understand him. In this process of understanding, he realizes that Kürten is not a monster, but rather a man (and by implication, legally responsible for his actions).

In addition to affirming his own expertise and dismissing what he perceives as a competing definition constructed by "the newspapers," Berg also implicates the public in this process. The average person can either content him/herself to be a mere "newspaper reader" or can endeavor to gain a better, truer understanding of the fascinating *Düsseldorfer Mörder* through real analysis. Of course, since the average individual has neither the special training nor access to Kürten to achieve such analysis, the most reliable source for this knowledge is Berg and his psychiatric compatriots. Here Berg defends his discipline from what he seems to understand as a competing source of knowledge and diagnosis, the newspaper.

Berg's report also locates him as the hero of the affair, in ways similar to the way the on-site reporter role had functioned during the search for the *Düsseldorfer Mörder*. In Berg's account, he is the reliable narrator bringing clarity to both the generally confused public and the clueless press. In his words, he is the individual who has convinced Kürten to open up by gaining his confidence and promising that all medical communications would be confidential.<sup>90</sup> Under Berg's tutelage, Kürten has conveyed to him "his most meticulously guarded secret."<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>90</sup> Berg, *Der Sadist*, 143.

<sup>91</sup> Berg, *Der Sadist*, 144.

Kürten, meanwhile, appeared to blame both the press and the medico-judicial process for his actions. While he deployed the *Düsseldorfer Mörder* identity against the psychiatric definition of the sadist, he also transferred responsibility for his actions onto the press. At the press conference following his capture, for instance, Kürten claimed he had followed press reports of his “adventures” with great interest, and he concluded that the press had “turned me into the man who stands before you today.”<sup>92</sup> In his closing statements at his trial, he declared that he had been intoxicated by the “sensationalist press.” As he said, “I can let you in on this secret, that I got an intense high from the sensationalist press, which I called poison before, and that it is responsible for poisoning my life.”<sup>93</sup> He also argued that the media had damaged Germany’s moral standards, suggesting that as a result of the sensationalist press German women had been overcome by an “urge for the male” which led them into his hands.<sup>94</sup>

On the other hand, in his psychiatric interviews, he asserted that one of his motivations had been revenge against the judicial/penal process that had embarrassed and shamed him; he had been investigated for murder and arrested several times before his killings in Düsseldorf. At some points in the interviews he claimed that by killing his victims he somehow transferred the guilt of his actions to the authorities’ hands<sup>95</sup> while at other times he claimed to be trying to illustrate the failings of the current penal system through his actions.<sup>96</sup> Notably, while the psychiatric experts did not directly contradict Kürten’s claims that he had been motivated by the press, they did outright dismiss any culpability the medico-legal apparatus might have in Kürten’s mind. Dr. Sioli concluded

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<sup>92</sup> Magnus Hirschfeld, *Zwischen zwei Katastrophen*, (Hannau, 1966), 502.

<sup>93</sup> *Berliner Tageblatt*, April 22, 1931.

<sup>94</sup> Lenk, *Leben und Wirken*, 117.

<sup>95</sup> Lenk, *Leben und Wirken*, 126-127.

<sup>96</sup> Lenk, *Leben und Wirken*, 104.

that the claims of a “mission of retribution and atonement” did not reveal an abnormally developed and uncontrollable misapprehension by Kürten, but rather represented a mental construct that legitimized his deeds to himself.<sup>97</sup>

During this psychiatric investigation and the subsequent trial of Kürten, the Berlin press was chiefly concerned with conducting its own analysis and diagnosis of the killer. The papers seemed most interested in explaining the killer to the reader, although approaches to Kürten-as-killer varied tremendously from paper to paper, and at times even from day to day within single papers themselves. Nevertheless, while the press had earlier worked to assemble a *Düsseldorfer Mörder* persona that both the diagnosing psychiatrists and killer himself seemed to understand as a competing definition to that offered by psychiatric expertise, the papers evinced no interest in further discussing this identity once the villain had been apprehended. Instead, the papers fell back into tropes that had served so well in the Grossmann, Haarmann, and Denke cases.

