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‘Are we a cruel nation?’ Colonial Practices, Perceptions, and Scandals

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Around 1900 colonialism was an area in which contacts and rivalries between Germany and Britain were prominently played out. The ‘scramble for Africa’ resulted in many new interactions between the two countries. It increased the frequency of diplomatic contacts between colonialists in Africa and encouraged mutual public observation of each other’s public sphere and politics. Despite a number of conflicts, no serious bilateral crises occurred over colonial questions.¹ However, in Africa the two countries competed for economic profit and national prestige. This was a competition in which both countries justified their actions by claiming cultural and moral superiority, and tried to increase their national prestige by establishing further colonies.

At the turn of the century the alleged cultural superiority of the two colonial powers was brought into question by various colonial scandals. Stories of violence, corruption, and sexual abuse committed by German and British officers sparked off international debates about the colonists’ behaviour and colonial administration. The scandals raised important questions, such as whether or not it was permissible to have sexual relations with African women, what kind of punishment of natives was acceptable, and how the colonial economy should be organized. The consequences of these scandals and the subsequent public debates about colonial abuse should not be underestimated.

¹ Cf. Paul M. Kennedy, *The Rise of the Anglo-German Antagonism 1860–1914* (London, 1980), 205–22, 410–15; Michael Fröhlich, *Von Konfrontation zur Koexistenz: Die deutsch-englischen Kolonialbeziehungen in Afrika zwischen 1884 und 1914* (Bochum, 1990), 311; Harald Rosenbach, *Das Deutsche Reich, Großbritannien und der Transvaal (1896–1902): Anfänge deutsch-britischer Entfremdung* (Göttingen, 1993); Roger Louis, *Great Britain and Germany’s Lost Colonies, 1914–1919* (Oxford, 1967), 20.

They led to dismissals, emigration, and suicides, to the setting up of investigative committees, and the introduction of reforms. Most importantly, however, the scandals that drew international attention discredited the moral claims of the colonial leadership.

Scandals, therefore, offer a rich field for a transnational history of colonial practices and their perception in Wilhelmine Germany and Edwardian Britain. This essay will address two questions relevant to the history of British and German colonial scandals. First, it will ask how colonial scandals came about and what consequences they had. Secondly, it will investigate the transfers and interactions between Germany and Britain that were triggered by these scandals. More specifically, this essay will analyse violence and sexual abuses (such as the scandals surrounding Stanley, Silberrad, Leist, Wehlan, and Peters) and corruption (such as the war stores scandal) that occurred in Germany's and Britain's African colonies. These events were already described as 'scandals' by contemporaries, but they have three things in common that also fit the definition of 'scandal' used by the current social science debate: (1) they violated norms; (2) these violations were made public; (3) they resulted in widespread public outrage.²

I. The Outbreak of Colonial Scandals

Neither scandals nor practices that could lead to scandals were a new phenomenon in the late nineteenth century. They have been well known since ancient Greek times, when the word scandal was coined.³ The late eighteenth century, just before the French Revolution, witnessed a number of political scandals that shaped public debates and presented a strong challenge to the political powers.⁴ The increased incidence of colonial scandals in the late nineteenth century was not only a result of rival imperialisms. Rather, there was a general rise in the number of political scandals in Western Europe and the USA in the 1880s and 1890s

² A similar definition of 'scandal' is used by Karl Otto Hondrich, *Enthüllung und Entrüstung: Eine Phänomenologie des politischen Skandals* (Frankfurt, 2002), 40.

³ Johannes Lindblom, *Skandalon: Eine lexikalisch-exegetische Untersuchung* (Uppsala, 1921); Manfred Schmitz, *Theorie und Praxis des politischen Skandals* (Frankfurt am Main, 1981), 16.

⁴ See Sarah Maza, *Private Lives and Public Affairs: The Cause Célèbres of Prerevolutionary France* (Berkeley, 1993).

involving corruption, adultery, homosexuality, monarchies, the police, and the press itself. Their parallel appearance can be explained by the development of the press and a more 'popular' politics. In general, it can be said that similar types of scandals appeared in Germany and Britain, but they started a few years later in Germany than in Britain.⁵ Consequently, cultural transfers from Britain to Germany might be expected.

The 1890s started with scandals about violence. In Britain, for example, there were public protests against the brutal punishment of African natives by British officers in Henry Morton Stanley's rear column (1890). Several witnesses reported that Major Bartellot, the son of a British MP, had flogged many Africans to death, applying up to 300 lashes, while another member of Stanley's rear column had staged a cannibal ritual in order to paint a picture of it.⁶ In Germany the newspapers published articles about the floggings and killings perpetrated by the governor of Cameroon, Heinrich Leist, his assessor Alwin Wehlan (both in 1894–5), and the colonial explorer Carl Peters a few years later (1896–7). Most of these cases were connected with the sexual abuse of African women. All were discussed in the Reichstag and debated in public for several years.

Not every act of cruelty that was made public constituted a scandal. It is remarkable that the mass killings and atrocities of the British and German colonial wars did not provoke widespread indignation. Perceptions of violence in the British Boer War and the German war against the Hereros and Namas in South-West Africa show some similarities, although the inter-white struggle between 'Briton' and 'Boer' (with 'natives' in the background) and the German struggle against the 'natives' had different ethnic backgrounds. In both cases a number of MPs or Reichstag deputies (such as Lloyd George and August Bebel) and a few newspapers (such as the *Manchester Guardian* and *Vorwärts*) criticized cruelties during the war and in the 'concentration camps', pointing out many details of the inhumane treatment of

⁵ As a brief introduction see Frank Bösch, 'Politische Skandale in Deutschland und Großbritannien', *Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte*, B 7 (2006), 25–32. As a more detailed version: Frank Bösch, *Öffentliche Geheimnisse: Skandale, Politik und Medien in Großbritannien und Deutschland, 1880–1914* (forthcoming, Munich, 2009).

⁶ See e.g. *The Times*, 8 Nov. 1890, 11; 9 Nov. 1890, 9; 10 Nov. 1890, 9; *Pall Mall Gazette*, 7 Nov. 1890, 3; 8 Nov. 1890, 4. The diary of the accused, Jameson, which was published by his wife in *The Times*, 15 Nov. 1890, 11, gave credence to this version.

women and children. However, the majority of the public, the media, and parliament in both countries defended the wars,⁷ and counter-narratives about the bestiality of the Boers and the Hereros were put forward to justify the actions of the colonial states.⁸

Scandals concerning violence perpetrated by civil servants remained important in Germany after the turn of the century. In 1905–6 scandals such as the shooting of a crying baby, the killing of a child which had fled up a tree, and the flogging of a thief who died tied to a stake in the sun were made public.⁹ However, after the Boer War the contents of colonial scandals changed somewhat. In both countries scandals about mismanagement in the colonies grew in importance. In Britain there was public indignation about the war stores scandal of 1904–5, which exposed corrupt money-making in South Africa. It became public knowledge that goods delivered to the army were sold cheaply after the war, and later bought back at much higher prices.¹⁰ In 1906 similar economic scandals occurred in Germany.¹¹ It could be argued that the extension of the administration in the African colonies had not put an end to scandals, but simply changed the type. Although there were no direct connections between the economic scandals in Britain and Germany, the fact that they immediately followed each other

⁷ See Paula M. Krebs, *Gender, Race, and the Writing of Empire: Public Discourses on the Boer War* (Cambridge, 1999), 32–54; Jürgen Zimmerer and Joachim Zeller (eds.), *Völkermord in Deutsch-Südwestafrika: Der Kolonialkrieg (1904–1908) in Namibia und seine Folgen* (Berlin, 2003); Janntje Böhlke-Itzen, *Kolonialschuld und Entschädigung: Der deutsche Völkermord an den Herero 1904–1907* (Frankfurt am Main, 2004).

