Bösch, Frank; Geppert, Dominik (Hrsg.): *Journalists as Political Actors. Transfers and Interactions between Britain and Germany since the late 19th Century*. Augsburg: Wißner-Verlag 2008. ISBN: 978-3-89639-673-0; 164 S.

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Gone are the days of conventional media history, the editors of this volume tell their readers. Rather than being preoccupied with the history of institutions and technologies and seeing the media as mere reflections of different parts of the public, contemporary media historians write the history of political communications. How did journalists influence the rules of politics? How did political actors react to the changing media sphere in which they had to act? Which means of directing the media and influencing politics were developed and how effective were they? (pp. 9-10) Yet rather than just adding to the growing literature on the politicisation of the media and the medialisation of politics this book promises to bring something new to the table: an analysis of the role of journalists as international or transnational actors. This is filling a gaping hole in the existing literature: international history and transnational studies have yet to discover the mass media; cultural history and the history of political communications have mainly concentrated on processes within one country and largely ignored the transnational dimension of political discourses and their formation.

The volume comprises eight essays which originated at the annual conference of the German Association for the Study of British History and Politics in May 2007. Therefore, anyone interested in the German media, its journalists and their interactions with Britain and the British will be largely disappointed. Apart from Frank Bösch's comparative study of pre-1914 scandals in Britain and Germany, all other contributions focus on British journalists. Indeed the label 'journalist' is used generously here, covering not only foreign or war correspondents but also government officials dealing with the media, and even newspaper proprietors.

As is usual in the case of conference volumes, some contributions do a better job in engaging with the editors' brief than others. Frank Bösch's essay on 'Journalists, Politicians and Scandals in Imperial Germany and Britain' convincingly argues for the emergence of what he calls 'politics of sensation' which changed the norms of political communications in both Britain and Germany. He explains the growing number of scandals around 1900 with the increasing tendency among contemporaries to launch political campaigns through the media. Generally, news of scandalous transgressions spread from elite political publications to the mass media, not vice versa. Yet the existence of mass audiences thought vulnerable to media influences played a crucial role in motivating political scandal-mongering. The media also played a major part in changing the parameters of political discourse through their coverage of foreign scandals. Social Democrats in Germany, for example, followed closely the efforts of the Irish and radicals to use revelations of homosexuality among the ruling elite for their political struggle; articles on the trial of Oscar Wilde led to a broad German reform movement for the repeal of paragraph 175; coverage of the Eulenburg trial in 1907 saw the first ever use of the word 'homosexual' in the Times. Even more transfer and interaction is evident in the case of colonial scandals: coverage of foreign transgressions was used to attack the other's colonial project, and at the same time these foreign scandals provided templates for recommended government action on domestic colonial incidents. Bösch concludes that a 'new kind of moral scrutiny entered the political realm' (p. 34), both in the domestic and the international arena in the decades around 1900.

Dominik Geppert's study of The Times' foreign correspondents in Berlin prior to 1914 successfully blurs the boundary between journalists and political actors, by analysing journalists' political self-perceptions and their room for political manoeuvre. The decades before the outbreak of the Great War saw an important shift in journalists' self-esteem, Geppert argues, which went hand in hand with their awareness of their increasingly important role in international affairs (p. 54). Not

infrequently, foreign correspondents developed a political agenda of their own, which led to a significant amount of confusion about their exact function at the crossroads between publicity and diplomacy. George Saunders, for example, Times' correspondent from 1897 to 1908, sought to convince decision-makers back home of the need to distance themselves from Germany and seek reconciliation with France and Russia. Not surprisingly, German officials were disoriented about the appropriate status of his writings in The Times which for them constituted a semi-official organ of the British government. 'If this is not stopped at once', Wilhelm II commented on what he perceived to be attacks on Germany in the Times to the British ambassador in 1900, 'disaster may come of it.' (p. 45) Saunders was subsequently cold-shouldered by German officials and attacked in the writing of German journalists, which induced him to concentrate even more heavily on the coverage of Anglophobe 'public opinion' in Germany. His despatches from Berlin were employed by the Foreign Office hawks in London to offset the more conciliatory official reports from the British Ambassador. Although Geppert is at pains to point out that not all correspondents exacerbated existing antagonisms (pp. 52-53), this is indeed one of the main impressions left by his essay.

Foreign correspondents also make the subject matter of two other contributions to this volume. Karen Bayer offers a micro-study of Sefton Delmer and his series of articles in the Daily Express revealing the existence of old Nazis within the higher ranks of the Adenauer administration. His campaign triggered a short-lived Anglo-German press controversy which Bayer places within the wider context of German re-armament, a policy which both Delmer and his publisher Beaverbrook strongly opposed. But it is difficult to agree with Bayer's assessment that this media frisson constituted 'an important debate' (p. 110). On the contrary, what is striking is the limited nature of this debate: almost all German press reactions appeared within a few days of Delmer's original publications in late March 1954; and the ease with which the German government was able to ignore Delmer's intervention indicates the lack of audience appreciation of his stories on both sides of the Channel. Antje Robrecht's essay on 'British Press Correspondents in Post World War II Germany' is slightly more successful in convincing this reader of the importance of journalists as political actors after 1945, even if the only evidence offered for a successful intervention is the scuppering of Adenauer's plans for a powerful Ministry of Information in 1953 – a plan abandoned after the Manchester Guardian broke the story. Indeed, even this intervention was initiated by officials from the German Federal Press Office who were opposed to the plan.

The remaining essays fall somewhat short of the editors' promise of leading us to new shores. Martin Schramm writes about British journalists and their coverage of the Great War; Thomas Wittek analyses the British press and the early Weimar Republic; and Stephanie Seul presents an unknown aspect of Chamberlain's appeasement policy, namely the BBC's German Service broadcasts in 1938-39. Studies of the relationship between governments and the media have been a staple product of media historians for over a century now, and although these essays are not without merit, there is precious little agency here and even less on transfer or interaction. This is true also of the volume's final section, Colin Seymour-Ure's essay on 'Media Barons in British Politics after 1945'. What becomes clear is that these various media entrepreneurs hardly qualify as journalists, that they take 'a fairly passive view of party politics' (p. 152 – a nice example of British understatement), largely refrain from interference in the editorial politics of their papers, and have no interest in elective office.

So whilst there are many stimulating insights into the entangled nature of twentieth century mass media and politics, there is also some rather old wine in new bottles. To some extent, this may simply reflect the generic challenge of bringing conceptual order to a mixed bag of conference offerings. However, it is also partly the result of the difficulty to conceptualise the phenomenon of cross-border media activity in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Future conference organizers could benefit from extending the geographical scope of the enquiry

quite considerably. This would help identify regions, media sectors and periods in which transfer and interaction were much more significant phenomena than in the volume under discussion. Anyone who has read the edited volume by Joel Wiener and Mark Hampton on Anglo-American Media Interactions in the period 1850 to 2000 cannot help but marvel at the ease and frequency with which journalists and journalistic practices crossed the Atlantic, transforming respective media landscapes.[1] A shared language undoubtedly helped to facilitate this transfer, but – as demonstrated especially by the individual contributions of Bösch und Geppert in the volume under review – were not necessarily a prerequisite for transfer. So the editors are to be congratulated for their efforts, praised for their willingness to make their findings accessible to non-German speakers, and encouraged to approach funding bodies for a follow-up conference that engages with the European and transatlantic dimension of this subject matter.

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[1] Joel Wiener / Mark Hampton (eds.), Anglo-American Media Interactions, 1850-2000, Basingstoke 2007.