Most obviously, and not surprisingly, the coverage again produced the two contradictory categories with which the press had labeled Grossmann after his capture: the beast and the mentally ill man. Best exemplifying the former approach was the *Berliner Lokal-Anzeiger*, which deployed the “vampire” moniker liberally, along with terms like “beast” and “unhuman.” In decidedly un-psychiatric rhetoric, the *Lokal Anzeiger* explained that Kürten, a “monstrosity of a sadistic abortion,” was driven by a soul that was “a chamber of horrors, filled with the most awful things.”<sup>98</sup> While this

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<sup>97</sup> Lenk, *Leben und Wirken*, 255-6.

<sup>98</sup> *Berliner Lokal-Anzeiger*, April 12, April 17, April 23, 1931.

language represents an especially extreme example, it accurately illustrates this rhetorical strategy.<sup>99</sup> The conclusion that the criminal was a monster fully excluded him from society and removed the impetus for further examining him. If Kürten was a less than human thing, his monstrous actions were the result of his very being. Any more analysis of the man himself was a waste of time. Instead, this coverage tended to linger on his deeds, describing in detail his killings and victims.

Other Berlin papers, however, undertook psychiatric analysis rather than condemning the man as monstrosity. This reportage, best represented in the *Berliner Tageblatt* and *Vossische Zeitung*, produced the second classification of Kürten in the press: the mentally ill man. The *Tageblatt's* coverage was marked by consistent and careful descriptions of the killer's behavior in court. In fact, these reports almost parroted a clinical exam, reading his behavior as a window into his nature. The paper noted his demeanor ("seemed calm and unagitated"), his personal tics and tendencies ("frequently rubbing his hands"), and personal traits like his punctuality (noted with typically German approval). Not surprisingly, and furthering this line of analysis, the *Tageblatt* meticulously reported the testimony of the psychiatrists and criminologists called as witnesses in the case.<sup>100</sup> The *Tageblatt* thus aped the observational method that the actual psychiatrists had deployed in analyzing Kürten and worked to replicate that very analysis.

The *Vossische Zeitung* deployed a similar method to explain how Kürten could appear so normal to the untrained eye. Like the *Tageblatt*, the *Vossische Zeitung* refrained from fantastical labels like beast or vampire, instead favoring meticulous

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<sup>99</sup> For other examples along these lines, see *Vorwärts*, April 12, 1931, *Berliner Morgenpost*, May 27, 1930, *Berliner Abend*, April 14, 1931.

<sup>100</sup> *Berliner Tageblatt*, April 11, April 12, April 14, 1931.

descriptions of the killer along with terms like *geisteskrank*.<sup>101</sup> The paper was particularly intrigued by Kürten's pleasant demeanor in court, repeatedly noting that such behavior was out of keeping with the horrific expert and eyewitness descriptions of Kürten's murderous actions. Rather than assuming Kürten to be a monster in disguise, the *Vossische*, interestingly, further lauded psychiatric knowledge by speculating that Kürten's illness might have been cured during the extensive psychiatric examinations he had received before the trial. The paper reasoned that this psychiatric analysis, during which Kürten had spoken at great length about his abusive childhood, might have had a curative effect on the defendant.<sup>102</sup>

Thus, both the subscription-based *Tageblatt* and *Vossische Zeitung* empowered psychiatric knowledge through their reporting, while tabloid papers like the *Berliner Lokal-Anzeiger* or *BZ am Mittag* refused to even consider the killer human. The papers that dealt with Kürten as a mentally ill man reproduced the alliance between psychiatry and reportage that had marked some of the press coverage of Grossmann. Here, then, was another example of the flexibility of the newspaper's claims to expertise. These papers often selected from a variety of technologies of knowledge as best suited their aims at a given moment.

While the newspapers varied in their analysis of Kürten's motivations and nature, they consistently asserted mastery of the trial's physical location. In this respect, coverage again affirmed the tendency of the Berlin press to claim, first and foremost, an exclusive, specialized knowledge of the locations they reported on. Across the spectrum of the Berlin papers, all of those which sent special correspondents to the Düsseldorf trial

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<sup>101</sup> *Vossische Zeitung*, April 15, 1931.

<sup>102</sup> *Vossische Zeitung*, April 16, 1931.

devoted substantial time to detailed descriptions of the courtroom.<sup>103</sup> The *Tageblatt*, for example, spent an entire newspaper column establishing how many stools were on which side of the courtroom, how many seats for reporters there were, where the judge sat, etc.<sup>104</sup> While such coverage did not necessarily make for exciting reading (compared to, say, lurid descriptions of the murders), the papers certainly privileged this information before delving into the particulars of the trial itself.