⁸ See Michael Schubert, *Der schwarze Fremde: Das Bild des Schwarzafrikaners in der parlamentarischen und publizistischen Kolonialdiskussion in Deutschland von den 1870er bis in die 1930er Jahre* (Stuttgart, 2003), 235; Helmut Walser Smith, 'The Talk of Genocide, the Rhetoric of Miscegenation: Notes on Debates in the German Reichstag Concerning Southwest Africa, 1904–14', in Sara Friedrichsmeyer, Sara Lennox, and Susanne Zantop (eds.), *The Imperialist Imagination: German Colonialism and its Legacy* (Ann Arbor, 1998), 107–23, 112.

⁹ Bebel in the Reichstag, 13 Mar. 1906, IX. Legislatur Periode, IV. Session, 1895–7, 59. Sitzung, vol. 144, 1982; Erzberger in the Reichstag, 1977; Ablass in the Reichstag, 15 Dec. 1905 and 19 Mar. 1906, 70. Sitzung, 344–9, 2148.

¹⁰ Cf. the charges in Wilson, Director of Army Finance [no date], in The National Archives (hereafter TNA) WO 32/9260; memorandum Butler, 21 Jan. 1905, in TNA WO 108/383, 46; some hints in G. R. Searle, *Corruption in British Politics 1895–1930* (Oxford, 1987), 75–9.

¹¹ Report Schunck, 6 Sept. 1906, in Bundesarchiv Berlin/Lichterfelde (hereafter BAB) N2106/72: 13; report, 22 Oct. 1906, in BA/B N2106/72; Matthias Erzberger, *Die Kolonial-Bilanz: Bilder aus der deutschen Kolonialpolitik auf Grund der Verhandlungen des Reichstags im Sessionsabschnitt 1905/06* (Berlin, 1906), 70.

makes it likely that German colonial critics read about British irregularities in the newspapers and then transferred this awareness to their own colonial economy.¹²

This leads to the question of whether cultural interactions and transfers took place. It is well known that in many respects the British Empire provided a model for German colonies. The envious dream of a 'German India' featured prominently in public debates in early Wilhelmine Germany. The aim of developing German colonies in cooperation with independent companies and without an extensive administration was also modelled on British imperialism.¹³ This perception changed after the German colonies were founded. German colonialists tried to distance themselves from British colonialism in order to create their own identity. Books about early adventurers reveal a change from admiration to derogatory stereotypes. Early meetings between German and British colonialists in Africa were tense. One contemporary account of colonial life in Cameroon, for example, described the English missionaries as domineering ('herrschaftlich') and suggested that alcoholism was widespread among the British colonial elite.¹⁴ The main German stereotype of British colonialists was that they were more interested in trade and money-making than in the transmission of culture. During the scandal of Stanley's rear column this was a major aspect of German reporting. Newspapers accused the expedition of being interested less in rescuing Emin Pasha than in ivory and trade treaties.¹⁵

The life of Carl Peters, an anti-Semitic nationalist who caused the biggest German colonial scandal of the 1890s, illustrates this ambivalence in the German attitude towards the British Empire. In the 1880s Peters joined his uncle in London, where he developed his plans to agitate for the creation of German colonies.¹⁶ Peters held up the British Empire as a model for German colonialism. Shortly after Stanley had embarked on his expedition to

¹² See the comparison in *B. Z. am Mittag*, no. 186, 10 Aug. 1906.

¹³ As an introduction see Horst Gründer, *Geschichte der deutschen Kolonien* (1st edn. 1985; rev. edn. Paderborn, 2004).

¹⁴ Max Buchner, *Kamerun: Skizzen und Betrachtungen* (Leipzig, 1887), 154, 196.

¹⁵ See esp. the articles in *Neue Preussische Zeitung*, 25 Oct.–20 Nov. 1890, esp. 8 Nov. 1890, no. 523, 2; also *Vossische Zeitung*, 31 Oct. 1890, no. 509, 2.

¹⁶ Arne Perras, *Carl Peters and German Imperialism 1856–1918: A Political Biography* (Oxford, 2004).

save Emin Pasha, Peters tried to find him too, in order to conclude trade agreements in the Congo area. Their competition enhanced international interest in their violent deeds. During the scandal of Stanley's rear column, Peters and other German 'experts' were interviewed in the British press to explain the behaviour of Stanley and his officers.¹⁷ After his own reputation had been destroyed in a scandal, Peters left Germany in 1896 and moved back to London where he began to write extensively on British colonialism and founded a colonial company in London.¹⁸ Peters's life and international career as Germany's most controversial colonialist were thus closely intertwined with British colonialism.

Similarities and interactions between Britain and Germany are also apparent in the rise of colonial scandals. There were few journalists from either country in the colonies. News reached Europe by insecure means such as official comments by the authorities, missionaries' and travellers' letters, and individual trials. Colonial 'heroes' such as Stanley and Peters regularly informed the international public about their experiences. When a long time passed without a report, both countries speculated about their death.¹⁹ However, on the whole, Britain's lines of communication were better developed than Germany's. Censorship was also stricter in the German colonies. Because of this, German newspapers often gathered their information about German colonies from the British media, especially from *The Times* and Reuters.²⁰

Thus German colonial scandals were sometimes sparked off by articles in the British press which German newspapers picked up. An example of this is the first report about Leist in Cameroon, who ordered naked women to be whipped, which caused widespread outrage. The British newspapers first reported on Leist's brutal government, verifying detailed German articles.²¹ Another example of a German scandal that was revealed with the help of

¹⁷ *Pall Mall Gazette*, 11 Nov. 1890, 4; 14 Nov. 1890, 6.

¹⁸ See articles such as 'Das britische Kolonialreich' and 'Englands Herrschaft in Nordamerika', *Die Zukunft*, 49, 5 Sept. 1896; 9 Jan. 1897.

¹⁹ For Peters see *The Times*, 3 Jan. 1890, 3; 4 Jan. 1890, 5; *Daily News*, 4 Jan. 1890, 4; *Daily Telegraph*, 1 Jan. 1890, 5; *Frankfurter Zeitung*, no. 1, 1 Jan. 1890; *Kölnische Zeitung*, no. 361, 30 Dec. 1889; *Berliner Tageblatt*, no. 661, 31 Dec. 1889.

²⁰ *Berliner Tageblatt*, no. 572, 11 Nov. 1891.

²¹ Hints on how the news was made public in Germany can be found in *Neue deutsche Rundschau*, Apr. 1894, 332.

the British is that surrounding Peters, who had his African mistress flogged and hanged. This news was spread in Africa by rumours and the reports of British missionaries in 1892. For this reason the colonial secretary, Kayser, presented it to the Reichstag as unreliable, and ordered an internal investigation.²²

In the 1890s German newspapers embarked on investigative reporting, which was already widespread in Britain.²³ The *Berliner Tageblatt* had a correspondent in Africa, Eugen Wolf. Shortly after his arrival in East Africa in 1891 he helped to expose several incidents of colonial violence.²⁴ When the German authorities responded by refusing to grant him permission to travel and use the telegraph, the British assisted him. In order to discredit Wolf's critical reports the German foreign ministry immediately spread a rumour that Wolf was a British spy.²⁵ He thus became entangled in the rivalry between Britain and Germany.

