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# Covering Crime, Restoring Order

## The “Berlin Jack the Ripper” (1909) and the Press Policy of the Berlin Criminal Investigation Department

Philipp Müller<sup>1</sup>

*Cet article met en lumière l’entrelacement entre une couverture médiatique sensationnaliste et semi-officielle et sa réception par les gens ordinaires de la Berlin impériale, à propos de l’affaire mettant en cause un «surineur» en 1909, et ses répercussions dans l’arène urbaine. À l’époque, les contemporains associèrent rapidement les «méfaits du surineur» à ceux de Jack l’éventreur, à Londres en 1888. Toutefois, certaines caractéristiques étaient propres au criminel berlinois, en particulier l’attitude proactive en matière de presse du département d’enquête criminelle et la coopération de la presse berlinoise. Ma thèse est que cette coopération semi-officielle bien établie fut décisive dans la construction de l’affaire. La police lança une chasse à l’homme publique, dont le succès reposait sur la coopération effective de la police et de la population urbaine. L’enquête publique ne fut cependant pas dépourvue de frictions et de malentendus, les relations entre les autorités et les «sujets» étant ambiguës et conflictuelles. En outre, la circulation quotidienne d’éléments sur l’enquête en cours accompagna la multiplication des «méfaits du surineur», de sorte qu’il y eut beaucoup d’imitateurs et qu’on ne parvint à supprimer les attaques que grâce à une extension des moyens ordinaires de recherche coordonnés par la police.*

*This article highlights the interdependent interlacing of semi-official sensationalist media coverage and its appropriation by ordinary people in Imperial Berlin, by examining the criminal case of a knifer in 1909 and its repercussions in the urban arena. In 1909, contemporaries swiftly associated “the misdeeds of the knifer” with the London Jack the Ripper Case of the year 1888. In spite of the intriguing Ripper tag particular characteristics distinguished the Berlin knifer: the proactive press policy of the Criminal Investigation Department and the cooperation of Berlin’s newspapers. My contention is that the well established semi-official cooperation between Department IV and Berlin’s press was instrumental in ‘the making of the*

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case'. The police instigated a public manhunt, and the success of this undertaking crucially relied on the effective cooperation of the police and the urban population. However, the public investigation of the case was not without frictions and misunderstandings; relationship between the authority and the "subjects" was ambiguous. Furthermore, the daily circulation of clues of the ongoing investigation went with the proliferation of "the misdeeds of knifer". Consequently, copycat action was rife, and the suppression of the "stabblings" was achieved only by extending the ordinary means of the public search coordinated by the police.

## INTRODUCTION

### THE «LONDON BELLY-RIPPER» AND THE «RIPPER IN BERLIN»

At the time of the infamous 'Jack the Ripper' in the late 1880s, Berlin dailies such as the *Berlin Lokal-Anzeiger* had seen fit not to devote much attention to the lengthy and multifaceted media coverage of the case undertaken by their London equivalents<sup>2</sup>. About twenty years later however, with similar occurrences taking place in Berlin, leading Berlin dailies would begin to associate the violent actions of a knifer with the ominous phenomenon of the "London Belly-Ripper"<sup>3</sup>: the headline of the *Berliner Morgenpost* exclaiming "A Ripper in Berlin" on 16 February 1909, the *Berliner Tageblatt* carrying a similar "No trace of the Ripper" on the same day<sup>4</sup>. Several days earlier, on 10 February 1909, the police had received several reports of young women and girls being attacked with knives near *Schleßischer Busch* in South East Berlin; *en passant* an apparently young man had plunged a knife into the abdomens of female passers-by. The identical pattern of action suggested that only a single individual had been involved in carrying out these "knife attacks", this and other details prompting both policemen and medical experts to notice a seemingly "exceptional similarity" between the recent incidents in Berlin and the legendary Ripper Case. The day following these first reports, however, the press' associative imagination had given way to a more precise labelling of the perpetrator and his violent acts: the *Berlin Morgenpost*'s headline reading "Misdeeds of the Knifer", the *Berliner Tageblatt* reporting on the "[t]wo new victims of the Knifer"<sup>5</sup>. These headlines considered the attacks and their circumstances more precisely, omitting the misleading Ripper tag and its tacit assumptions.

Indeed, these two criminal cases significantly differed in several respects. Between August and November 1888, an unknown perpetrator killed five prostitutes in London's Whitechapel district, mutilating both their bodies and their inner sexual organs; in February 1909, the police registered 41 attacks with a small knife against women at various locations in the German capital. In contrast to the Jack the Ripper case, the victims in Berlin lacked any unifying social criteria, seemingly being chosen at random at different sites in the German capital. Their only common

<sup>2</sup> Walkowitz (1992, pp.191-228); Curtis (2001).

<sup>3</sup> *Berliner Tageblatt* (BT) 11.2.1909, No. 75, 1. Spl., 1.

<sup>4</sup> *Berliner Morgenpost* (BMP) 11.2.1909, No. 35, 1.Spl., 1; BT 11.2.1909, No. 76, 1. Spl., 1.

<sup>5</sup> *Berliner Lokal-Anzeiger* (BLA) 11.2.1909, No. 76, 1; BMP 12.2.1909, No. 36, 1. Spl., 1; BT 12.2.1909, No. 77, 1. Spl., 1; cf. BMP 13.2.1909, No. 37, 1. Spl., 1.

characteristic was that they shared the same gender: all the victims were female<sup>6</sup>. Furthermore, the ominous Jack the Ripper killed all of his five victims; in Berlin, only one of 41 recorded victims died of her wounds. Indeed, the vast majority of the victims would merely suffer from “very small skin and laceration wounds”; in eight cases only the victim’s clothes had been cut, these women emerging otherwise completely unscathed from the attempted attacks on the their bodies<sup>7</sup>.

Above all, there was a crucial difference in the media coverage of the two cases as in the two capital cities the relationship between police and press crucially differed. Scotland Yard’s policy regarding the Ripper case was not to furnish London’s dailies with details about the on-going investigation, but instead the police sought to prevent any intrusion by the London press<sup>8</sup>. If journalists sought to answer the pressing questions and demands of the urban public in autumn 1888, they were obliged to borrow from circulating narratives, metaphors and literary motifs<sup>9</sup>. In doing so, it was they that accounted for the occurrences in East London: London newspapers thus helped to fabricate the legendary and multilayered Jack the Ripper narrative. In contrast to this, the proactive and inclusive press policy of the Berlin Criminal investigation department resulted in semi-official media coverage. Indeed, it is the contention of this essay that the established cooperation between the Criminal investigation department and Berlin’s daily newspapers was a formative element of the urban crime drama in Imperial Berlin, marking a crucial difference between the alleged Berlin Ripper and its notorious original. Furthermore, the semi-official press policy was an integral element of a public police investigation that affected the alleged Berlin Ripper case in several ways. Firstly, the search in public initiated an essential phase of the urban crime drama, the public investigation: in cooperation with the urban public, the police attempted to track down the perpetrator. Secondly, in the context of the public investigation, the circulation of detective clues and advice provided the pretext for copycat action that in this particular case contributed to the dissolution of the unity of perpetrator and deed and, ultimately, culminated in the “epidemic of the stabbings”. Thirdly, in the end, the search of police and public amounted to collaborative suppression of the “stabbings” (*Messerstechereien*). In contrast to the London Ripper case, the search for criminals in the German capital city provided an encounter between the police and the urban public. Cooperating as they were, the police and the many engaged in re-establishing the public security and safety. The cooperation was not unambiguous and in the context of the imminent crisis conflict and contestation was rife. However, the “stabbings” ceased: from 20 February 1909 onwards, no further attacks were reported and henceforth the case was silenced, although not one of the many Berlin knifers had been brought to justice<sup>10</sup>.

<sup>6</sup> This rule did not lack one exception: on 19 February 1909, the seventeen years old Georg Lewandowski was attacked with a knife by a passer-by in *Andreasstrasse*, BLA 20.2.1909, No. 93, 3.

<sup>7</sup> Lindenberger, Lüdtkke (1995); Brückweh (2006).