In addition to their coverage of the trial, the Berlin papers also deployed the Kürten case to buttress broader arguments about the direction and fate of German society. Just as in the Haarmann case, the various papers took notably different tacks, as they had very different ideas about the problems facing Weimar Germany. Papers which deemed Kürten a monster considered how society should deal with such monstrous threats in the future. The *Berliner Lokal-Anzeiger* thus pondered the implications of the Kürten case for child protection policies, given the killer's desire to prey on the young. The paper invited two different experts, Dr. Ernst Levi and *Stadtmedizinalrat* Dr. Fürstenheim, to reflect on the proper approach for protecting children.<sup>105</sup> These columns functioned in ways quite similar to the *Vossische Zeitung's* typography article discussed earlier, as they both strengthened the claim of the expert knowledge on display and also involved the paper itself as a discussant in proper state policy.

*Die Rote Fahne*, meanwhile, read the case to support its preconceived political notions of the Weimar Republic. Of all the Berlin papers examined, *Die Rote Fahne's* argument and trial coverage most directly mirrored its message and approach in previous

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<sup>103</sup> See *Vorwärts*, April 12, 1931; *8-Uhr Abendblatt*, April 12; *BZ Am Mittag*, April 12, 1931; *Neue Preussische Zeitung*, April 14, 1931; *Berliner Morgenpost*, April 13, 1931; *Berliner Tageblatt*, April 10, 1931; 1931; *Die Weltbühne*, April 12, 1931; *Berliner Lokal-Anzeiger*, April 12, 1931.

<sup>104</sup> *Berliner Tageblatt*, April 12, 1931.

<sup>105</sup> *Berliner Lokal-Anzeiger*, April 15, 1931.

serial cases, especially that of Haarmann. This paper read the case as a morality tale that condemned the government in general, yet the paper also exhibited a complex relationship with the expertise deployed by the justice system it decried.<sup>106</sup> The *Rote Fahne* did deploy a medicalized analysis that conformed to the official psychiatric diagnosis, as it regaled readers with accounts of the “sadistic degeneracy” of the *Düsseldorfer Mörder*.<sup>107</sup> It reflected at length on the question of whether “Kürten is insane in a medical sense”<sup>108</sup> and offered competing and well-articulated arguments for both sides. These articles mirrored, with rather striking depth, the issues that the psychiatric experts themselves had needed to resolve in their analysis of Kürten.

Yet while the paper apparently approved of the medical discourse deployed in court, it condemned the state as a whole. The *Rote Fahne* had practically ignored the case during the police’s search for the killer, even going so far as to speculate that the whole thing might be a ruse by political leaders to distract the public.<sup>109</sup> Having dismissed the search as it occurred, the paper constructed a new narrative as the trial began. In this new account the Düsseldorf police had lucked into a solution to the crime after “spending their time concerned with preventing large gatherings of people to protest these killings.”<sup>110</sup> The paper repeatedly, and unsurprisingly, excerpted the sections of the trial transcript that made the police look the most incompetent. These included moments where Kürten described how he enjoyed laughing at news reports of the investigator’s efforts.<sup>111</sup> More so than any other paper’s coverage, Kürten appeared in these accounts as

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<sup>106</sup> Eg *Die Rote Fahne*, April 12, 15, 1931; *Neue Preussische Zeitung*, April 15, 1931.

<sup>107</sup> *Die Rote Fahne*, April 15, 1931.

<sup>108</sup> *Die Rote Fahne*, April 22, 1931.

<sup>109</sup> *Die Rote Fahne*, November 22, 1929.

<sup>110</sup> *Die Rote Fahne*, April 12, 1931.

<sup>111</sup> *Die Rote Fahne*, April 16 1931.

a sort of anti-hero. The paper was simultaneously horrified and completely fascinated by his actions, providing detailed and lurid descriptions of his killings along with blaring headlines like “I wanted to kill the whole family.”<sup>112</sup> At times *Die Rote Fahne* even seemed to appreciate Kürten’s ability to befuddle the police apparatus. This appreciation proved short lived as Kürten’s closing remarks about the degeneracy of Weimar society were deemed “a defense of cultural fascism” by the paper.<sup>113</sup>