Unlike those in Britain, German colonial scandals tended to be exposed by politicians rather than the press. The immunity of German Reichstag deputies protected them from prosecution, and the parliamentary reports in the newspapers gave them a chance to reach a wide public immediately. The Social Democrats played a particularly important part in these parliamentary campaigns because their papers were censored regularly. Until the 1890s the Social Democrats protested against all forms of colonialism. Individual Social Democrats who supported colonies as markets for trade were forced to leave the party.²⁶ Karl Kautsky, editor of the Social Democratic newspaper *Die Neue Zeit*, argued that brutality in the colonies was the inevitable outcome of capitalist imperialism in all countries.²⁷ The exposure

²² 'Es ist uns aus keiner lauterer Quelle zu Gehör gekommen, denn es ist uns von englischen Männern mitgeteilt worden' (We did not hear this from an honest source, for it was told to us by Englishmen). Kolonial-Abteilung to Peters, 6 Apr. 1895, in BAB N 2223/42: 16; statement by Peters, 9-10 Apr. 1895, in BAK NL 1067-21. Answer in Verhandlungen des Reichstages (hereafter RT), 14 Mar. 1896, IX. Legislatur Periode, IV. Session, 1895-7, 60. Sitzung, vol. 144, 1452.

²³ About these attributions in general see Jörg Requate, *Journalismus als Beruf: Entstehung und Entwicklung des Journalistenberufs im 19. Jahrhundert. Deutschland im internationalen Vergleich* (Göttingen, 1995).

²⁴ See files in BAB R 1001-4694, and -4695.

²⁵ Report, 23 Aug. 1892, in BAB R1001-4694-121; see also *Hamburger Correspondent*, 13 Aug. 1892.

²⁶ Gründer, *Geschichte der deutschen Kolonien*, 76.

²⁷ Cf. Hans-Christoph Schröder, *Sozialismus und Imperialismus: Die Auseinandersetzung der deutschen Sozialdemokratie mit dem Imperialismusproblem und der 'Weltpolitik' vor 1914* (Hanover, 1968), 167.

of scandals involving incidents of violence or sexual abuse of women was a new and successful strategy on the part of the Social Democrats in their fight against colonialism. The charges that the leader of the Social Democrats, Bebel, famously levelled against Peters, for example, were brought up in the Reichstag in 1896. Bebel revealed that Peters had killed his African mistress after he had discovered that she had been having a relationship with an African man.²⁸ Such accusations offered arguments against colonialism. To increase the visual impact of his speeches, Bebel presented to the Reichstag an original hippopotamus whip like that which Leist had used to punish naked African women in 1895.²⁹ Bebel spoke about many cases of scandalous violence to infuriate public opinion. In 1906, for example, he presented the case of a captain who had shot a mother and her baby because the child's crying had woken him up.³⁰

German left Liberal and Centre Party deputies also initiated discussions about colonial scandals. Many Centre Party members were critical supporters of colonialism. They supported the alleged Christian cultural mission of colonialism, but their enthusiasm was undermined by the frequent reports of violence and the high financial cost of maintaining the colonies for the taxpayer. Catholic deputies learned about the scandals through the international networks that existed between missionaries in the colonies and religious politicians. Catholic deputies such as Hermann Roeren and Matthias Erzberger obtained their information about violence in the colonies directly from missionaries and Catholic colonial officers.³¹ Many conflicts between missionaries

²⁸ Reichstag, 13 Mar. 1896, IX. Legislatur Periode, IV. Session, 1895-7, vol. 144, 1434; see Martin Reuss, 'The Disgrace and Fall of Carl Peters: Morality, Politics, and Staatsräson in the Time of Wilhelm II', *Central European History*, 14 (1981), 110-41; for the general use of scandals within the SPD see Alex Hall, *Scandal, Sensation and Social Democracy: The SPD Press and Wilhelmine Germany 1890-1914* (Cambridge, 1977).

²⁹ Reichstag, 16 Feb. 1894, IX. Legislatur Periode, II. Session, 1893/94, vol. 135, 51. Sitzung, 1294. The presentation of the whip was probably a response to Chancellor Caprivi's claim that he knew nothing about the use of such whips. See Maria-Theresia Schwarz, 'Je weniger Afrika, desto besser'. *Die deutsche Kolonialkritik am Ende des 19. Jahrhunderts: Eine Untersuchung zur kolonialen Haltung von Linksliberalismus und Sozialdemokratie* (Frankfurt, 1999), 285.

³⁰ Bebel in the Reichstag, 13 Mar. 1906, IX. Legislatur Periode, IV. Session, 1895-7, 59. Sitzung, vol. 144, 1982.

³¹ See the reports in Loebell to Staatssekretär des AA, 26 Sept. 1905, in BAB R 43 945: 17; reports Schnee, 20 Sept. in BAB R 43 945: 69. See Roeren's first revelations in the Reichstag on 18 Mar. 1905, XI. Legislatur Periode, I. Session, 1903-5, vol. 203, 5390.

and the civil administration in Africa were made public and conveyed to the Reichstag in this way.

The rise of the public Christian conscience in Britain was also one reason why the number of scandals increased from the 1880s onwards. Nonconformist journalists such as W. T. Stead from the *Pall Mall Gazette*, who combatted prostitution by bringing up scandals, also increased public awareness of sexual behaviour in the colonies.³² Under the title 'Is the Empire a Moloch?', his newspaper lamented in 1887 that most of the 260,000 Englishmen in the colonies were without women and consequently had 'immoral relations with natives', which turned them into savages.³³ And after the Jameson Raid in 1896, Stead also tried to implicate Joseph Chamberlain in a scandal by writing a number of articles in which he tried to prove that Chamberlain knew about the raid against the Boers and was now lying.³⁴ The editor of the *Sentinel*, the Quaker Alfred S. Dyer, travelled to India and accused the British government of founding brothels there in 1888. The publication in the *Sentinel* of a request by a high-ranking military officer to 'send young and attractive woman' caused considerable public offence.³⁵

Although journalists were much more influential in exposing colonial scandals in Britain than in Germany, cooperation between politicians and the press was crucial in Britain too. For example, attempts to make Joseph Chamberlain the subject of a scandal after the Jameson Raid in 1896 by accusing him of mixing private commercial interest with politics emanated mainly from the radical MP Henry Labouchere and his newspaper, the *Truth*.³⁶ The scandals of the Boer War and its concentration

³² His famous campaign against prostitution in London is described by Raymond L. Schults, *Crusader in Babylon: W. T. Stead and the Pall Mall Gazette* (Lincoln, Nebr., 1972).

³³ *Pall Mall Gazette*, 19 May 1887, 1-3; on this debate see Kenneth Ballhatchet, *Race, Sex and Class under the Raj: Imperial Attitudes and Policies and their Critics 1793-1905* (London 1980), 57-8.

³⁴ See esp. *Review of Reviews*, Feb. 1896, 117-18; 1897, 2-3, 37, 107, 140, 205, 313, 351, 417, 546. See also Joseph Baylen, 'W. T. Stead's "History of a Mystery" and the Jameson Raid', *Journal of British Studies*, 4 (1964), 104-32.

³⁵ See the *Sentinel* (subtitled: 'A monthly journal devoted to the exposition and advancement of public morality and to the suppression of vice'), May 1888; *The Times*, 24 Feb. 1888, 5; 24 Apr. 1888, 6; 11 Dec. 1888, 6; Alfred Dyer, *The Black Hand of Authority in India* (London, 1888). The interaction between dealing with prostitution in Britain and the colonies is discussed by Philippa Levine, *Prostitution, Race and Politics: Policing Venereal Disease in the British Empire* (London, 2003).

