

Siemens, Daniel: *Metropole und Verbrechen. Die Gerichtsreportage in Berlin, Paris und Chicago 1919-1933*. Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag 2007. ISBN: 978-3-515-09008-7; 444 S.

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Whether in television, newspapers or radio broadcastings, court trials are omnipresent in our own media culture today; it would appear in the past, that judicial negotiations did not lack any media interest either, as Daniel Siemens posits in his study „Metropole und Verbrechen“. Siemens' book is based upon a comparative examination of the court trial press coverage in Chicago, Paris, and Berlin during the interwar period. He contents that court trials held a central position in the public sphere due to media coverage of the trials guaranteeing the circulation of the judicial decision making processes, thus allowing both the judicial system of the state and wider society to connect. The enhancement of the social significance of court reportage served to make it a source for social orientation, helping to remedy the lack of confidence and security in the interwar period and also establishing a „local moral order“.

In order to assess the „themes“ and „functions“ of the court reportage, Daniel Siemens introduces the reader to the different journalistic contexts of it; he presents the developments of the press in general and of the court reportage in particular, considers the different papers chosen for his comparison, their design and political lenience, and, finally, Siemens sketches the personal background of the authors of his main source, court reporters, their writing styles and motives.

The relationship between state authorities and the press is depicted in accordance with well established lines of current historiography. Due to the „union sacrée“ prevailing in the Third Republic in the aftermath of the 'Great War', rigid press regulations and strong personal ties between journalists and the French political elite, the press and the administration of justice enjoyed a very harmonic relationship. *Le Petit Parisien*, *Le Figaro* and *Le Matin* espoused the moral con-

sensus of the Third Republic. Hence, their reports were dominated by a semi-official tone. Consequently, neither the young age of a defendant nor the death penalty stirred a public cause. In Berlin, however, the opposite was seen - trials rising to political prominence with the press generally drawing attention to the defendant after the turbulent years of the early 1920s. „Vertrauenskrise der Justiz“ („confidence crisis of the justice system“) was the rallying cry of left liberal papers, attempting as they were to reform the administration of justice during the so called years of stability. The criticism of single judges and particular provisions of the penal code and the subsequent general discourse of a „Vertrauenskrise“ prompted the establishment of a press office in Moabit. As Siemens argues, however, although tensions did rise high between the various participants involved in the „crisis discourse“, the newly established office did not succeed in establishing efficient levels of cooperation between the conflicting parties. In Chicago, too, confidence in the justice system eroded due to the prohibition and its consequences and the general crisis of legal realism. However, in contrast to its European counterparts, the media coverage of the Chicago Tribune or the Daily News was barely restricted in legal terms and held a central role in mediating between the courts and their electorate, the citizens of Chicago. Thus the Chicago press formed together with Municipal Court and the Psychopathic Laboratory a powerful alliance in the combat against crime, advocating a strict law and order policy.

Daniel Siemens' examination of the court reportage reveals interesting insights into the interplay of expert criminological knowledge and court reportage. In contrast to general assumptions of the diverse national historiography, Berlin's court reporters did not pay more respect to scientific authorities than journalists in Paris or Chicago. In fact, court reporters such as Gabrielle Tergit or Paul Schlesinger did not take a stand against forensic experts. However, the expertise of criminologists had barely any impact on the journalists' reports let alone the radicalised criminological discourse of the late 1920s; rather journalists preferred to draw their readers' attention to the

defendant and regularly portrayed them as a product of their social circumstances. Parisian journalists tended to pathologize the culprit, and overall, they were not willing to revise their normative views about the culprit before the late 1920s. In Chicago, however, media coverage drew heavily on eugenic notions and propagated political measures concurrent with the Municipal Court.