While individual newspapers took specific and distinct approaches to the trial, just as in the Grossmann and Haarmann cases these papers were simultaneously building a unified idea of the newspaper itself: the papers molded their Kürten coverage to suggest that their own discourse imparted a sort of specialized knowledge. Within this commonality, they mobilized their narratives towards a variety of ends. For instance, while the *Rote Fahne* discussed the degeneracy of the government that it insisted all the other papers willfully ignored,<sup>114</sup> the *Vossische Zeitung* understood itself as participating in psychiatric analysis of the killer<sup>115</sup> and the *Berliner Tageblatt* reflected on the way that the judiciary handled extreme cases.<sup>116</sup> In other words, coverage of the Kürten trial did not create a singular narrative or explanation for Kürten; rather, the press produced a singular narrative about the specialized competence of the professional Berlin press. The same overarching message had appeared as the press covered the police’s pursuit of Kürten: the reporter appeared as a protagonist within the narrative, blessed with an unusual ability to safely travel the same areas as the killer.

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<sup>112</sup> *Die Rote Fahne*, April 17 1931

<sup>113</sup> *Die Rote Fahne*, April 22, 1931.

<sup>114</sup> *Die Rote Fahne*, April 23, 1931.

<sup>115</sup> *Vossische Zeitung*, April 14, 1931.

<sup>116</sup> *Berliner Tageblatt*, April 23, 1931.

While some scholars have concluded that these papers' Kürten coverage simply offered lurid murder descriptions and a desire for the death penalty, in fact these papers were asserting their own expertise.<sup>117</sup> This expertise was not psychiatric or criminological-- in this case it produced a concept of the killer which competed with the psychiatric diagnosis of Kürten. As had been the case with Grossmann, the newspaper's expertise in its Kürten coverage was informed primarily by a mastery of the place, the site of the report. As such, the newspaper could either support or challenge other forms of expertise, especially those claimed by the police and courts, depending on the circumstance and the needs of the press narrative.

Just as in their coverage of Grossmann, Haarmann, and Denke, the Berlin press here had not acted simply as a stenographer of events, nor had it functioned exclusively as a sensational purveyor of lurid tales. Rather, the press claimed different types of specialized knowledge. In the first stage of Kürten coverage, when the killer was yet anonymous, the character of the reporter took on a heroic role as the daring chronicler of the dangerous, abandoned city. From this analysis emerged the foil for the hyper-competent on-site reporter: the complex, sometimes internally-inconsistent character of the *Düsseldorfer Mörder* that Kürten himself had identified with and that the medico-legal expert Berg had deemed a threat to his own diagnosis. Once the killer had been apprehended, the papers shifted their coverage, even inviting psychiatric and legal experts to discuss the Kürten case in the paper. The press's trial coverage generally reaffirmed psychiatric insights into the killer.

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<sup>117</sup> Eg Tatar, *Lustmord*, 45.

The press did provide contradictory messages about the nature of the killer and multiple narratives attempting to explain the Düsseldorf murders, but the constant, from the investigation's inception until the trial's conclusion, was the continued assertion of the reporter (and the newspaper he represented) as an expert authority. Throughout the period examined in this dissertation, the press had claimed a specialized set of knowledge, some of which it selectively borrowed from other ascendant expert disciplines, but some of which it developed from its own analysis of locations. Newspapers could reinforce their expertise by citing specialists or even using a discipline's techniques to explain an event; however, the press could also undermine and challenge the assertions from expert disciplines. Thus, the critiques of the press from psychiatrists like Berg in the Kürten case can be understood not simply as an expert dismissal of a symbol of the "mass public" (although this is likely a dynamic in these critiques), but also as a contest over the power to explain unusual or surprising events to that public. Rather than simply pandering to sensationalist sentiments, the Berlin press had been working, successfully, to establish itself as a legitimate source of explanatory and interpretive knowledge in the Weimar Republic.

## CONCLUSION

In their sensational coverage of serial killers during the Weimar Republic, Berlin reporters built an image of the journalist as an expert and the newspaper as a source of expertise. First and foremost, reporters emphasized their mastery over the location of the crime. In cases like Grossmann and Kürten, many reports explicitly noted the danger and difficulty of reporting from that particular crime scene. Reporters used techniques unavailable to the average reader, such as on-site investigations and interviews with both witnesses and police experts. Such descriptions and techniques implied that these articles revealed truths hidden from the lay reader. At times, these stories also portrayed the reporter as a character within the sensational narrative; reporters appeared most often as hyper-competent investigators. In Lessing's coverage of Haarmann or the coverage of Kürten, for example, the reporter was often presented as more capable of finding truth than were the police.