³⁶ See R. J. Hind, *Henry Labouchere and the Empire 1880-1905* (London, 1972), 24; Algar L. Thorold, *The Life of Henry Labouchere* (London, 1913), 390-1.

camps were also uncovered by radical MPs and newspapers such as the *Manchester Guardian* and the *Morning Leader*.³⁷ On the other hand, Chamberlain cultivated contacts with journalists. The Africa correspondent for *The Times*, Flora Shaw, visited him regularly and took his point of view, and probably owed her appointment to the colonial secretary.³⁸

In Britain it was less official censorship than charges of this kind that limited newspaper reports in exposing scandals. Often libel cases actually pushed scandals on because they encouraged the press to increase their investigative work. A good example of this is the war stores scandal. *The Times* and the *Daily News* briefly reported a trial in South Africa in June 1904. The *Daily News* in particular, which had become the liberal paper of choice for those who criticized the Boer War, levelled a charge of 'sordid corruption' that, it claimed, 'plundered' the taxpayer's pocket.³⁹ Colonel Morgan, whose name was mentioned in this context, sued both papers for libel and won, but the jury concluded that 'the trial reveals a very lax state of affairs, and urge[d] a rigid investigation on the part of the Government'.⁴⁰ Consequently the libel case led to further detailed investigation, which precipitated the final breaking of the scandal.

While the exposure of colonial scandals revealed differences between Wilhelmine Germany and Edwardian Britain in terms of media coverage as well as legal and political structures, it also demonstrated several layers of interaction between key colonial actors in the two countries and a high degree of mutual observation.

³⁷ Kenneth O. Morgan, 'Lloyd George, Keir Hardie and the Importance of "Pro-Boers"', *South African Historical Journal*, 41 (2000), 290–311; John Grigg, 'Lloyd George and the Boer War', in A. J. A. Morris (ed.), *Edwardian Radicalism 1900–1914: Some Aspects of British Radicalism* (London, 1974), 13–25.

³⁸ *History of the Times*, iii. *The Twentieth Century Test 1884–1912* (London, 1947), 161–2; Dorothy Helly and Dorothy Callaway, 'Journalism as Active Politics: Flora Shaw, *The Times* and South Africa', in Donal Lowry (ed.), *The South African War Reappraised* (Manchester, 2001), 50–66.

³⁹ 'The story of sordid corruption in South Africa grows daily more shameful. The wrested land, now that the murder has done its worst, seems delivered over to the kites and the vultures. . . . The British public must remember that it's their pockets which are being plundered', *Daily News*, 4 June 1904, 4; without such a commentary: *The Times*, 4 June 1904, 7.

⁴⁰ *The Times*, 7 Apr. 1905, 3.

II. Colonial Perceptions and Practices

If we compare the public debates during the scandals, another major difference between Germany and Britain emerges: the German public was much more concerned about its image abroad than was the British public. In general, the German public compared itself and its colonialism much more with other countries. Britain was always a major point of reference in the German colonial scandals. There were two different kinds of argument in these debates, and both took Britain as a model.

First, bourgeois and right-wing newspapers and politicians argued that the British behaved as badly as the Germans in the colonies. They also claimed that while the Germans openly and remorsefully discussed their scandals, the British did not make theirs public. 'Could one imagine a British Parliament stoning Stanley, this brave crosser of Africa . . . for all the cruelties and harshness that he is responsible for on his journeys?', asked the National Liberal *Rheinisch-Westfälische Zeitung*, for example, during the Peters scandal. Conservatives in the Reichstag argued along similar lines.⁴¹ Some years later, the Liberal *Münchner Neueste Nachrichten* suggested that 'Neither Britain nor France nor any other colonizing power make much fuss about such attacks on natives. Those who know Britain's colonial history, full of unspeakable deeds which have never been atoned for, must recognize the virtuous indignation and weeping of the English press as soon they speak of problematic events in German colonies as just another example of hypocrisy'.⁴² The strength of the British Empire was seen as residing not in its moral superiority, but in its power to ignore critical reports by means of patriotic self-censorship. Of course, it was not true that the cruel deeds committed by Stanley during his expeditions were not publicly discussed in Britain. However, despite continuing protests Stanley still remained a popular figure after the scandal and was even elected to Parliament in 1895.⁴³

⁴¹ *Rheinisch-Westfälische Zeitung*, no. 91, 31 Mar. 1896; see also Armin in the Reichstag, 14 Mar. 1896, IX. Legislatur Periode, IV. Session, 1895–7, 60. Sitzung, vol. 144, 1452.

⁴² *Münchner Neueste Nachrichten*, no. 71, 13 Jan. 1903; similar e.g. *Berliner Illustrierte Zeitung*, no. 12, 22 Mar. 1896.

⁴³ Frank McLynn, *Stanley: Sorcerer's Apprentice* (London, 1991), 373.

Secondly, British colonialism was taken as a positive model in the debates during the scandals. At the time of the scandals the German radicals and Social Democrats in particular argued that Germany should learn from British colonial practice. 'Why do the Englishmen, our neighbours in Africa, get by without so many whip lashes and why do the blacks prefer to work on English rather than German soil?' asked Rudolf Hofmeister, a Bavarian lieutenant who had spent several months in East Africa, in a book on the scandals of Leist's and Wehlan's violent government.⁴⁴ The famous physician and Liberal politician, Rudolf Virchow, argued that something like that could never happen on British soil, and the Liberal *Berliner Tageblatt* expected the African natives to seek British protection in future.⁴⁵ This idealized picture of British colonial practices was used to persuade the German government to reform its colonial practice. British colonial law was portrayed as much more detailed and less racist than German colonial law, and as not leaving as much scope for arbitrary and brutal punishment.⁴⁶

Not all the debates about punishment in the colonies referred to Britain. For instance, after the first scandals, Franz Giesebrecht, writing in the intellectual journal *Neue Rundschau*, asked a number of experts with colonial experience: 'what is the best method of treating the natives in the German colonies?'⁴⁷ The majority replied: 'hard but fair'. Their point of reference was not British colonial practice, but colonial laws. Moreover, they did not compare natives in the German and British colonies; rather, they compared natives with children.

During the scandals of 1906, many critics of colonialism argued that Britain could be taken as an example of an effective colonial administration. These articles were read with great interest in Britain, as they increased the British feeling of moral superiority, for example, when Martin Spahn, a member of the

⁴⁴ Rudolf Hofmeister, *Kulturbilder aus Deutsch-Ostafrika* (Bamberg, 1895), in BAB R 100: 7249: 48.

⁴⁵ *Berliner Tageblatt*, no. 64, 5 Feb. 1894. *The Times*, 24 Oct. 1894, 5 presented Virchow's statement immediately.

⁴⁶ Harald Sippel, 'Typische Ausprägungen des deutschen kolonialen Rechts- und Verwaltungssystems in Afrika', in Rüdiger Voigt and Peter Sack (eds.), *Kolonialisierung des Rechts: Zur kolonialen Rechts- und Verwaltungsordnung* (Baden-Baden, 2001), 351–72, 360.

⁴⁷ 'Die Behandlung der Neger', *Neue Rundschau*, 8 (1897), 77–97. A complete version of the answers in Franz Giesebrecht (ed.), *Die Behandlung der Eingeborenen in den deutschen Kolonien* (Berlin, 1898).