<sup>8</sup> Walkowitz (1992, p. 191); Curtis (2002, pp. 116, 141 & 194).

<sup>9</sup> Walkowitz (1992, p. 197); Curtis (2002, pp. 116f., 137, 254, 313 & footnote 29).

<sup>10</sup> The fundament of this analysis is an examination of the media coverage of the prevailing newspapers of Imperial Berlin, the *Berliner Tageblatt*, the *Berliner Lokal-Anzeiger*, and the *Berliner Morgenpost*. In addition to this, I inspected the media coverage of the *BZ am Mittag* and the relevant records and files of the Berlin police headquarters (BPH) and the Prussian Interior Ministry. General observations and arguments concerning the context of the urban crime drama in Imperial Berlin rely on the investigation: Müller (2005a).



press policy in 1885 was the relative circulation of the various Berlin dailies: "If we publish only in Berlin's conservative newspapers that are rarely read by the masses, [the press releases] do not answer their purpose and should better be discontinued."<sup>15</sup> The circulation of those organs of the press that were well-disposed towards the government was indeed relatively low: the "conservative and government-friendly" *Norddeutsche Allgemeine Zeitung* sold about 7,500 copies; the circulation of the "independently conservative" *Reichsbote* was about 12,300; furthermore, the "independently conservative" *Post* did not sell more than 14,500 copies per issue. Clearly then, these papers could hardly function as a mouthpiece of the police in order to garner public support for the authority. In contrast to the conservative papers above, the circulation of those newspapers considered "liberal and oppositional" fared better: the circulation of the "extreme progressive Jewish democratic" *Berliner Zeitung* reached about 17,500 copies; the circulation of the "extremely progressive" *Berliner Presse* was about 29,700; and the *Berliner Tageblatt*, a "progressive scandal-sheet", sold about 60,000 copies per issue<sup>16</sup>. Suffice it to say, in 1885, Department IV acknowledged the manifest journalistic power relationships in the German Capital and adjusted its press policy accordingly.

In the subsequent years, the press policy of the Criminal investigation department was subject to further change: Department IV deliberately extended its arsenal of public means, ready to be deployed in the daily combat of urban crime. With a view to this, the police authority assured the cooperation of the *Deutsche Reichsbahn*, as well as managers of movie theatres in Berlin, in helping to disseminate various official statements. Special arrangements concerning the publication of extra editions were also made with the *Berliner Lokal-Anzeiger* and the *Berliner Morgenpost*, further guaranteeing the extended and swift circulation of official information in the metropolis and its environs. It was, however, far more the media landscape of the Imperial capital, as well as its transformation, that affected the press policy of Department IV – ultimately also altering the media quality of its semi official press releases. It was true that in 1885 the conservative newspapers were already at a considerable disadvantage: liberal newspapers out matched their circulation. The breakthrough of a mass press was yet to come however. By the end of the 1880s, three new large publishers – Mosse, Scherl and Ullstein – began to prevail. Their numerous journalistic products came to dominate the press market of Berlin; the flagship products of the three publishing houses, the *Berliner Tageblatt*, the *Berliner Lokal-Anzeiger*, and the *Berliner Morgenpost* also reached unprecedented circulations of any newspaper ever before seen in the German Empire. As a result, the press notices of Department IV did not only reach the readers of so called quality papers such as the *Berliner Tageblatt*, but also the new readers of the *Berliner Lokal-Anzeiger* or the *Berliner Morgenpost*. As the Criminal investigation department did not revoke its decision to deliver press notices to any "newspaper of local significance"<sup>17</sup>, the press policy of the police increasingly reached the wider public of the capital city. Concomitantly, the semi-official press releases surfaced in a new media context: the modern urban daily, rendered affordable for ordinary people and with a strong emphasis on local affairs.

<sup>15</sup> LAB A Pr. Br. Rep.030 Tit.28 No. 806, Writ 18.2.1885, 290, 293, 291.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. Müller (2005a, p. 380).

<sup>17</sup> LAB A Pr. Br. Rep.030 Tit.28 No. 806, Draft 25.6.1885, 328f., 329.

## THE PLOT OF THE «STABBINGS»

In view of the “misdeed of the knifer” in early February 1909, Department IV took its usual course of action and instigated a public investigation. As soon as the police had established a connection between the attacks on Martha Kahlert, Martha Fillinger and Marie Schäfer on 9 February 1902, it sought to “resort to the widest public” as Traugott von Jagow (President of Berlin Police, 1909-1916) described the regular public campaigns<sup>18</sup>. The next day, Berlin police headquarters published announcements at the advertising pillars of the city, promising a reward of 1,000 Mark for information or actions that led to the capture of the perpetrator. Internal reports were also drafted, with further information being published in the official press organs of the police, for example the *Deutsche Fahndungsblatt*, to inform all branches of the German police<sup>19</sup>. A couple of days later, the search reached a turning point as the police were to notice several attacks per day. From 14 February onwards, the profile of the misdeed began to diffuse; the attacks occurred in all parts of the city and the pattern of action varied, the unity of perpetrator and deed dissolved. From now on, Department IV was obliged to assume a plural of perpetrators and thus it began to intensify its public manhunt.

## THE PUBLIC MANHUNT IN FEBRUARY 1909

In engaging in public campaigns, the police generally did not miss the opportunity to highlight its concerted efforts to track down the criminal; the work of the police was a leitmotif of any public campaign. Despite their vain efforts to “render [harmless] the wrongdoer” in February 1909, projections of the police’s industrious activity were underpinned by both general remarks and more detailed narrations of the efforts undertaken<sup>20</sup>. With its lack of “any distinct clues [about] the criminal”<sup>21</sup>, the Berlin Ripper case urged the police to at least emphasise their endeavours: whilst the *Berliner Tageblatt* and the *Berliner Morgenpost* informed their readers that the police would work on the solving of this crime “feverishly”, the *Berliner Lokal-Anzeiger* also assured its readership that “the most comprehensive measures have been taken to ascertain the culprit”<sup>22</sup>. Indeed, it was even deemed worthwhile to mention that, if the perpetrator had escaped again after another attack on a female passer-by, at least leading police officers in automobiles had arrived at the crime scene almost immediately<sup>23</sup>.

A further characteristic of such public campaigns was the detailed representation of detective clues. The search for the ‘knifer’ in February 1909 was no exception in this respect; any attempt to solve a major crime incorporated a public manhunt. In

<sup>18</sup> GStA Berlin I.HA Rep.77 Tit.235 No. 1 Bd. 14, Newspaper Clip, *Tageszeitung* 10.3.1912, 20.

<sup>19</sup> LAB A Pr. Br. Rep.030 Tit.198B No. 1934, Report February 1909, 92-95, 94; BLA 11.2.1909, No. 76, 2; BLA 11.2.1909, No. 76, 1.

<sup>20</sup> BT 11.2.1909, No. 75, 1. Spl., 1.

<sup>21</sup> BLA 12.2.1909, No. 77, 3.

<sup>22</sup> BT 16.2.1909, No. 85, 1. Spl., 1; vgl. BT 19.2.1909, No. 90; BMP 11.2.1909, No. 35, 1. Spl., 1.

<sup>23</sup> BLA 14.2.1909, No. 81, 3.

this particular case, however, the search for the “fiend”<sup>24</sup> was hampered by the very few and very vague indicators as to the culprit’s personality. Given the lack of any “palpable trace”<sup>25</sup> of the perpetrator, the police displayed what evidence they had been able to find, and thus represented in detail the tiniest clues that might aid in solving the case: the victims’ descriptions of the perpetrator, articles of clothing or pieces of jewellery that the police had found, the weapons used by the perpetrator, as well as the pierced garments and wounds of the victims. In principle, and as long as it was in line with the internal search strategy of the police, anything that could relate to the perpetrator was passed on to the publishers of Berlin dailies.