As a corollary to this claim of journalistic expertise, the newspaper was portrayed as a site for the dissemination and discussion of expert knowledges. Thus, newspapers could invite police or criminological experts to publish opinions on cases, and papers might also offer critiques of expertise, just as the *Berliner Tageblatt* challenged graphology during its Kürten coverage. In the cases of Grossmann and Haarmann, meanwhile, newspaper articles deployed psychiatric language and tropes while defining

the killer as a *Lüstmorder*. When covering Denke, the editorial staffs of the *Rote Fahne* and *Vorwärts* developed anthropological theories about the roots of and solutions for what these papers presented as a rash of cannibalism in the Weimar Republic.

However, the sort of expertise claimed by reporters differed substantially from the criminological and psychiatric expertise mobilized by the Weimar Republic's juridical apparatus during these criminal cases. Certainly, during this period psychiatry and criminology relied first and foremost on knowing the individual's body, while the journalist primarily claimed to understand the place of the crime. The distinction between these types of expertise was more fundamental, though. Unlike criminology and psychiatry, the expertise of the journalist did not create new types of knowledge. It often, in fact, incorporated popular prejudices or cultural norms into stories as expert fact (a practice which also occurred at times in psychiatry). Most importantly, while psychiatry, criminology, and reportage all commonly asserted that their specialized knowledge stemmed from particular investigative practices, journalistic expertise was unique in its insistence that the public was capable of understanding the knowledge that the expert produced.

As Wetzell's *Inventing the Criminal* has demonstrated, early twentieth century criminological and psychiatric dialogues were primarily focused within the disciplines themselves. Discourse within and between specialized psychiatric and criminological publications assumed that the general public could not properly understand the intricacies of this expertise. Such an assertion/assumption greatly strengthened the expert's claim to specialized knowledge. Thus, for example, in 1930 criminologist Peter Gast bemoaned

the popularization of the term *Lustmord*, suggesting that the public did not understand the term, and in over-applying the phrase they had sapped its diagnostic power.

By contrast, these Berlin journalists, even as they asserted their own authoritative explanatory knowledge, intended to create dialogue with the public. The result was what I term an empathetic expertise. While their expertise still asserted the expert's knowledge as specialized, journalists also emphasized sympathy with the audience and aimed first and foremost to communicate with and educate the lay reader. In sensational coverage, this empathetic expertise might mean a focus on the plight of the victims, as occurred especially in the Grossmann and Kürten cases, or expressions of dismay and indignation about the state of society, as occurred in the Denke coverage.

Theodor Lessing, who was both a journalist and a psychologist, preferred the journalistic writing style to the psychiatric precisely because he believed it could more effectively communicate profound truth to the public. In the case of Haarmann specifically, Lessing argued that labeling the killer a "werewolf" produced in the public a more lasting, accurate sense of Haarmann than could the psychiatric term *du jour*. Obviously, Haarmann was not a werewolf, nor did Lessing think that the audience took such a term literally. Rather, Lessing believed that this sensational term mobilized a deeper cultural concept for the audience which captured important aspects of Haarmann's personality and nature.

The reporter's empathetic expertise, working for the education of the public, could also challenge or popularize elitist expertise like criminology and psychiatry (I do not intend the term "elitist" pejoratively here; rather, I am emphasizing these discourses' intentional detachment from popular dialogue). During the Kürten case, for example, the

Berlin press's sensational coverage created an image of the killer as the *Düsseldorfer Mörder*. Psychiatrists working on the case, such as Karl Berg, explicitly criticized this press image. In so doing, these medical experts implied that the press's explanation challenged their own diagnosis. Following his apprehension, Kürten himself would attempt to assume many aspects of this press-created identity in order to refute the diagnosis of the state's juridical apparatus.

The growth of empathetic expertise in the Berlin press during the Weimar Republic had several causes. As Chapter 1 of this dissertation argued, German reporters in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century understood their mission to be the education of the public as well as the conveyance of facts. This motivation to educate/instruct the reader stemmed in part from the *Bildungsbürgertum* origin of many reporters, and in part from the prevalence of political reporting in Germany after 1848. Editorial belief in the importance of educating the public stayed strong after the founding of the Weimar Republic. In various comments at the outset of the Republic, editors for major Berlin papers including the *BZ am Mittag*, *Vossische Zeitung*, and *Berliner Tageblatt* emphasized the press's educational obligations towards the citizenry.