German Centre Party, argued in the Reichstag that the British prevented further scandals by punishing the guilty, whereas the Germans made no investigations at all.⁴⁸ Many conservative papers complained again that scandals in the British colonies were worse, but that it was typically German to damage the reputation of one's own country by exaggeratedly making scandals public.⁴⁹

The Social Democrats in particular used the combination of German scandals and the British model to call for democratic structures in the colonies and at home. For instance, in the Reichstag Wilhelm Liebknecht argued that Germany supported misdemeanours such as those by 'Peters, Leist, and their associates, whereas Britain supported liberty and culture everywhere'. He claimed that this was because Britain had a liberal constitution while despotism ruled in Germany.⁵⁰ Eduard Bernstein, a Social Democratic journalist who worked as a German correspondent in London, was a major transmitter of this colonial perception of Britain. He saw Britain as a nation pursuing a more democratic method of colonization and argued that colonialism was acceptable under certain conditions. 'Even if one considers the great burden of colonial violence, the advantages which the colonies have brought are more important,' Bernstein wrote in the journal *Sozialistische Monatshefte*.⁵¹

The more Britain was seen as a model during the scandals, the more the Social Democrats started to tolerate the idea of colonialism with a humane and democratic face. After the Boer War, the Social Democrats did not whitewash British cruelty during the war. However, they regarded the treatment of the Boers after the war as an example for German-occupied areas such as Alsace-Lorraine after the Zabern scandal of 1913. As *Vorwärts* wrote, Britain had tied the inhabitants of formerly independent states so closely to the mother country by the generous granting of civil rights that 'today nobody is prouder to call himself an

⁴⁸ *The Times*, 30 Aug. 1906, 3.

⁴⁹ Cf. *Leipziger Neueste Nachrichten*, no. 210, 1 Aug. 1906; *Deutsches Blatt*, no. 66, 18 Aug. 1906; *Hamburger Correspondent*, 29 Oct. 1906; *Deutsche Zeitung*, no. 288, 9 Dec. 1906.

⁵⁰ Liebknecht in the Reichstag, 21 June 1899, X. Legislatur Periode, I. Session, 1898/99, 98. Sitzung, vol. 159, 2708.

⁵¹ See articles such as Eduard Bernstein, 'Socialismus und die Kolonialfrage', *Sozialistische Monatshefte*, 4 (1900), 238–51; 'Socialismus und die Kolonialfrage', *ibid.* 549–62, at 559. Francis Ludwig Carsten, *Eduard Bernstein 1850–1932* (Munich, 1993), 51–2, 68.

Englishman than the Boer who, not long ago, threatened with a rifle every British citizen as an arch-enemy'.⁵² Even if this was far from the reality of South Africa, it showed again that Britain was seen as a colonial model by the political left in Germany up to the eve of the First World War. In fact, the British Empire offered the natives many opportunities and rights, and not only in South Africa. In Germany, by contrast, conservatives argued that contrary to the British model, 'coloured people' should not hold positions at a middle or higher level.⁵³

British perceptions of colonial scandals were quite different. The British public rarely contrasted their colonial scandals with those of other countries. This underlines Britain's self-confidence as compared with the young colonial power of Germany. Nor is there any evidence that Britain held Germany up as a colonial model during the scandals. However, the British public was concerned about the reputation of the British Empire abroad during the scandals. *The Times* called the behaviour of Stanley's expedition 'a disgrace to the English name'. And under the headline 'Are we a cruel nation?', the *Pall Mall Gazette* condemned the scandal as the worst charge 'against the reputation of the Anglo-Saxon race for humanity'.⁵⁴ The British public was certainly concerned about mockeries in the French press, but not much about its image in the German press.⁵⁵

Both countries, Germany and Britain, commented on each other's scandals. The British articles about Germany were, in general, more objective and subtly written. *The Times* in particular limited its explicit reportage of German cruelties and mismanagement. It regularly wrote about German scandals, but only briefly mentioned charges concerning sexual abuses.⁵⁶ A conservative magazine such as the *Spectator*, however, concluded from the German scandals that German colonialism was destined to fail. During the Peters scandal, for example, it

⁵² *Vorwärts*, 12 Nov. 1913, 1. The famous Zabern affair was not, of course, a colonial scandal, but it had a number of similarities with them. Cf. David Schoenbaum, *Zabern 1913: Consensus Politics in Imperial Germany* (London, 1982).

⁵³ Hans Ziemann, 'Wie erobert man Afrika für die weiße und farbige Rasse (1907)', reprinted in Horst Gründer (ed.), '... da und dort ein junges Deutschland gründen': *Rassismus, Kolonien und kolonialer Gedanke vom 16. bis 20. Jahrhundert* (Frankfurt, 1999), 274.

⁵⁴ *The Times*, 24 Dec. 1890, 6; *Pall Mall Gazette*, 25 Nov. 1890, 1.

⁵⁵ *Star*, 10 Nov. 1890, 1; *The Times*, 10 Nov. 1890, 10.

⁵⁶ On 'The flogging scandal' see *The Times*, 6 Feb. 1894, 5; 9 Feb. 1894, 5; 17 Oct. 1894, 5; 19 Oct. 1894, 3; 24 Oct. 1894, 5.

pointed out that 'This is the third case and yet German officials wonder why, even when they have acquired colonies, German settlers prefer to emigrate to America or to the British colonies.'⁵⁷ According to this view, the scandals were interpreted as a sign of Germany's colonial immaturity. *The Times* also hoped that 'Christianity, humanity, and morality will supersede . . . inhumanity and reckless cruelty' in German colonialism after Bebel's charges against Peters.⁵⁸ These harsh British commentaries in the spring of 1896 must be seen against the background of diplomatic and public tensions caused by another scandal concerning the colonies—Wilhelm II's telegram to Paul Kruger, congratulating him on keeping the peace against the 'armed hordes' after the Jameson Raid.⁵⁹

Such commentaries were discussed in both countries.⁶⁰ German perceptions of the British scandals as expressed in the liberal and conservative press were far more polemical than British views of German scandals. The greater professionalism of the British press, which had fewer party-political affiliations and differentiated more between news and commentary, might explain such rhetorical differences. Numerous German articles about the rear column scandal, for instance, offered biting comments on Stanley. Criticism of his hypocrisy, selfishness, and profit-orientation was directed at English colonialism in general.⁶¹ Thus while Britain served as a positive model in the discussion of German colonial scandals, hostile stereotypes increased in Germany when British colonial scandals became public.

III. Consequences of Colonial Scandals

Public indignation after the scandals forced governments in both countries to reform their colonial practices to avoid further scandals and loss of reputation. Germany employed Britain as a model

⁵⁷ *Spectator*, 21 Mar. 1896, 399.

⁵⁸ *The Times*, 16 Mar. 1896, 5; 14 Mar. 1896, 11.

⁵⁹ The diplomatic tensions are described by Fröhlich, *Von Konfrontation zur Koexistenz*. For the public reception of the Kruger telegram see Lothar Reinermann, *Der Kaiser in England: Wilhelm II. und sein Bild in der britischen Öffentlichkeit* (Paderborn, 2001), 148–79.

⁶⁰ See e.g. *Germania*, no. 254, 4 Nov. 1890, 3.

⁶¹ See esp. articles in the *Neue Preussische Zeitung*, 25 Oct.–20 Nov. 1890; also *Vossische Zeitung*, 31 Oct. 1890, no. 509, morning edn. 2.

for these reforms. This can already be seen after the first scandals concerning the violence of Leist and Wehlan. They started discussions on corporal punishment in general, and to what extent it should be allowed. After the Reichstag had passed a resolution asking the government to prepare a law against such abuses of power, the government responded.⁶² The reform of the laws on corporal punishment after these scandals in 1896 followed the example of the British colonies.⁶³ Corporal punishment was permitted only for black African men older than 16, and was limited to a maximum of twenty-five lashes. Indians and Arabs were not allowed to receive corporal punishment. To reduce the torture of natives the reform stated that the German law on trials governed the obtaining of confessions by force. The new law also described in detail how corporal punishment was to be administered. The exact material of the sticks and whips, medical observation, and breaks in the punishment were all specified.