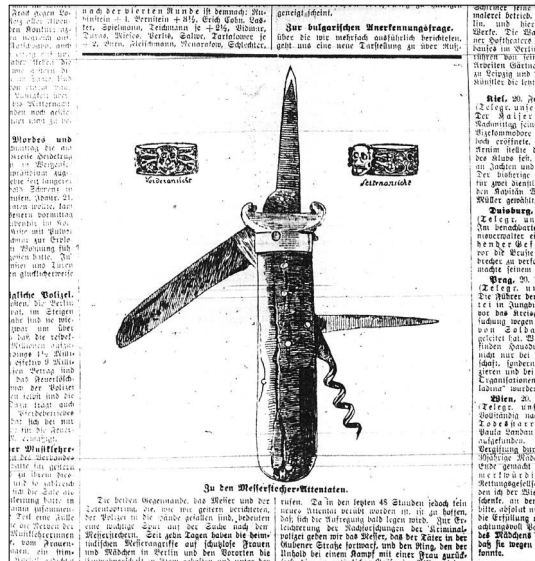


Illustration II. Evidence illustrated in the *Berliner Lokal-Anzeiger*

## ASKING AND DEMANDING: THE APPEAL TO THE PUBLIC

The deliberate dissemination of detective information was an integral aspect of “the appeal to the public” (*Publikum*). At the beginning of a public investigation into a crime, the police explicitly asked the public for support. In view of the aforementioned lack of evidence in February 1909, the Criminal investigation department emphasised the reliance of the police on the “observations” and “reports” of the public<sup>26</sup> in helping to solve the Berlin Ripper case: its Director, Councillor

<sup>24</sup> BLA 14.2.1909, No. 81, 1. Spl., 1; BT 12.2.1909, No. 77, 1. Spl., 1; cf. BMP 11.2.1909, No. 35, 1. Spl., 1.

<sup>25</sup> BLA 11.2.1909, No. 76, 1.

<sup>26</sup> BLA 11.2.1909, No. 75, 3; BMP 11.2.1909, No. 35, 1. Spl., 1.



Hoppe, acquainted the *Berliner Lokal-Anzeiger* with the fact that “[i]n this case we are more than ever dependent on the cooperation of the public”, and underscored “that, for the Criminal investigation department, it is probably impossible to arrest the knifer without the help of the public”<sup>27</sup>. In order “to keep up permanently / the interest of the public / in this difficult matters”<sup>28</sup>, the police put up official announcements in pubs and restaurants in the area of the *Schleßische Brücke*; newspapers subsequently alluded to these very announcements by copying them into their reports. During a brief period where there were no reports of further attacks, the *Berliner Lokal-Anzeiger* reminded its readers that it would be hazardous “if the public calmed down during this momentary state of tranquillity. On the contrary, the most intense vigilance is necessarily required”<sup>29</sup>. Time and again, the general and broad appeal to the public was completed by very precise instructions and clear advice. For example, the police called upon particular professions to sharpen their ears and eyes, and also publicly addressed single people that were “urgently requested” to “promptly” report their observations to the police<sup>30</sup>.

The Criminal investigation department did not have to wait long for police “perceptions” (*Wahrnehmungen*) furnished by various members of the public, participating actively in the search for the “fiend”. A few days after the beginning of the public campaign, the *Berliner Lokal-Anzeiger* sketched the ongoing exchange between the police and the urban public:

In the Police interrogation office. / There is a buzz of activity in the police headquarters, a continual coming and going. The head office of the police investigation in this crime case is in room 36, on the ground floor of the headquarters. Commissioned with the solving of the bloody deeds, police detective Peters holds office there. The door of the office does not stand still: one visitor hands it into the hands of the next one. A tangled mass of reports is on hand and they are complemented continuously by new ones. Supported by his staff, the police detective busily inspects the reports. / The incoming reports accumulate, some are also delivered in person by the informers and then they have to be recorded. Pneumatically delivered letters, ordinary letters, telegrams and wired reports are coming in abundantly. So far, all of the examined reports lack any value: they drew the police attention to misleading tracks, or their worthlessness was obvious and they went straight into the wastebasket. But under high pressure the inspecting and examining continues<sup>31</sup>.

The literary quality of the scene notwithstanding, this sketch of the Police interrogation office not only served the embellishment of the published press releases in the *Berliner Lokal-Anzeiger*, but also conveyed various other messages catered for potential informers. The representation stressed the activity of the policemen; additionally it informed the readers of both where to go and whom they were supposed

<sup>27</sup> BLA 11.2.1909, No. 76, 2 [Explanation by the Director of CID Hoppe]; vgl. BT 11.2.1909, No. 76, 1. Spl., 1 [Explanation by the Director of CID Hoppe]; BLA 15.2.1909, No. 83, 3; BT 15.2.1909, No. 82, 1. Spl., 1.

<sup>28</sup> BLA 12.2.1909, No. 77, 3.

<sup>29</sup> BLA 19.2.1909, No. 90, 3.

<sup>30</sup> BT 11.2.1909, No. 75, 1. Spl., 1 [Explanation by the Director of CID Hoppe]; BT 12.2.1909, No. 78, 1. Spl., 1; BLA 11.2.1909, No. 76, 2.

<sup>31</sup> BLA 11.2.1909, No. 76, 1 [Original emphasis]; cf. BT 12.2.1909, No. 78, 1. Spl., 1.

to contact should they wish to communicate with the police. As a final act, the short paragraph also served to implicitly encourage the public to furnish the authority with expedient details only<sup>32</sup>.

### CO-SEARCHING: THE POLICE AND THE URBAN POPULATION

During the investigations into the Berlin Ripper case, the police considered details relating to “mentally ill persons” especially useful<sup>33</sup>. From the inception of the search, the Criminal investigation department had entertained a suspicion that “a lunatic” was accountable for the recent knife attacks. A “list of suspicious insane persons and epileptics” provided the police with the means to check on relevant persons “who could be considered capable of committing such a deed due to their former life and disposition”; the police authority used this list to examine the alibis of known “lunatics dangerous to public safety” in Greater Berlin<sup>34</sup>. Lunatic asylums, penal institutions and the police authorities of the wider German Empire were also contacted, the Berlin police force advising them of their suspicions and asking for their feedback. Complementing the internal police investigation, the public search strategy would also target these “suspicious lunatics”: the initial public announcement by Ernst von Stubenrauch (Director of Berlin police headquarters, 1908-1909) called for the generation of “reports about conspicuous and suspicious behaviour of male persons, especially of insane persons and epileptics” by the wider Berlin public<sup>35</sup>.

In the days following this first announcement there were to be no shortage of “reports about nervous personalities or any other peculiar demeanour”<sup>36</sup>. The *Berliner Lokal-Anzeiger* summarised the first three days of the campaign: “It is almost perilous, if one only looks faintly similar to the women-murderer. In a twinkling of an eye innocent people are arrested by members of the public and sometimes carried away to the police.”<sup>37</sup> Similarly, an unemployed bricklayer, on his way to *Gärtnerstraße* 18 to discuss working with a foreman, would experience the concrete physical effects of the collaborative efforts of police and public:

As he entered [the building] to inspect the silent porter [an index of all tenants], two girls stood in front of the door [of *Gärtnerstraße* 18]. The children came in the house, too, and rang the door bell of the flat of their parents. One of them believed that the man wanted to do her harm. When the bricklayer left again,

<sup>32</sup> BT 11.2.1909, No. 75, 1. Spl., 1; BMP 11.2.1909, No. 35, 1. Spl., 1; BLA 11.2.1909, No. 75, 3 [Announcement of BPH 10.2.1909].

<sup>33</sup> BMP 11.2.1909, No. 35, 1. Spl., 1.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*; LAB A Pr. Br. Rep.030 Tit.198B No. 1934, Report February 1909, 92-95, 94; BLA 11.2.1909, No. 75, 3; BT 11.2.1909, No. 75, 1. Spl., 2; BT 11.2.1909, No. 76, 1. Spl., 1 [Explanation by the Director of CID Hoppe]; BLA 11.2.1909, No. 76, 2 [Further Explanation by the Director of CID Hoppe]; BT 12.2.1909, No. 78, 1. Spl., 1.