This editorial desire to educate/direct the Weimar Republic's public stemmed in part from a general belief that the new republic required newly informed citizens; however, this period was also a time of intense contestation about the meaning of industrialization and urban life. Detlev Peukert's *Weimar Republic* famously argued that Weimar Germany represents a crisis of classical modernity. In Peukert's account, domestic and external pressures following the First World War diminished the Weimar state's "capacity to mitigate many of the stresses and strains that rapid social change

would cause.”<sup>1</sup> In such an unstable historical moment, contestation over the meaning of/explanation for events was vital—particularly so in cases which shocked the public. It was in this context that Berlin newspapers intensified their project to transform the role of the journalist, competing with the explanatory mechanisms of the state (in this case, the juridical apparatus that was tasked with charging and punishing serial killers).

As the 1920s Berlin press attempted to explain fantastic events such as serial killing cases, it increasingly employed the sensational genre in this effort. This development stemmed both from a belief in the efficacy of sensational reporting and from the commercial pressures facing Berlin’s papers in particular. As the reporting of the major left-wing Berlin papers during the 1918 revolution demonstrates, journalists were more likely to use sensational language as they felt their own messages being challenged or undermined. Using the sensational genre allowed for a more immediate connection with the reader; certainly, the *Vorwärts*, *Freiheit*, and *Rote Fahne* each understood sensational writing to be a powerful tool for convincing readers of a message, whether for good in the right hands or ill in the wrong hands.

Commercial pressures also encouraged journalists to use sensational language more often. Berlin in the 1920s saw unprecedented growth in the *Boulevardpresse*, papers which relied on street sales and advertising profit. In order to attract readers, more newspapers moved to more visually stimulating formats, emphasizing white space, large lettering, and eventually even photographs. However, the writing style employed by journalists changed as well, becoming increasingly sensational. Even stories which were not splashed across the front pages, such as the Grossmann, Haarmann, and Denke

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<sup>1</sup> Detlev Peukert, *The Weimar Republic: The Crisis of Classical Modernity*, trans. Richard Devison (London: Allen Lane, 1991), 85.

coverage, deployed melodramatic textual forms and emotional phrasing intended to provoke emotional responses from the audience. While German reportage in much of the nineteenth century had been directed primarily towards other members of the *Bildungsbürgertum*, the reportage of Weimar Berlin was intended to educate and entertain a much broader public. Combined with the journalist's self-conception as expert and guide for the reader, the Berlin press produced an empathetic expertise which both claimed specialized knowledge and attempted to interact directly with the lay reader.

Because this newspaper discourse mixed claims of expertise with compelling empathetic appeals to the audience, it was a particularly effective method of challenging other claims made from authority. As noted already, this might mean undermining or supporting the claims of medical experts; but Berlin's press also attempted to exert political influence in its sensational reporting of nonpolitical events. The Berlin press's impetus to educate and its growing use of the sensational genre were both prevalent in Berlin's left-wing press during the 1918-1919 Revolution. The outsized response to *Die Rote Fahne*'s sensational language, and the *Vorwärts* staff's growing reliance on the sensational genre as their own narrative's authority was challenged, suggest the political power of a discourse that could both claim masterful knowledge (relating particularly "true" content) and mobilize an audience to believe these claims (expressing this content in the form of sensationalism).

In sensational serial crime cases during the Weimar Republic, these reporters also crafted narratives that undermined aspects of state authority. In the cases of Haarmann, Denke, and Kürten, these critiques were directed towards the republic's juridical and policing systems. During the Haarmann trial, Lessing's attacks on the German judiciary

and penal systems were so effective that the presiding judge banned him from the court. In both the Denke and Kürten cases, the Berlin press undermined the public assumptions of police competence that are so essential to the assumed authority of a police force. In presenting the reporter as an individual capable of understanding and following the killer while the police searched haplessly, major papers like the *Vorwärts*, *Rote Fahne*, *Berliner Tageblatt*, and *Vossische Zeitung* cast doubt on the Weimar Republic's policing capacity.

While Berlin's newspapers commonly positioned the reporter as an expert during the Weimar Republic, their content was also often explicitly ideological even in sensational murder cases. This ideology inflected reporters' presentation of the facts of a case. Thus, the actual explanations of events offered by different newspapers often varied tremendously. Contrary to Fritzsche's argument that the mass press created a unified sense of community in Berlin, this dissertation has suggested that Berlin papers' political orientations heavily affected how they portrayed both Berlin and the Weimar Republic during these cases.

