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# Scandalogy 2

Cultures of Scandals – Scandals in Culture

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## Introduction

At a glance, it is self-evident that scandal is a transcultural phenomenon. The international conference of scandal research, which we hosted twice already in Bamberg, is proof of that. It drew scholars from different regions of the world – from the Middle East, North Africa, the Americas as well as from Scandinavia and other parts of Europe. These scholars are identified as scandalologists because the research discussed and compared at our conferences, though very interdisciplinary in character, shared many commonalities. Indeed, scandalology emerged as an interdisciplinary field that could be productively examined from different theoretical perspectives and with varying types of methodologies (HALLER/MICHAEL/KRAUS 2018).

Arguably, scandals occur in every culture and at all times in human history, thereby constituting a part of our species' social evolution. In this respect, scandals are social phenomena that may not necessarily constitute the disintegration of culture, as public discourse sometimes suggests. Quite the opposite – scandals may be integral as a cultural practice and always have permeated lived culture and its manifold social behaviors. In addition, scandals can be traced everywhere in recorded culture and its collections of material artifacts. Borrowing loosely from Williams (1960: 254), scandals may thus be essentially part of human culture as »a whole way of life«.

With Dunbar's (1996) concept of language and storytelling in mind, one could argue that scandals constitute a very particular and very powerful element of our social evolution. From this anthropological perspective a scandal would constitute a communicative invariant, allowing groups to effectively mediate social events which involve the breaching of certain moral or legal codes and help to determine how to elicit a sufficient pub-

lic response against actions that would otherwise endanger social peace (cf. THOMPSON 2000).

Our first volume of scandalology contains research that backs this claim up further. Scandal is an invariant that follows quite stable communicative schemata. There always seem to be similar social figurations and cascading actions (cf. WAGNER-EGELHAAF 2018; also ENTMAN 2012) that constitute a set of differentiated mediatised speech acts and discursive practices in the ›process of scandalization‹ (illustrated by the ›scandal clock‹, BURKHARDT 2018).

With this said, however, certain inconsistencies of scandalology beg our attention. Paradoxically scandals seem to fulfill a stable transcultural function by sharing a set of essential characteristics while manifesting itself in different forms and situations in culture. At our first conference in 2016 we discovered that intercultural boundaries existed with respect to what social events caused a process of scandalization and how specific dynamics of this process materialized. Such differences of realizing the potential of scandalization may be caused by the specifics of varying cultural frameworks.

The 2nd international conference in scandalology therefore focussed on »Cultures of Scandals – Scandals in Culture« to examine cultural factors of scandalization. A closer look into scandal studies shows that, while the factor ›culture‹ has been addressed, a deeper analysis of cultural influences in the process of (non-)scandalization remains unexplored. For instance, Thompson's (2000) work on political scandals highlights two main variables which are necessary to understand today's media and scandalization: first, changes in journalistic culture, and second, changes in political culture (THOMPSON 2000). This prompts several questions: What if a society's media culture or its political system are (historically) different from ours? How can we make sense of social events when something that would be a scandal in Western societies is not mediated publicly as such in other cultures and vice versa? Under what circumstances do different cultures of scandals actually emerge and how do such scandal cultures become firmly established? Such are some desiderata of scandal research.

Admittedly, the lack of a heuristic model causes difficulties to analyze such questions about cultures of scandals systematically. Such a model should account for different variables that shape such cultural frameworks.

In analogy to similar heuristic models of communication and mass media (WEISCHENBERG 1994; SHOEMAKER/REESE 2014) it makes sense to differentiate three dimensions: An analysis of variables that determine cultures of scandals and consequently mediatised acts of scandalization

can be facilitated on a micro-, meso- and macro-level. Such a model would help to distinguish constants that manifest scandals as the aforementioned transcultural phenomenon but also account for differences that determine the makeup of specific cultures of scandals.

Hence, we should consider that the micro-level comprises invariant human dispositions, i.e. cognitive and emotional schemata that affect scandalizers and scandalized alike, as well as a public audience of such scandalization (cf. VERBALYTE 2018). Feelings of moral outrage and cognitive attention-biases are present in every cultural setting. Moreover, the ›scandal-clock‹ (BURKHARDT 2018) follows similar narratives in different nations. All scandal-agents are hard-wired to act in a more or less similar way. International and interdisciplinary research in the present edited volume provides further evidence for this. Historical analysis shows that scandalization in ancient Rome, for instance, unfolds in a way that seems quite relatable from our modern perspective. However, a heuristic model should also account for variable factors that contribute to scandalization on the micro-level by taking into account different culture-specific social patterns of media use (especially with respect to the scandal audience) or the social status and the possible affiliations to different social fields, e.g. politics, sports or literature, with respect to scandalizers and scandalized. Intelligence of scandalizers and scandalized can also vary. Some scandalized agents just react more intelligently to accusations and thus seem to be less affected by scandals than others are. We should assume that scandalization could vary because the degree of public outrage also depends on these individual characteristics in different cases.