<sup>35</sup> BT 11.2.1909, No. 75, 1. Spl., 1; BMP 11.2.1909, No. 35, 1. Spl., 1; BLA 11.2.1909, No. 75, 3 [Announcement of BPH 10.2.1909]; LAB A Pr. Br. Rep.030 Tit.198B No. 1934, Report February 1909, 92-95, 94; cf. BLA 11.2.1909, No. 76, 2 [Statement of Professor Kohler].

<sup>36</sup> BLA 11.2.1909, No. 75, 3.

<sup>37</sup> BLA 14.2.1909, No. 81, 3; BMP 14.2.1909, No. 38, 1. Spl., 1; BT 14.2.1909, No. 81, 1. Spl., 1.

because he could not find the foreman here either, he was followed and arrested. Again rumour had it: 'The knifer has been arrested!' The man was brought to the police headquarters, but was released as soon as his innocence was revealed<sup>38</sup>.

As the article in the *Berliner Lokal-Anzeiger* suggested, reports and the arrests were occasionally grounded in a match between the vague personal description of the wanted knifer and the accused. More often though, peculiar demeanours or "suspicious phrases" provided the pretext for arrests and persecutions; further to this, the possession and the public demonstration of a knife time and again prompted swift interventions in the urban arena<sup>39</sup>. Men simply under the influence of alcohol were also often arrested: the blend of lacking bodily control and ambiguous or unclear expressions repeatedly prompted passers-by to assume that they were dealing with the wanted 'mentally insane' person<sup>40</sup>. The experience of the "cook L.", who was under such circumstances compelled to stay under arrest for two days, serves as a fitting example. 'L.', being heavily drunk, collapsed on the street. As a man helped him up, the drunken cook threatened his helper with his knife, saying: "You can get a stab, too!" He was brought to the police headquarters<sup>41</sup>.

Concomitant with the specific public campaigns, the search resulted in a surplus of security and public safety. Given the resonance of public investigations with the wider urban public, the search for a particular criminal was often accompanied by the arrest of wanted thieves and tricksters, fugitive prisoners and escaped inmates of lunatic asylums<sup>42</sup>. Even if the police did not succeed in apprehending the perpetrator specifically responsible for the recent attacks, they did manage to seize a number of other wanted criminals<sup>43</sup>. This side-effect of the intensification of measures taken to guarantee the public's security and safety was at least welcomed by the police, if not partially calculated by the authority as objectives to be achieved in tandem with their on-going public campaigns.

Taking a similar line, the *Berliner Lokal-Anzeiger* also appreciated that "these dreadful occurrences [the misdeeds of the knifer] will have at least one good effect: the return of a number of released dangerous lunatics into their asylums"<sup>44</sup>. The *conditio sine qua non* of these intensified security measures, however, was the effective collaboration of the many. Berliners did not limit themselves to mere acts of informing, but actively took matters into their own hands. In order to catch the wanted criminal, the many brought suspects to bay, arrested them, and subsequently either delivered them to the nearest police station or the next police officer they encountered on the way<sup>45</sup>. Ordinary people appropriated essential policing tasks, tasks that included the observation of suspicious behaviour, the arrest of suspects, and the

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>39</sup> BT 14.2.1909, No. 81, 1. Spl., 1; BLA 14.2.1909, No. 81, 3; BMP 14.2.1909, No. 38, 1. Spl., 1; BLA 16.2.1909, No. 84, 2; BLA 22.2.1909, No. 96, 2.

<sup>40</sup> BLA 13.2.1909, No. 79, 3.

<sup>41</sup> BLA 22.2.1909, No. 96, 2.

<sup>42</sup> See BT 11.2.1909, No. 76, 1. Spl., 1; BLA 11.2.1909, No. 75, 3; BLA 15.2.1909, No. 83, 2.

<sup>43</sup> BLA 14.2.1909, No. 81, 3; BLA 15.2.09, No. 83, 2.

<sup>44</sup> BLA 11.2.1909, No. 75, 3.

<sup>45</sup> Concerning violence and the use of weaponry in conflicts, cf. Schwerhoff (2002, pp. 102-127); Lindenberger (1995); Ellerbrook (2003); Müller (2005a, pp. 310-312).

custodial escort of suspects until such a time or place that they could be handed over to the authorities. In doing so, they empowered themselves and executed, at least momentarily, state power<sup>46</sup>.

### THE AMBIGUOUS RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN POLICE AND PEOPLE

It would only been very few cases that the actions of “the voluntary criminalists”<sup>47</sup> were ever publicly lauded. Generally speaking, the police and their semi-official mouthpieces, the Berlin dailies, were far more likely to express their dismay at the ineffectual acts of cooperation they encountered from the urban public. The situation in February 1909 was certainly no exception to this; coupled with a lack of positive results in the investigation, the performance of city dwellers had generally let down the police’s expectations. In tandem, both police and press supervised and admonished actions taken by the many: misleading reports and calls were time-costly affairs that consumed the energy of police officers; on the streets, in the various neighbourhoods of Berlin and also in pubs and restaurants, the decrying of innocent passers-by as potential suspects resulted in distracting interventions in public life; “idle talk” and “rumours” about the alleged arrest of the knifer jeopardised the effective coordination of the investigation. In short, the alleged “nervousness”<sup>48</sup> of the urban public obstructed the ability to cooperate with the on-going investigation in line with the intentions and objectives of the police. Rather than establishing a panoptic state, with the intended aim of placing the authorities in a position to observe without being seen<sup>49</sup>, the public search strategy employed by the police produced an unclear state in which everybody claimed to have spotted a criminal who was, in reality, still unknown and on the run. As the many did not comply (or only complied in part) with the instructions of the police, the authority of the police was thus undermined.

The attitude of the police towards its potential informers and supporters was rather ambiguous. Characterising the police’s relationship towards the public<sup>50</sup> were the two coexistent forms of ‘asking’ and ‘demanding’. On the one hand, members of the public were by no means legally obliged to report any of their observations, and so the police were left with no other option than to ask for collaborative support. On the other, the expectation of the public’s compliant cooperation asserted an authoritative power position, echoing the military spirit of the Prussian police and its close institutional ties with the army<sup>51</sup>. Official discourse regarding the “public” (*Pub-*

<sup>46</sup> Foucault (1975); Lüdtkke (1992); Landwehr (2003); Holenstein (2009, pp. 25-28).

<sup>47</sup> BLA 21.2.1909, No. 94, 1. Spl., 1.

<sup>48</sup> BLA 21.2.1909, No. 94, 1. Spl., 1; BLA 13.2.1909, No. 79, 3.

<sup>49</sup> Foucault (1995, p. 257); Gellately (1997, p. 185); compare differently, Elder (2006, p. 414); Fürmetz, Lüdtkke (1998); Hohkamp, Ulbrich (2001).

<sup>50</sup> BT 11.2.1909, No. 75, 1. Spl., 1; BMP 11.2.1909, No. 35, 1. Spl., 1; BLA 11.2.1909, No. 75, 3 [Announcement of BPH 10.2.1909, original emphasis.]; LAB A Pr. Br. Rep.030 Tit.198B No. 1934, Report February 1909, 92-95, 95; BLA 15.2.09, No. 83, 2.

<sup>51</sup> Concerning the relationship between military and police in 19<sup>th</sup>-century Prussia, Spencer (1985); Lüdtkke (1989); Reinke (1991); Johansen (2004).

*likum*) relied on the notion of the “subject”: in view of the seeming lack of the required reasoning and discipline, the police were to keep a tight rein on “the public”: in order to correctly align the collaborative acts of the many with the investigations of the police, “the public” required constantly both instruction and correction. For the police, diverging from official instructions was not an option and so the actions taken by ordinary people remained incomprehensible and insufficient. The public performance of the many did not make any sense from the police’s viewpoint; the constant criticism is therefore not much of a surprise.