One of the highlights of Siemens' study is the comparative examination of media practices in Chicago and Berlin, reflecting the differences in media cultures in American and German metropolises. In 1928, subsequent to the sensational Krantz Trial another breach of social rules stirred alarm: the surfacing of the aforementioned trial photographs in the *Berliner Tagblatt*. During the judicial proceedings the press photographer Erich Salomon had taken photos of the main protagonists of the trial, this risky as well as irksome performance leading ultimately to the publication of the pictures after the court's verdict. In Berlin, given the tradition of an „etic understanding of press affairs“¹, the publication of these pictures not only stirred a cause but also threatened to undermine the court's authority; conversely, a group of editors toyed on with very different ideas. As early as 1924, the editors of the *Chicago Tribune* had seen the chance of a lucrative business and advocated a live, albeit censored, broadcasting of the „Leopold Loeb Trial“. To lobby the cause of a 'radio trial' (who would unsurprisingly broadcast it on their own radio station), the *Chicago Tribune* advocated the relevant social and political missions, published different opinions, and organised a vote about the 'radio trial' among its readership. Although the majority of the responses rejected the idea of a radio broadcasting of the judicial procedure, the paper had still succeeded in setting the tone for what was yet to come: a year later its radio station, the „W[orld]-G[reatest]-N[ewspaper]“, finally broadcasted the sensational „Scopes trial“.

¹Jörg Requate, Journalismus als Beruf. Entstehung und Entwicklung des Journalistenberufs im 19. Jahrhundert. Deutschland im internationalen Vergleich, Göttingen 1995, pp. 293, 383; Bernd Weise, Pressefotografie IV. Die Entwicklung des Fotorechts und der Handel mit der Bildnachricht, in: Fotogeschichte 1994, pp. 14, 27-40, 27f.

Siemens' overall objective laid out at the beginning of his study is the exact determination of the interwar period's historical position by examining occurrences such as court trials. Although I share Siemens' professional interest in allegedly banal things of the past, Siemens' analysis is slightly problematic. Firstly, the prevalent interest in positioning the court trials and their dramatisation in the larger frame of the interwar period transforms them into a search for historiographic meaning in this given wider context. In other words, while contemporaries sought to ascertain judicial truth, the historical analysis primarily seeks to establish a historiographic truth of this particular decade; however, the institutional making of justice² and thus the contemporary notion of a court trial as a drama supposed to reveal new clues about society is taken for granted. Secondly, the framework of Siemens' discourse analysis is to a large extent confined to the preferred and highlighted medium of representation, the court trial reportage. This is not without effect on the examined relationship of metropolis and crime: the medium of the urban crowd, that means the street³, is absent from Siemens' examination. The investigation of the repercussions of an established „local moral order“ in the wider public, its opportunistic as well as wayward appropriations by ordinary people, the temporarily confined and fragile legitimacy of the court's verdict⁴, are unconsidered while assessing the establishing of social order in the metropolis.

²Benjamin Hett, Death in the Tiergarten. Murder and Criminal Justice in the Kaiser's Berlin, Cambridge MA. 2004; Rebekka Habermas / Idem, Eigentum vor Gericht. Die Entstehung des modernen Rechtsstaates aus dem Diebstahl?, in: WerkstattGeschichte, 42 (2006), pp. 25-43.

³Thomas Lindenberger, Collective violence in the streets. An interactionist analysis of public disorder in urban contexts, Berlin 1900-1914, in: IAHCCJ Bulletin (1994) 19, 39-62; Belinda Davis, Home/Front. The military, the war and gender in twentieth century, Oxford 2002, pp. 115-137.

⁴Regina Schulte, The Village in court: arson, infanticide, and poaching in the court records of Upper Bavaria, 1848-1910, Cambridge 1994; idem, Bürgerliches Recht und bäuerliche Norm. Semantische Konfliktlinien im Dorf des 19. Jahrhunderts im Spiegel bayerischer Gerichtsakten, in: Heinz Mohnhaupt / Dieter Simon (eds.), Vorträge zur Justizforschung. Geschichte und Theorie Vol. 2, Frankfurt am Main 1993, pp. 405-425, 423f.

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