Another consequence of the first colonial scandal was that the law governing Germans in Africa was reformed. Leist and Wehlan were not taken to court because German criminal law did not apply to deeds committed in Africa. An administrative court merely transferred them to different positions and reduced their pensions. The public protested at the lack of punishments and laws. Early in 1896 this gave rise to a number of instructions which guaranteed that any such deeds could be judged by the criminal law in future. It also resulted in official orders concerning the moral behaviour of civil servants.⁶⁴ Thus the first great German colonial scandal demonstrated the functional power of scandals in changing laws and public norms.

After these first reforms, Britain continued to provide a model for the German colonies. Especially after the scandals of 1906 the newly appointed German secretary for colonial affairs, Bernhard Dernburg, showed great interest in British colonial practices. Dernburg's biography might explain this open-mindedness. Unlike the conservative lawyers who usually gained such

⁶² Reichstag, 13 Mar. 1896, IX. Legislatur Periode, IV. Session, 1895-7, 59. Sitzung, vol. 144, 1422.

⁶³ This was the contemporary perception. See *Frankfurter Zeitung*, no. 187, 7 July 1896. The law was announced in *Reichs-Anzeiger*, no. 53, 9 Feb. 1896, in BA/K R 1001-5626. See also Gotthilf Walz, *Die Entwicklung der Strafrechtspflege in Kamerun unter deutscher Herrschaft 1884-1914* (Freiburg, 1981), 77.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.* 65.

positions after a career in the German administration, Dernburg was a liberal who had worked as a banker in the USA. In 1907 he instructed diplomat von Jacobs to travel to London and Paris on a fact-finding mission on the law concerning natives in the British and French colonies.⁶⁵ In 1907 and 1908 Dernburg himself travelled to the German colonies in Africa to gain a personal impression of the situation that had led to so many scandals in the previous year. He also visited the British colonies adjacent to the German ones to gain insights into their administration. In 1908 he went to London to speak to the colonial secretary Robert Crewe, Winston Churchill, King Edward VII, and others, before travelling to the British colony in South Africa for six weeks to gather information.⁶⁶ These visits and the reforms initiated by Dernburg helped to improve relations between the Germans and the British in Africa after the scandals of 1906.⁶⁷

Dernburg initiated a large number of reforms after the scandals. Many of them corresponded to the British model, even if they were not directly copied from it. One of the major problems besetting German colonial practice became obvious in the scandals: German civil servants in the colonies were inadequately trained. The foundation of the Colonial Institute Hamburg, where future colonial civil servants received a year's training, was at least a first step towards creating a system for educating colonial officers like that of the British Empire. Moreover, future judges in the German colonies had received special training since 1908.⁶⁸ The Beschaffungsstelle für die Schutzgebiete, newly founded in response to the scandals concerning corruption and overpriced deliveries, also revealed some similarities with the British model.⁶⁹

Finally, the members of the Reichstag demanded similar committees to investigate scandalous practices. During the scandals of 1906 the Social Democratic, Catholic, and Liberal

⁶⁵ Harald Sippel, 'Typische Ausprägungen des deutschen kolonialen Rechts- und Verwaltungssystems in Afrika', in Voigt and Sack (eds.), *Kolonialisierung des Rechts*, 354.

⁶⁶ Werner Schiefel, *Bernhard Dernburg 1865-1937: Kolonialpolitiker und Bankier im wilhelminischen Deutschland* (Zurich, 1974), 73-4.

⁶⁷ See Fröhlich, *Von Konfrontation zur Koexistenz*, 284-6.

⁶⁸ See Thomas Kopp, 'Theorie und Praxis des deutschen Kolonialstrafrechts', in Voigt and Sack (eds.), *Kolonialisierung des Rechts*, 71-94, at 75.

⁶⁹ Schiefel, *Bernhard Dernburg*, 198.

deputies called for an investigative committee to be set up with direct reference to Britain and France. Dernburg and Chancellor von Bülow refused because they were afraid that such a committee would give too much power to parliament.⁷⁰ However, a commission of three judges was proposed for the investigation, which had some similarities with a British Royal Commission.⁷¹ Although the popular politics of sensationalism did not, at first sight, appear to be a democratic form of communication, the scandals thus helped to strengthen democratic structures because they led to critical public debates.

IV. Race and Sexuality

There were certain differences between Britain and Germany in colonial scandals concerning sexual matters. In both countries colonialism was strongly connected with the sexual imagination. As Ronald Hyam and Robert Aldrich have shown, sexual desire was a potent drive behind British colonialism.⁷² The new mass press supported this. The first photographs, regularly printed in newspapers such as the *Illustrated London News* and the *Berliner Illustrirte Zeitung*, showed naked African women.⁷³ However, scandals concerning sexuality in the colonies occurred more often in Germany and were also discussed more openly. There was broad public outrage about sexual relations with African women in prison in the scandals concerning Leist and Peters in 1894–6.⁷⁴ In 1906 several sexual revelations followed each other, thus subverting the moral claim of the German colonists.

These scandals about sexual practices in Africa resulted in discourses about whether relations with African women could be

⁷⁰ Dernburg to Bülow, 12 Nov. 1906, in BAB R 43: 941: 242–3; Denkschrift AA and Reichsjustizamt to Bülow, 7 Sept. 1906, in BAB R 43: 941: 185.

⁷¹ Dernburg to Bülow, 14 Sept. 1906, in BAB R 43: 941: 209, Protokoll der Sitzung 13 Sept. 1906, *ibid.* 216.

⁷² Similar arguments, with a number of examples, in Robert Aldrich, *Colonialism and Homosexuality* (London, 2003); Ronald Hyam, *Empire and Sexuality: The British Experience* (Manchester, 1990); and Philipp Holden and Richard Ruppel (eds.), *Imperial Desire: Dissident Sexualities and Colonial Literature* (Minneapolis, 2003). See the debate between Mark T. Berger, 'Imperialism and Sexual Exploitation: A Review Article', and Ronald Hyam, 'A Reply', *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 17 (1988), 83–98.

⁷³ *Illustrated London News*, 17 Oct. 1885; 23 Feb. 1889; 21 Dec. 1889; *Berliner Illustrirte Zeitung*, 16 Jan. 1898; 14 May 1899.

⁷⁴ For Peters see Reuss, 'The Disgrace and Fall of Carl Peters'.

tolerated at all, and if so, what kind of relations. How such scandals started discussions about sexual practices was underlined by the first great colonial scandal in Germany. In this case, Leist in Cameroon was accused of imprisoning African women overnight and taking them to his bedroom against their will. Leist publicly defended sexual intercourse with African women. He argued that it was usual in Europe for the sex drive of unmarried men to be satisfied, and stressed that renting women was common in Africa because there were no prostitutes.⁷⁵ Even in court he admitted having had sexual intercourse with 'Pfandweibern' ('women given as security by their husbands') and justified this by pointing to the stimulating effect of the climate and the different sexual culture, and arguing that any European would do the same.⁷⁶ The disciplinary court accepted these arguments. After investigations in Africa, it concluded that in Africa women were seen as 'objects', because 'they are at the free disposition of men like objects'. They could, for instance, be rented out by their husbands in case of debt.⁷⁷ It was regarded as unlikely that these women had protested 'because for those women shame and sexual honour were unknown words and refusal was not expected if money was given'.⁷⁸ Thus the official interpretation supported the image of Africa as a huge brothel full of prostitutes. It also created the public impression that it was common for Europeans to have regular sexual intercourse with African women and that African men lent their women to friends and colleagues as a sign of hospitality.⁷⁹

⁷⁵ See Leist, 'Der Fall Leist', *Die Zukunft*, no. 45, 8 Aug. 1896: 'Die Prostitution wird dadurch ersetzt, daß die Farbigen ihre Weiber den Europäern vermieten. Die Benutzung der Pfandweiber bot nun an und für sich, d.h. ohne die Veröffentlichung Vallentins, weit mehr Garantie für einen unauffälligen Geschlechtsverkehr als die Benutzung erst aus den Towns herbeigeholter Personen. Ich wies die Pfandweiber, deren Bestellung dem Diener am Bequemsten war, nicht zurück, da sie für denselben Entgelt sich preisgeben hätten, auch wenn sie nicht zufällig den Gläubigern ihrer Eigentümer verpfändet gewesen wären.' (Prostitution is replaced by the practice of Africans renting out their women to Europeans. As such, the use of women given as security by their husbands, that is, without Vallentin's revelation, offer a much safer guarantee of unobtrusive sexual intercourse than fetching people from the towns. I did not reject the women given as security by their husbands, who were easiest for the servant to procure, as they had to work for the same price even if they were not, by chance, given to their creditors.)