The repetitive scolding of “the public”, a leitmotif of any public police investigation, did however ignore a particular attribute of the public’s actions: ultimately, the many did intend to help in apprehending the wanted criminal. Observing and informing, persecuting and (co-)searching, arresting and delivering were all public-social actions, characterised by a willingness to collaborate with the authorities. Indeed, the police officer ‘patrolling his beat’ was not alone when caring for law and order; after all, ordinary people were also concerned with matters of “public security and morality”, and their multifarious participations contributed to ‘law and order’ in different ways. As revealed in Thomas Lindenberger’s pioneering study *Straßenpolitik*, a general condition of this willingness to cooperate was an everyday and permanent “readiness” of ordinary people<sup>52</sup>. This “readiness” prompted a verbal and physical commitment to public affairs: either in close cooperation with the police or without external support, the many actively opposed breaches of social rules and the disruption of the order of the everyday. However, the “readiness” of the populace in the urban arena does not necessarily match with the Marxist thesis of an antagonism between “the people” and the “power bloc” however<sup>53</sup>. Participatory actions were rather typified by a wayward opportunism: they seized the opportunity provided by the sensational event and appropriated the detective clues in their own way. As a result, ambiguous verbal expressions or public gesticulations with a knife could thus provide valuable indicators, perhaps leading the ‘ready’ public to the wanted criminal. However, the various social actions did not necessarily correspond with the rationale of the search, or the detective reasoning of the police. The appropriations of the manhunt by members of the public depended rather on their individual *enjeu* and the situation in which they found themselves.

The act of participating in the search for the Berlin Ripper was also imbued with sensationalism, due to the most important medium of the metropolis: the newspaper. Media coverage, the use of other media and the concerted efforts of the search transformed the public investigation into a media event, attributing a distinct significance to the matter which went far beyond a mere police issue. The public investigation was a sensationalist affair in the urban arena, and, apparently, it was worthwhile to appropriate its public-symbolic value by contributing to it in various ways: in the pubs of Berlin, people bragged about their personal acquaintance with the fugitive; on the streets they attempted to track down the wanted criminal, with or without the support of the police; in the telegraph offices, the offices of the newspapers or in the interrogation rooms of the police, the public found authority figures willing to listen. The many were granted the opportunity to inscribe themselves into the daily representation of the metropolis: being acknowledged for one’s endeavours in the news-

<sup>52</sup> Lindenberger (1992, pp.16, 131 & 191, 1994, p. 53); cf. Davis (2002, 2005).

<sup>53</sup> Lindenberger (1992, p. 13, 1995, pp.192, 194 & 209).

paper was as much attractive as any publicly announced or proven dedication to the authorities. Semi-official sensationalist crime cases produced momentary chances of empowerment; the numerous and multifaceted appropriations of these opportunities by the inhabitants of Berlin are proof indeed of the attractive potential of sensationalist crime cases.

### LIMITS OF THE SEMI-OFFICIAL MEDIA COVERAGE

Whereas ordinary Berliners intensively appropriated the search, the leading newspapers of Berlin were to barely exploit the journalistic potential of this particular case. In terms of morale and *enjeux*, there was a vast gap between the semi-official discourse in the newspapers and the wide spectrum of actions taken in the urban arena.

In a remarkable contrast to the portrayal of the London's Jack the Ripper, the media coverage in Berlin largely focused on the public investigation itself. Despite their various political leanings, Berlin dailies turned into mouthpieces of the police. This is not to say that the leading newspapers, particularly the more liberal *Berliner Tageblatt* and the *Berliner Morgenpost*, did not generally oppose the politics of the Prussian police however; criticism of the police was an established and distinct feature of public debate in Imperial Germany<sup>54</sup>. Furthermore, such public manhunts put the police in a position to be criticised: their politics were exposed, and subsequently faced heightened public scrutiny. In the case of failures or shortcomings, the liberal papers time and again seized the opportunity to challenge and criticize the Prussian police for its lack of competence. Last but not least, the journalists of Berlin knew very well how to play with literary motifs, and were quite used to drawing comparisons with literary examples; with reference to more dramatic genres, journalists would translate ongoing affairs into literary dramatic texts<sup>55</sup>. In February 1909, however, they refrained from producing a dreadful as much as delighting narrative of the current affair. Apparently, there was little reason to do so: the "stabblings" were a worrying matter; the results of the ongoing investigation disappointing; and the circumstances surrounding the death of Miss Schäfer were truly lamentable: due to the small size of the wound, the arterial injury went unnoticed and so resulted in her bleeding to death. The suddenness of the violent acts, the arbitrary choice of the victims, the vague details of the personal descriptions, the lack of any "palpable trace", all this culminated in the invisibility of the perpetrator and the unpredictability of his re-emergence: the "horror of Berlin" was untraceable and yet, at the same time, the terror of the knifer was omnipresent<sup>56</sup>. But not even this ominous void would be filled by literary imagination.

A further distinct feature of the Berlin Ripper media coverage was the restraint from any literary dramatisation of "the erotic nature"<sup>57</sup> of the stabblings. Here, again, the detective context of the public investigation prevailed; the text of the press releases delivered twice daily by the Criminal investigation department dominated

<sup>54</sup> Funk (1986); Roth (1997, pp. 55ff.); Reinke (1991); Johansen (2009).

<sup>55</sup> Müller (2005a, pp. 191ff. & 325ff.).

<sup>56</sup> BZM 15.2.1909, No. 38, 1.

<sup>57</sup> BT 18.2.1909, No. 89, 1. Spl., 1 [Statement of Dr. Rubinowitsch, quote of the *Petite République*].

media coverage of the knife attacks. Nevertheless, on the occasions that the perpetrator was described as a “fiend”, “monster”, “women-murderer”, “madman”, “lunatic” or “perversely inclined man”, the generally silenced erotic connotations of the “knife attacks” would resurface<sup>58</sup>. The press notices penned by Department IV contributed to this in their own way, given that they accurately described the details of the criminal deeds. The representation of the crime and its surrounding circumstances were rooted in the detective interests of the police; the detailed information supposedly providing “voluntary criminalists” with clues that would enable them to actively contribute to the on-going police investigation. Although such deliberate and concerted public instruction required the description of indecent circumstances, the discussion of these circumstances was not considered appropriate. The urge to communicate thus conflicted with the morale constraint of public speech – in other words, the public representation of items relating to police investigations had reached a serious obstacle, though these matters still needed to be discussed. The moral conceptualization of the public sphere in Imperial Germany established a border around public speech, and also confined the public representation of details relating to criminal investigations in newspapers. Phrases were shortened and abbreviated as a result, though even these could not completely ignore the erotic undercurrent of the stabbings. In newspaper articles, the deed was designated an “attack”, an “assault” or an “attempted assassination”<sup>59</sup>, or, in other instances, the course of action was simply reduced to its technical dimension. The *Berliner Lokal-Anzeiger*, for instance, revealed that Marie Loobs had “received a stab in *Kirchgasse* around 2.15 pm”<sup>60</sup> and that Berta Gröske “was injured by a stab into her abdomen”<sup>61</sup>. Indeed, those women and girls who had been attacked were thereupon also termed “the Stabbed” (*Gestochene*)<sup>62</sup>. As a final act, this ambivalent expression was even put in the mouth of the victim Maria Schäfer, recreating their alleged experience of the violent act: the words “A young man has stabbed me !!”<sup>63</sup> were purportedly her final utterance, as she recovered consciousness for the last time before her death.

### ACCOUNTING FOR THE MISDEEDS: THE EXPERT KNOWLEDGE OF THE MEDICAL DOCTORS

Although absent in the press, the debate concerning the “erotic” undercurrent of the stabbings was to be found somewhere else: in special comments and the additional articles of medical experts. Due their expert knowledge, male doctors enjoyed the privilege of broadly debating “the sexual nature” of the stabbings, and their pathologic origins. Placed in the central sections of newspapers, their comments and

<sup>58</sup> BT 11.2.1909, No. 76, 1 Spl., 1; cf. BT 12.2.1909, No. 75, 1. Spl., 2; BMP 14.2.1909, No. 38, 1. Spl., 1; BLA 14.2.1909, No. 81, 1. Spl., 1; BLA 16.2.1909, 84, 2; BLA 14.2.1909, No. 81, 1. Spl., 1; BLA 14.2.1909, No. 81, 3; BLA 13.2.1909, No. 79, 3; cf. BLA 14.2.1909, No. 81, 1. Spl., 1; BLA 11.2.1909, No. 75, 3; cf. BT 11.2.1909, No. 75, 1. Spl., 1; BT 11.2.1909, No. 76, 1. Spl., 1.