Thus, in the Grossmann coverage, papers promoted different ideas of the city: the press on the middle and especially the right presented Friedrichshain as a degenerate location, while papers on the left assiduously avoided such imagery. Similarly, the residents of Friedrichshain appeared an unruly, untrustworthy mass in right-wing coverage, while on the left they were a put-upon but hard-working community trying to survive in hard times. During their Haarmann coverage, different Berlin papers molded the same facts to fit a variety of divergent arguments; while the communist papers used Haarmann to condemn the SPD project of political reform, right-wing papers deployed Haarmann to argue against granting any rights to Germany's gay population. In the

Denke case, the press developed a metanarrative about cannibalism in 1920s Germany and from this imagined fact then drew a variety of political lessons.

This ideological drive within Berlin's newspapers did not undermine or contradict the Berlin press's general project of establishing the journalist as an expert. These two key aspects of the Weimar Berlin press, positioning journalistic discourse as expertise and inflecting coverage with ideological interest, functioned on different registers. That is to say, regardless of their specific ideological project, Berlin papers affirmed that reporters as a whole, thanks to their investigative techniques and experience, were privy to specialized knowledge that they could then impart to the reader. Even papers with stark ideological disagreements during the cases examined here, such as *Vorwärts* and *Die Rote Fahne*, agreed that reporters for their competitors were capable and knowledgeable investigators. With this "fact" as a given, papers then shaped these sensational criminal cases to fit their own preferred political narratives; when they dismissed competing narratives from rival papers, these attacks criticized the motivations of the "enemy" reporters (their conscious attempts to mislead the public) rather than their investigative competence/expertise.

Of course, this newspaper coverage was not necessarily accurate despite its claims to specialized knowledge. In fact, these case studies have suggested that Berlin's papers drew on a variety of popular tropes and beliefs in constructing their varied versions of events. This could range from the cannibal narrative emerging from Denke's crimes, to the heavily gothic imagery that dominated Kürten stories, to the preconceived ideas of the working class that often appeared in Grossmann coverage. In essence, these papers often coded popular prejudices with added authority. Here it is worth noting that during this

period other disciplines more commonly considered “expert,” such as psychiatry, sometimes medicalized popular sentiments about unpopular groups of people.

While the ideal of expertise envisions such knowledge emerging from intensely rational reflection, historically ideology and prejudice have also inflected expert discourse. As this dissertation has suggested, claims of expertise rely on the logic of exclusion: for a certain type of knowledge accumulation to qualify as “expert,” it must be unavailable to the broader public. Such a sense of separation can be achieved through instituting standards of training, or, as in the case of the Berlin papers during the Weimar Republic, by emphasizing that the specialized skills of the expert are beyond most people’s capacity. However, these papers did not attempt to exclude readers from interacting with the expert discourse itself; while they positioned the reporter as an expert, papers also shared the fruits of this expertise with the explicit intent of “educating” the audience.

Here I should note that in discussing the “educational” intent of the Berlin press, I do not mean to suggest that sensational coverage was consistently a public good or that it did not have notable negative social effects. I understand sensationalism here as a genre, deployed by Berlin newspapers to more effectively maintain audience interest. Certainly, we find examples of sensationalism in these cases producing misleading melodrama or encouraging popular prejudices, among other negative social effects. Limiting our understanding of or interest in sensationalism to only these aspects, however, prevents us from considering the ways that the sensational genre could also be deployed in support of more fundamental claims about the journalist and newspaper themselves.

Finally, this study of the Berlin press suggests a general consistency in the dynamics undergirding sensational reportage during the 1920s. The intensity of this coverage increased, but its inherent character did not change. While studies of the Weimar period often reproduce the classic “stabilization-crisis-collapse” narrative of the period, such dynamics do not appear in this press coverage of events from 1918, 1921, 1924, and 1929-31. The Weimar Berlin press’s coverage of these murders was sensationalized and politicized, but its treatment of the Kürten trial in 1931 shared many of the features of coverage of Grossmann’s arrest in 1921. Berlin’s newspapers, while shaping different political messages out of non-political events, worked in concert on a more fundamental level to establish the reporter as an expert about the locations he explored.

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