⁷⁶ His testimony is printed in *Berliner Lokal-Anzeiger*, no. 527, 9 Nov. 1894.

⁷⁷ See 'Disziplinarurteil gegen den Kanzler Leist', *Berliner Neuesten Nachrichten*, no. 560, 4 Nov. 1894; see also the court's second decision, *Berliner Tageblatt*, no. 176, 6 Apr. 1895.

⁷⁸ Disciplinary judgement, *Kölnische Zeitung*, no. 893, 4 Nov. 1894.

⁷⁹ See the defence in *Kölnische Volkszeitung*, no. 619, 18 Oct. 1894.

However, these arguments caused great public and political offence, and the German Chancellor and the minister responsible for the colonies refused to accept them.⁸⁰ In public, the newspapers criticized the 'whippers of women and keepers of harems' and 'nightly orgies in the governor's residence in Cameroon'.⁸¹ The German civil servants were seen as the real savages and even the conservative papers feared that the Germans would turn into barbarians if they continued to behave like this in Africa.⁸² The scandal led to a broad discussion of other similar cases. In 1895 the Social Democratic deputy Georg von Vollmar reported to the Reichstag about employees who bought women or broke into huts at night and forced the inhabitants to bring them women.⁸³ Bebel's revelation in 1896 that Peters had killed his African mistress because she was having an affair with an African man may be seen as another outcome of this discourse. During the colonial scandal in 1906 several similar sexual scandals were uncovered. Catholic, Liberal, and Social Democratic deputies reported to the Reichstag about high-ranking civil servants who had bought their own women for 650 Reichmark in Togo, or had built huts with public money for their prostitutes in Cameroon.⁸⁴ Such revelations became an effective strategy for criticizing colonialism and the government in general.

It is remarkable that such scandals rarely came up in Britain. This does not mean that there were no violations of sexual norms in the British colonies. However, there was a bigger taboo on writing about them or discussing them because of the Puritan influence.⁸⁵ Some newspapers mentioned that Major Bartellot of Stanley's rear column, a Briton, had not only tortured natives but also abused African women.⁸⁶ However, unlike in Germany,

⁸⁰ Reichskanzler i.A. Kayser to Zimmerer, 8 Nov. 1894, in BA/L R 1001/5003.

⁸¹ 'Frauenpeitscher und Haremshalter'; 'nächtliche Orgien im Kameruner Kanzlerpalais', *Würzburger Journal*, no. 279, 19 Oct. 1894.

⁸² *Kölnische Volkszeitung*, no. 619, 18 Oct. 1894; *Deutsche Reichszeitung*, no. 479, 18 Oct. 1894; *Reichsbote*, no. 245, 19 Oct. 1894; *Vorwärts*, 9 Feb. 1894, 2.

⁸³ Reichstag, 18 Mar. 1895, IX. Legislatur Periode, III. Session, 63. Sitzung, 1571.

⁸⁴ Ablaß in the Reichstag, 19 Mar. 1906, 70. Sitzung, 2147; Ledebour in the Reichstag, 20 Mar. 1906, 71. Sitzung, 2159–60.

⁸⁵ On earlier similar scandals see Julia Wells, 'The Scandal of Rev. James Read and the Taming of the London Missionary Society by 1820', *South African Historical Journal*, 42 (2000), 136–60. Another case occurred in Australia and is described by Ken R. Manley, 'A Colonial Evangelical Ministry and a "Clerical Scandal": James Taylor in Melbourne (1857–1868)', *Baptist Quarterly*, 39 (2001), 56–79.

⁸⁶ *The Times*, 8 Nov. 1890, 11; *Pall Mall Gazette*, 13 Nov. 1890, 6.

this did not become a major point in the debate. Even when the British press reported German scandals, the sexual dimension was neglected. *The Times*, for instance, frequently wrote about Leist's violence, but rarely mentioned his sexual abuses.⁸⁷ However, in Britain adultery by politicians resulted in sexual scandals at that time (such as the famous cases of Charles Stewart Parnell and Charles Dilke), but relationships between civil servants and African women did not. One reason might be that in domestic politics sexual scandals drew their explosive power from public divorce trials, not from investigative journalism.⁸⁸ If a colonial officer had sexual relations with African women in the colonies, there was not normally a trial to provide journalists with confessions that could easily and legally be published.

In other cases concerning sexuality the British government tried to suppress news coverage. A good example is the scandal of Hector MacDonald. The general, who became famous in the Boer War, was accused of having masturbated with young boys on a train in Ceylon. When hints of this scandal reached the international press in February 1903, MacDonald shot himself in a Paris hotel.⁸⁹ The British government did its best to hush up the whole story and prevent a scandal. First it tried to avoid a public investigation, then to bury MacDonald quietly in Paris. Finally, after protests from the family, a small private funeral was organized in Scotland. The newspapers and the wider public discussed the sexual scandal only briefly, but stressed MacDonald's fame and criticized the government for trying to bury him without public honour. Only the radical *Reynolds's Newspaper* broke this consensus. Like the German Social Democrats it tried to link the case with a general moral critique of imperialism, militarism, and the upper classes. 'The charge of which Lieutenant-General Hector Macdonald committed suicide is a common vice among the well to-do classes in London, both sexes of whom luxury, idleness, and Imperialism have thoroughly

⁸⁷ See *The Times*, 6 Feb. 1894, 5; 9 Feb. 1894, 5; 17 Oct. 1894, 5; 19 Oct. 1894, 3; 24 Oct. 1894, 5.

⁸⁸ Roy Jenkins, *Victorian Scandal: A Biography of the Right Honourable Gentleman Sir Charles Dilke* (New York, 1965); F. S. L. Lyons, *The Fall of Parnell, 1890–91* (London, 1960).

⁸⁹ See the following biographies: Trevor Royle, *Death before Dishonour: The True Story of Fighting Mac* (Edinburgh, 1982); John Montgomery, *Toll for the Brave: The Tragedy of Hector MacDonald* (London, 1963); Kenneth I. E. MacLeod, *The Ranker: The Story of Sir Hector MacDonald's Death* (Cortland, 1976).

corrupted. Needless to say that he was accused of a sexual offence.⁹⁰ However, this radical position did not represent the majority view.