<sup>59</sup> BLA 16.2.1909, No. 84, 1.

<sup>60</sup> BLA 16.2.1909, No. 84, 1.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>62</sup> BMP 11.2.1909, No. 35, 1. Spl., 1; BLA 18.2.1909, No. 88, 3; BLA 19.2.1909, No. 90, 3.

<sup>63</sup> BLA 11.2.1909, No. 76, 2; cf. BMP 14.2.1909, No. 38, 1. Spl., 1.

examinations both reflected the increasing significance of criminology<sup>64</sup>, and also marked the privileged position of experts in the public discourse on crime that took place prior to any proceedings in court<sup>65</sup>. Whereas the public investigations of the police attempted to answer the question “who is the culprit?”, explanations given by a diverse range of medical doctors focussed on the “nature” of the criminal act, as well as on the “type” of the criminal<sup>66</sup>. In this context, the neurologist Professor Dr Eulenburg referred to existing investigations in “sexual-pathological studies”: he drew comparisons to the other “varieties of fiends”, from the “inksplasher (*Tintenspritzer*) to the sex killer”, and also noted that the perpetrator “gets some sexual satisfaction [from] stabbing with a knife”<sup>67</sup>. Distinguishing the most recent stabbings from other “delicts of rudeness” that occasionally occurred in Berlin, Professor Kohler concluded:

On the contrary, the course [of the misdeed] indicates a clearly distinct type of psychosis, a classic type of a sex murderer. Hereupon refers not only the majority of the immediate succession of several assaults[,] but also the fact that the knife was stabbed into the abdomen<sup>68</sup>.

In contrast to Kohler’s findings, the Director of the *Bicêtre* in Paris, Dr. Rubinowitsch, surmised that “the mysterious criminal [instead] performed [...] under the influence of a mania”<sup>69</sup>. Whereas these circumstances were only mentioned very briefly in the main articles, and certainly in a laconic and neutral tone, such circumstances were at the centre of the debate between medical experts, and were explicitly discussed in the jargon of their professions. However, this discussion of lust, sexual satisfaction, and the erotic nature of the stabbings was compliant with one essential condition: these themes and issues only surfaced in the context of a medical discourse, a discourse that emphasised the pathological and immoral qualities of its object.



Illustration III. Headline of the *BZ am Mittag*, 16 February 1909

<sup>64</sup> In regard to the significant role of criminology, see Wetzell (2000); Becker(2002); concerning the role of medical experts in court trials see Hett (2004, p.177); Siemens (2007, pp. 195ff.).

<sup>65</sup> Cf. Habermas (2006, 2009b).

<sup>66</sup> Becker (2005).

<sup>67</sup> BLA 11.2.1909, No. 76, 2 [Statement of Professor Dr. Eulenburg].

<sup>68</sup> BLA 11.2.1909, No. 76, 2 [Statement of Professor Kohler].

<sup>69</sup> BT 18.2.1909, No. 89, 1. Spl., 1 [Statement of Dr. Rubinowitsch].



### THE “EPIDEMIC OF THE STABBINGS”: COPYCAT KNIFE ASSAULTS AND INVENTED ATTACKS

Regardless of whether or not the knifer was mentally ill or just immoral, several Berliners did not consider the concerns and arguments voiced by the experts of medicine and psychopathology. On 14 February 1909, Berlin newspapers reported that the Criminal investigation department had to assume the existence of more than just one knifer. Although knife assaults on girls and young women had occurred for the first time in the evening of 9 February, the subsequent circulation of this news from 11 February onwards seemed to prompt further attacks, swiftly carried out and in imitation of the original misdeed. The suspicions of both police and press fell on “lads”, “scallywags”, “rogues”, and other “certain bad asocial elements”<sup>70</sup>; in short, the “rude rabble of which there is some in any big city – and that certainly is relatively strongly represented in Berlin”<sup>71</sup>. Apparently, male youth or young men seemed to enjoy mimicing the wanted knifer. For the perpetrators, the gender of their victims suggested that they would only encounter (supposedly) defenceless<sup>72</sup>, or at least certainly astonished, young women. Additionally, the swift technique of the perpetrator gave the individual a chance to inflict considerable pain on a woman, all the while operating at a significantly diminished risk of being apprehended. Above all, copying the knifer’s assault against women contained an inherent sexual undercurrent, an undercurrent that was worded in either the detective language of the police or the expert language of medical practitioners.

The copycat stabbings lacked any explicit instructions or literary dramatisations in the newspapers, and yet “certain immoral asocial elements [in] Greater Berlin” restaged the “stabbings” in their own way. They made use of the clues that had been circulated in the diverse urban media; by imitating the original knifer, they appropriated the public-symbolic status of the search. As Dr. phil. Rudolph Hennig pointed out:

The incitement is the pleasure to hear people talking hereof in anxiety, to see the deed published in the official announcements put up at advertising pillars, and they feel that they are something great: their hysterical drive to render themselves interesting, at any cost, is amply satisfied<sup>73</sup>.

The dramatic appropriation of the knifer’s assault strategy also commented on the helplessness of the police, as well as on the measures that they had taken in order to arrest the criminal: to the young copycats, the knifer that had been initially dubbed the Berlin Ripper was far more convincing than the vein undertakings of the police<sup>74</sup>.

The counterpoint to such imitation stabbings by young men was the feigned knife assaults by women and girls. The actions of Bertha Marzahn, a 48 year old worker who had been attacked by a knifer on 16 February, provide a illustrative

<sup>70</sup> BLA 14.2.1909, No. 81, 3; BMP 14.2.1909, No. 38, 1. Spl., 1; BLA 16.2.1909, No. 84, 1; BLA 16.2.1909, No. 85, 2; BMP 16.2.1909, No. 39, 1. Spl., 1; BLA 19.2.1909, No. 90, 3.

<sup>71</sup> Cf. LAB A Pr. Br. Rep.030 Tit.198B No. 1934, Report February 1909, 92-95, 92.

<sup>72</sup> See the response of the “resolute Miss Henze”, BLA 17.2.1909, No. 87, 3.

<sup>73</sup> BT 16.2.1909, No. 84, 1. Spl., 1 [Article by Dr. phil. Rudolph Hennig].

<sup>74</sup> Cf. BLA 13.2.1909, No. 79, 3.

example of this kind of behaviour. Several days after she had been initially attacked, Marzahn was to report another “knife attack” to the police on 22 February:

As [Bertha Marzahn], running some errands, passed by this building around 9:15 in the morning, she had been jostled by a young man who then accelerated his pace and escaped her eyes. Only later, she sensed a strong pain in her right thigh. As she look down on her clothing, she noticed that there was a clear cut like the first time<sup>75</sup>.

In order to clarify the circumstances of the second and relatively unlikely “knife assault” on Bertha Marzahn, the police began to search for witnesses. The next day, the young man indicted in the above statement reported himself to the police, producing a very different record of the incident:

He “[went] calmly his way [...] when suddenly Miss M., who he was not acquainted with, rushed up to him and embraced him. Puzzled, the man stopped while Miss M. continued her way and shouted loudly for help as she was about fifty steps away from him”<sup>76</sup>.

Marzahn’s dramatic performance was rooted in material motifs. Since she had been signed off as sick for several days following her initial attack, she wanted to continue her sick leave and receive sick leave payment. From the inception of the public investigation, young women and girls had approached the police in order to report a “knife attack”. In contrast to the “mischief” of “rascals” and “scallywags”, the imitation of being attacked did not prompt any serious public critique<sup>77</sup> – the fictitious suffering did not, after all, inflict any harm to anybody. What is more, the police simply distinguished between the real and the fictitious by transforming the women’s clothing into the touchstone of truth: whereas the lack of any evident damage suggested the ‘victim’ was no more than pretending, distinguishable knife-marks on women’s clothes induced the authorities to assume a ‘true’ assault had taken place. Nevertheless, although these feigned assaults were deemed harmless, the copycat action of young men did indeed harm women and girls, and threatened public security and safety in Berlin.

From the viewpoint of police, medical experts and journalist commentators, copycat stabbings and feigned assaults were perceived as an illness or a temporary infection. For these observers and readers, the imitation of criminal demeanours originated from urban sensationalism and the psychology of sensationalist crime cases – as illustrated on many other occasions. Criminal actions imbued by sensationalist media coverage would be “infectious [and] suggestive”, helping to elicit the action of imitation. In order to account for the recent happenings, commentators referred to similar cases of “psychic infection”<sup>78</sup>, as well as previous knife assaults such as the murder of Lucie Berlin in 1904<sup>79</sup>. A particular precedent had already been set for the knifer in Berlin however, coming in the form of London’s Jack the Ripper<sup>80</sup>:

<sup>75</sup> BLA 22.2.1909, No. 56, 2; BMP 23.2.1909, No. 45, 1. Spl., 1.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>77</sup> Cf. BMP 18.2.1909, No. 41, 1. Spl., 1.

<sup>78</sup> LAB A Pr. Br. Rep.030 Tit.198B No. 1934, Report 92-95,93.

<sup>79</sup> Concerning this criminal case, see Fritzsche (2005), Müller (2005b).

<sup>80</sup> BT 16.2.1909, No. 84, 1.Spl., 1 [Article by Dr. Hennig]; cf. BMP 14.2.1909, No. 38, 1. Spl., 1.

It is a psychological fact of experience, whose significance has been acknowledge only very recently, that each sensationalist and startling criminal case characterised by a certain originality has the dangerous effect that very shortly after further similar criminal actions are committed, reproducing all details with utmost accuracy<sup>81</sup>.

The best form of “prohibitive means against [the] further mimicking actions”, it was thought, would be the apprehension of “one of these criminals”<sup>82</sup>.

### **“WORKING HAND IN HAND”<sup>83</sup>: THE END OF THE STABBINGS**

In order to ultimately contain the “imitation drive” (*Nachahmungstrieb*)<sup>84</sup> of the “rabble”, Department IV acknowledged its obligation to undertake further measures. As a result, the police raised the advertised award from 1000 to 3000 Mark, and continued its public investigation in cooperation with the population of Berlin. Besides the intensification of tried and tested means, the police also decided to take additional institutional actions, and to initiate further private measures as well. Hoping that the combination of “governmental and private measures”<sup>85</sup> would finally result in the arrest of the knifers, the police on the one hand “increased their public as much as secret presence of forces in the metropolis”, and on the other integrated the central logistical institutions of the city into the wider public search. Intensifying their presence by establishing “special taskforces”<sup>86</sup>. The police ensured that several hundred police officers “were continuously patrolling the streets of particularly emperiled districts.” Patrols were reinforced, “railways and other gathering points of larger crowds” were placed under observation, and “undercover agents, some of them dressed in women’s clothing” were deployed at various endangered parts of the city. As an additional measure, the Berlin police force appealed for all of its officers, if off duty, to voluntarily support those on patrol<sup>87</sup>.

Private surveillance measures also pursued the stated aim of observing “the hustle and bustle on the streets”<sup>88</sup>. On 16 February 1909, the President of the Lichtenberg Police asked the chairman of the *Association of Houseowners* of Lichtenberg and Boxhagen-Rummelsburg for support, arguing that a “private supervision of buildings, houses as well as the streets” should render it feasible to catch the culprit

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.* The association of both cases went further: a particular aspect of the unfolding case of the Berlin knifer, the plural of perpetrators, was considered to be at the core of the London Jack the Ripper case: a “suggestion of the masses” (*Massensuggestion*) had resulted in the emergence of several “rippers” in late Victorian London, LAB A Pr. Br. Rep.030 Tit.198B No. 1934, Report February 1909, 92-95, 93, 95; BT 16.2.1909, No. 84, 1. Spl., 1.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>84</sup> BT 18.2.1909, No. 89, 1. Spl., 1 [Statement of Dr. Rubinowitsch].

<sup>85</sup> BLA 17.2.1909, No. 87, 2.

<sup>86</sup> BLA 16.2.1909, No. 85, 2f.

<sup>87</sup> LAB A Pr. Br. Rep.030 Tit.198B No. 1934, Report February 1909, 92-95, 94; BT 15.2.1909, No. 82, 1. Spl., 1; BMP 16.2.1909, No. 39, 1. Spl., 1 [Decree of Police President Stubenrauch].

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*

in the act<sup>89</sup>. The President of the Berlin Police achieved a similar agreement with the chairmen of the *Association of the House- and Landowners*, the *Tram and Omnibus Company*, the *Overhead Railway and the Subway*, and the *Security Company* in Berlin; in order to establish an effective “supervision of their houses”, it was advised that “homeowners should, in groups, employ one man who observes the street and, in the case of an attack, initiates the persecution of the perpetrator and follows the man, too”<sup>90</sup>.

Ultimately, the police and private measures proved effective. From 20 February onwards, only ten days after the first reported stabbings in South East Berlin, the assaults on women and girls ceased. This achievement was due to a deliberate transformation, into police observation points, of the logistical positions in the city that had played a crucial role in the criminal acts of the knife attacks: the streets and corridors where the perpetrators had, unawares, caught their victims. As a result, the unconditional invisibility of the perpetrator, and therefore the certainty of escaping any attempted arrest, was no longer guaranteed.

Although the police extended their measures beyond the ordinary boundaries of a public campaign by “requesting”<sup>91</sup> private associations and institutions, the police still operated within the ordinary framework of the public police investigation. “Working hand in hand” with civic institutions as they were, the police attempted to establish a massive presence in the metropolis. The police deliberately incorporated civic agencies and particular groups of people, delegating to them special policing tasks; with this, the internal strategies of police thus multiplied in the urban public. The successful suppression of other attacks on young women and girls was therefore achieved by a publicly visible dissemination of policing competences in the urban arena: the police enjoined “the public”, and vice versa.

## CONCLUSION

In the end, the police succeeded in restoring safety and security in the capital city. Their strategy effectively combined the physical and discursive presence of various forms of policing. Through this strategy, which involved both the enhancement of police’s public methods and the co-option of the public in aiding with their investigation, the dreadful occurrences of February 1909 were brought to an end. Yet the investigation ultimately failed in apprehending either the original perpetrator or any of the subsequent copycats – a failure that went without any further scandalisation in Berlin’s dailies. When pushing for reform, the Director of Department IV, Count von Pückler, had anticipated such kind of effect; in 1885 chief instigator of the reform noted, “the service catered for the newspapers [i.e. the aforementioned proactive press policy] will not remain without effect on their [the newspapers’] position and will make them more liable to concede to the wishes of the police headquarters”<sup>92</sup>. The proactive press policy of Prussian police therefore successfully silenced their failed attempts to bring any of the perpetrators to justice, the police’s

<sup>89</sup> BLA 16.2.1909, No. 84, 2; BMP 16.2.1909, No. 39, 1. Spl., 1.

<sup>90</sup> BLA 16.2.1909, No. 85, 3; BMP 17.2.1909, No. 40, 1. Spl., 1.

<sup>91</sup> BLA 16.2.1909, No. 84, 2.