It seems that it took much longer in Britain than in Germany to discuss cases of sexual abuse in the African colonies. A case similar to these German scandals was that of Hubert Silberrad in 1908–9. This scandal started when a letter to the editors in *The Times* reported from Kenya that Assistant District Commander Hubert Silberrad had 'rented' three young girls aged 12, but had not been punished by the governor. His promotion had merely been delayed for two years.⁹¹ As in Germany, this one case triggered a debate in which several similar cases became public. MPs asked the Liberal government what it was doing to prevent the abuse and buying of women in other cases.⁹² A number of letters to the editor and the colonial minister attempted to justify sexual intercourse with 12-year-old African girls on the grounds that African women became sexually mature earlier than European women, but many letters to *The Times* argued that this was too young.⁹³ However, compared with the famous maiden tribute scandal of 1885, in which W. T. Stead had discovered the prostitution of young girls in London, public indignation about the abuse of African girls was muted.

The consequences of these sexual scandals reveal at least some similarities between German and British culture. In both countries these scandals stimulated debate about whether relations between Europeans and Africans should be forbidden. And both countries took measures against such sexual relations. Early in 1909 in Britain, the scandal of Hubert Silberrad resulted in an official order that all new civil servants in the colonies should be informed that having sexual relations with native women was a reason for a dismissal.⁹⁴ The racist connotations of this order were enhanced because it did not apply to East Asia, where relations with native women were more common and obviously seen as less problematic.

⁹⁰ *Reynolds's Newspaper*, 29 Mar. 1903, 1.

⁹¹ *The Times*, 3 Dec. 1908, 10.

⁹² See the parliamentary reports in *The Times*, 8 Dec. 1908, 7; 11 Dec. 1908, 8; 10 Aug. 1909, 8.

⁹³ *The Times*, 9 Dec. 1908, 6; 7 Dec. 1908, 8.

⁹⁴ Hyam, *Empire and Sexuality*, 168.

The Germans reacted much more extensively. After the sexual scandals of 1896 and 1906 the German Colonial Society began to encourage the transport of white women to Africa to reduce a mixing of the races.⁹⁵ A colonial department order forbade girls under 14 living in the houses of unmarried civil servants. The most important measure, however, was the passing of racist laws that prohibited marriages between Germans and Africans. Although the number of mixed marriages was small and, even in the German colonies, the majority of white Europeans in mixed marriages were British men, a number of colonies passed such laws, including German South-West Africa, where a brutal war against the Herero and Nama had triggered further racial discrimination against the natives. A general prohibition on such marriages failed to pass the Reichstag in 1912 because the Social Democratic Party and the Centre Party rejected it on the grounds that it would lead to prostitution or relationships outside marriage.⁹⁶ However, colonial law and the wide discussion of the problems showed that the Germans were afraid of losing their authority, mixing their 'blood', and producing black children who would be entitled to German citizenship if German men married native women. In this discussion Britain once again provided a point of reference. Conservatives argued that it was a mistake that British tradesmen in the colonies had married the wives of African chiefs, while the Catholic Centre Party and the Social Democratic Party stressed that if Germany passed such a racist law, it would be abandoning the standards of European law.⁹⁷

On questions concerning sexuality in the colonies, Britain did not really serve as a model for Germany. It seems that neither the practice of marrying native women, nor the toleration of such relationships was taken as an example. Instead, Britain followed the German example at least to the extent of prohibiting relations between civil servants and African women in 1909.

⁹⁵ Birthe Kundrus, *Moderne Imperialisten: Das Kaiserreich im Spiegel seiner Kolonien* (Cologne, 2003), 78–83, 222.

⁹⁶ Cornelia Essner, 'Zwischen Vernunft und Gefühl: Die Reichstagsdebatten von 1912 um koloniale "Rassenmischehe" und "Sexualität"', *Zeitschrift für Geschichtswissenschaft*, 45 (1997), 503–19, at 503.

⁹⁷ Paul Rohrbach, 'Koloniale Rassen- und Ehefragen (1912)', reprinted in Gründer (ed.), *... da und dort ein junges Deutschland gründen*, 287.

V. Conclusion

In his widely discussed study of the British Empire, Niall Ferguson asked 'whether the Empire was a good or bad thing'.⁹⁸ This question could be reformulated as: was the British Empire seen as a good or bad thing by contemporaries? This essay's analysis of colonial scandals in Britain has shown that public discussion of cruelty and corruption resulted in widespread indignation, but not in a general criticism of the British Empire.

Germany maintained a high degree of interest in the British Empire. During German colonial scandals, the British Empire was taken as an example of how Germany should organize its colonialism. During the scandals the Conservatives claimed that Germany should learn from the British Empire not to discuss everything in public, but to display a proud unity. Liberal and left-wing deputies and their press took the British Empire as an example of humane colonial practice that reduced arbitrariness and supported freedom. And the Social Democrats began to tolerate colonialism on condition that, like the British Empire, it spread democratic rights.

Even German Conservative governments took the British Empire as a model on a number of occasions. The reforms of the administration and colonial law implemented after the scandals in many respects followed the British example. These reforms showed that the scandals and German perceptions of the British Empire were not merely discourses or imaginations. Rather they led to changes in colonial practice, although it is difficult to measure to what extent these reforms really resulted in more humane colonial practices. However, the number of scandals decreased rapidly in Germany from 1907 onwards. In this sense the early German scandals helped to reduce some peculiarities of German colonial history.

These observations, of course, do not answer the question of whether the British Empire was a good thing or not. Imperialism went hand in hand with violence in all colonies. Although only individual cases precipitated great scandals, they showed that arbitrary cruelty in the colonies could have consequences and

⁹⁸ Niall Ferguson, *Empire: How Britain Made the Modern World* (London, 2003), p. xi.

was not always tolerated. Even in Germany, where the power of the press and parliament was much more controlled by the government, the public was able to protest and set some limits. In many respects these scandals led to positive reforms. However, scandals did not necessarily open a road to liberty and equal human rights, as was shown in the analysis of sexual scandals which in both countries led to restrictions on relations between Europeans and Africans. From this perspective, the scandals increased the peculiarities of German colonial history because they led to uniquely racist laws in the German colonies.

The techniques of exposing colonial scandals were different in the two countries. Whereas in Germany parliament played an important part, in Britain newspaper reports from Africa generally sparked off the scandals. This was a result of the different media and legal structures, and different political systems. Yet the scandals came about as the result of interaction between British and German protagonists. The Germans in particular profited from the British communication system. The scandals led to debates that created mutual perceptions of each other's colonial practices, showing that Britain was not always exemplary. Both countries claimed that violence was characteristic of the other country's colonialism. However, especially Germany lost its authority, its standing as a colonial power, and its reputation because of its scandals.

As this essay has demonstrated, Germany's image as a brutal colonial power developed before the First World War,⁹⁹ but German colonial violence returned to public memory during the war and in 1918–19. Then British perceptions of German scandals served as an argument for the disbanding of Germany's colonial empire. At the end of the war a British Blue Book on German colonialism brought together many of those scandals. It put forward a large number of arguments to justify Article 119 of the Treaty of Versailles, which declared that Germany had failed to govern its colonies properly, and should therefore give them up. The Germans had committed such atrocities, it was argued, that the natives had a pro-British attitude, and therefore Britain should take responsibility for the German colonies.¹⁰⁰ The response to

⁹⁹ Other historians argued that this image developed during the Great War. Cf. Louis, *Great Britain and Germany's Lost Colonies*, 16.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.* 99.

the German protests against this part of the treaty cited the scandals during the Kaiserreich.¹⁰¹ While colonial scandals were not directly responsible for the loss of Germany's colonies, they helped to create the image of the brutal German that was established more widely during the First World War and impacted on Germany's reputation well after 1918.

¹⁰¹ See the response of the Allied and associated powers, 16 June 1919, repr. in Gründer (ed.), '*... da und dort ein junges Deutschland gründen*', 316.