<sup>92</sup> LAB A Pr Br Rep.030 Tit.28 Nr.806 Writ 18.3.1885, 290-293, 291.

discursive presence in the media pitching the fact of their failure into oblivion. In the case of London's Jack the Ripper, the unwillingness of Scotland Yard to communicate with the press had produced rather the opposite effect: silence on behalf of the detectives prompted the press' invention of the Jack the Ripper legend, a legend that continues to play on our imagination in view of the manifest failure of London's police in 1888. However, Berlin's reformed press policy was not a panacea for all of its police investigations. On other occasions, this very same proactive press policy was a clear and resounding failure; the semi-official notices of the police reports were turned against the authorities, whilst the wanted criminal rose to prominence. The mixed results of this policy notwithstanding, Berlin's police acquired an essentially new tool, one that allowed for the promotion of police concerns in public and the presentation of matters of public safety and security. As Department IV embarked on the reform of its press relations, the police adjusted their policy to the political conditions of the Berlin press market at the time, prior to its thorough transformation a few years later. In order to reach the wider public, the Criminal investigation department was therefore willing to acknowledge the prevailing position of the liberal papers in the capital city.

Despite the adaptation of the Criminal investigation department to its surrounding media landscape, the learning process of the Prussian police was limited in several respects. In the first instance, the police clung to their political bias – continuing to occasionally favour conservative newspapers and to withhold official information from a publisher if they were to be penalised for insubordinate media coverage. Such practises contradicted the core objective of reform: to use the police's newly required means to enhance their position, promote their agenda and garner public support. Similarly, the adjustment of the police's press policy did not prompt an overhaul of the institutional make up of the Prussian authorities. The small and almost invisible reform of 1885 did not eclipse the prevailing notions of Prussian policing; the distinct and superior self-understanding of the police remained, along with a persistent disregard of the public. Although it is true that the police were willing to engage with the wider public, they did not to assume a more civilian approach like that epitomised by the notion of the «gentle Bobby»<sup>93</sup>. Furthermore, the press policy of the police was subject to change. Although the official press notices was persistently considered an original police matter, the transformation of Berlin's media landscape altered the effect of the very same press notices published and disseminated in a essentially changing urban public. Thus is it does not come as a surprise that the attitude of the police remained; social change made the police aloof of the popular repercussions of its press policy. The police neither acquired an understanding of the public dynamics to which it significantly contributed, nor the streetwise actions of the urban crowd. The authority thus did not meld with the popular nature of public affairs that they stirred so well.

Nevertheless, the police still contributed to public affairs, and also informed the urban crime drama in the capital city. In the previous decades and centuries, the persecution of a criminal climaxed in the spectacle of retribution, with the authorities increasingly choosing to conceal the retributive act from the public eyes<sup>94</sup>. The theatre of punishment gave way to the «hunts for the criminal» (*Verbrecherjagden*),

<sup>93</sup> Emsley (1996, 2005).

<sup>94</sup> Foucault (1975); Evans (1996); Martschukat (2000).

although the execution of death sentences continued to attract some attention. Thus, in the urban crime drama, the search for criminals and the public investigation of their misdeeds preponderated. Through the use of modern mass media, the search for criminals was put on public display – the media coverage transforming the detective work of the police into a sensational and highly popular affair. In contrast to the institutional *credo* of the police, the public investigation of crimes opened up new horizons for (co-)policing. These searches produced a new encounter between police force and public, an encounter that certainly did not match with the police's self portrayal as superior, nor with assumptions of a nervous and ill-performing public. Against this backdrop, the term «moral panic»<sup>95</sup>, albeit occasionally attributed to sensational crime cases, does not prove sufficient. First, the concept of «moral panic» hardly covers the complex interdependent interlacing of news and its appropriation during the campaign of the Berlin police; secondly, the concept echoes a leitmotif of the public campaign, i.e. the scolding of the public. Underlying this leitmotif was the problem of the fear of «the new reader»<sup>96</sup>. These 'new readers' came in the form of the shop owners, craftsmen, servants, and workers, whose comparatively recently initiated consumption of Berlin's dailies staked their political claims in the urban arena. The reading of the *Berliner Morgenzeitung* or the *Berlin Lokalanzeiger* marked just the beginning of their political participation in urban affairs, very much to the dismay of the formerly privileged reading public. Given the "readiness" of ordinary people, public police investigations prompted their intervention in public affairs. Criminal actions endangered society and its order, were a serious breach of social rules, and initiated a crisis<sup>97</sup>: the liberty of the wrongdoer thus meant a continuing threat to the public's security and safety, and necessarily required public intervention. Offences demanded the subsequent restoration of order, and prompted undertakings that ranged from on looking to talking, from observing to informing, from investigating to following and even arresting. Regardless of whether or not these actions complied with the inherent conventions and expectations of the police, the actions of the many "voluntary detectives" were driven by a willingness to contribute to the restoration of social order. The public manhunt offered the urban public opportunities to do this, even if the appropriation of these chances went against the grain of the rationale of the police. In this way, the imitations of the original Berlin Ripper, as well as the feigned "knife attacks", were as much characterised by wayward opportunism as the numerous actions taken to catch the culprit.

The public manhunt affected the power relationship of the police and the public. For the many, public police investigations produced a wide range of opportunities to contribute to the policing of society. Particularly in the case specifically discussed in this piece, searching for the criminal required the cooperation of both the public and the police. For the police, cooperation meant the enforcing of their superior position of the authorities, actions that strongly required the leadership and the instructions of the police. To a certain extent, the multifarious acts of cooperation certainly served this end: the many demanded leadership, and lent authority to the police whenever they either addressed a policeman on his beat or detailed their perceptions

<sup>95</sup> Reinke (1991, p. 62); Evans (1998, p. 192); Hett (2004, p. 78).

<sup>96</sup> Lyons (2002, p. 457).

<sup>97</sup> Turner (1987, p. 75).

of an alleged criminal in one of Berlin's many police stations. Indeed, during the period of crisis, acts of informing flourished, and detective police work became increasingly popularised. When examining the collaborative efforts to hunt down the criminal (e.g. the agreement with private association, the collective hunting of suspicious persons), this becomes even more plain. Depending on the situation and the *enjeux* of «the voluntary detectives» however, the notion of Prussian police superiority proved illusory. This was particularly so in February 1909, when the police were unable to either establish any evidence relating to the crimes, or to contain the following «epidemic of the stabbings» without the (semi-)compliant support of the many. What is more, the numerous independent arrests of suspicious passers-by, not to mention the various copycat stabbings and feigned attacks, amply illustrate the limits of the alleged institutional superiority. As a result then, the police was forced to continuously reassert its role as the primary instigator of the on-going public investigation: the police corrected misleading rumours, rebuffed members of the public for their inadequate behaviour, and instructed the public by presenting essential clues and good examples of adequate support. Rather than a “general perspective” then, or even a “word city” as proposed by Peter Fritzsche<sup>98</sup>, sensational crime cases like the 1909 Berlin stabbings produced a multitude of voices and inextricably interlinked actions. The newspapers of Berlin relayed the attempts of various actors to track down the criminal, channelling and amplifying as they did so. Whilst searching for the wrongdoer, the various actors of urban public not only communicated about the whereabouts and identity of the perpetrator, but also about their say and performance, their role and conduct in the urban arena. In the period of crisis, misunderstanding was rife; through this the polyphony of the German capital's transforming urban public was revealed.

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## ARCHIVAL MATERIAL

### Landesarchiv Berlin

LAB A Pr. Br. Rep. 030 Tit.198B Nr.1934 Vorgehen bei Kapitalverbrechen

LAB A Pr. Br. Rep. 030 Tit.28 Nr.806 Kriminalkommissariat

### Geheimes Staatsarchiv

GSStA Berlin I.HA Rep.77 Tit.235 Nr.1 Bd.14 Die Verwaltung der Kriminalpolizei sowie der allgemeinen Sicherheitspolizei in Berlin

<sup>98</sup> Fritzsche (1996, 5, 26, 131, 158, 2005); cf. Schwartz (1989, 2f.). In this respect the studies of Stuart Hall and other scholars of the *Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies* at the University of Birmingham are legendary, Hall (2000, 61); in regard to the sensationalist media events, see *locus classicus* Walkowitz (1992); cf. Lüdtkke, Müller (2005); Habermas (2003, 2009a); Schwerhoff (2011).

## Newspapers

*Berliner Lokal-Anzeiger* (BLA)

*Berliner Morgenpost* (BMP)

*Berliner Tageblatt* (BT)

*BZ am Mittag* (BZM)

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