On the macro- and meso-level, varying organizational and systemic conditions determine the emergence and development of scandals. Analogous to micro-level prerequisites, features can differ to some extent. The makeup of modern societies in general poses constant variables, comprising economic, political, legal, cultural, academic and media subsystems that shape scandals in cultures. However, the structures and norms of institutions within these subsystems vary to some degree in different nations and different cultures. In authoritarian regimes, scandalization is used to stabilize governmental power, whereas coverage on misconducts by powerful people and institutions can serve as a corrective in democracies. With respect to media institutions, for instance, some countries have a strong public-service sector, whereas privatized media have a stronger market position in other nations. A strong private media sector seems to have an

impact on journalism and consequently on specific cultures of scandals (cf. MAZZONI/MINCIGRUCCI/STANZIANO 2018). Canel and Sanders (2005) suggest that an analysis of different cultures of scandals and its effect on the realization of scandals in cultures should also bring varying levels of public trust in politics and journalism into the explanatory frame. This would include analyses of the level of freedom of the press and legal as well as constitutional settings in different societies.

With this preliminary outline of a heuristic model for scandal research in mind, it does not come as a surprise that the present volume of scandalology aims to map a multi-faceted socio-communicative phenomenon by identifying various factors that shape specific cultures of scandals. Hence, contributions cover areas such as organizational culture, media logics and its effect on journalistic coverage, character assassination, minorities in the media, historical analyses, scandals in hybrid media systems, legal backgrounds of media coverage and psychological analyses.

The collected volume opens with a general critique of the functionalist paradigm as HANS MATHIAS KEPPLINGER's (Germany) keynote lecture condenses the debate about functionalistic and empirical scandal research. Kepplinger criticizes functionalist theory because it does not fulfill fundamental empirical and theoretical requirements. To close that research gap, he develops a three-step research agenda that is more suitable for analyzing complex scandal processes by differentiating between scandal reality, the media coverage on scandals and media effects during and after scandalization processes. He particularly focuses on negative outcomes of media scandals, especially feelings of fear and helplessness of scandalized actors. His work offers a well-thought-out analytical framework to reduce functionalistic deficits in scandal research.

CHRISTIAN VON SIKORSKI (Germany) contributes to our understanding of cultures of scandals on a micro-level by analyzing psychological conditions in political scandals. Based on the motivational reasoning perspective and empirical studies he argues that positive attitudes of recipients towards politicians may be strengthened during a scandal. Von Sikorski's research shows that strong political attitudes are important variables in the evaluation process of citizens. Von Sikorski therefore advocates for a stronger focus on such variables in empirical research.

MONIKA VERBALYTE (Germany/Lithuania) provides further research on the micro-level. Verbalyte presents a deep analysis of the prominent German scandal case of former Minister of Defense, Karl-Theodor zu Gutten-

berg. The study uses a discursive analysis of zu Guttenberg's resignation speech and guided interviews with supporters of zu Guttenberg during the scandal. Her empirical findings suggest that his supporters internalized the fallen hero narrative. The methodologically ambitious qualitative study shows how scandalization processes create and substantiate deeper maintained relationship between the scandalized politician and ordinary citizens. This methodological framework could be used for the study of further political scandals because it helps to understand deeper beliefs and emotions in the context of scandals.

ANNIKA KLEIN and MURIEL MOSER (Germany) transfer contemporary scandal theory to a historico-cultural setting. Their study analyzes the trial of Caelius in ancient Rome and shows how Cicero used compromising information to scandalize Clodia Metelli, a witness of the trial. Klein and Moser demonstrate how the Roman public assembly was turned into a muckraking confrontation. Their study offers fruitful findings for interpersonal communication research as well as for scandal research in general. The historic analysis also reveals that negative campaigning and techniques of litigation in public relations have been part of judicial and political confrontations since ancient times.

MARTIJN ICKS (Netherlands) and ERIC SHIRAEV (USA) further discuss the phenomenon of character assassination as part of scandalization. Their research sheds light on how and why character attacks cause scandals. By comparing four historical cases of (attempted) character assassination, Shiraev and Icks substantiate the argument that phenomena of scandalization underlie certain transcultural and transhistorical discursive practices and social figurations. In order to rationally argue why and how character attacks cause possible scandals, the researchers pose their own model. This model helps to differentiate the quantity and quality of rhetorical practices that constitute character attacks on the one hand and the degree of social sensitivity to certain issues that is prefigured by aforementioned cultural variables on the other hand. The detailed and informed discussion of the case studies and the grounding of the analysis in a heuristic model are both valuable additions to the field of scandalology.

MARK FELDSTEIN (USA) discusses a political (non-)scandal that has become somewhat of a historical afterwit. Feldstein investigates the CIA's countless (failed) attempts to assassinate Cuban revolutionary leader Fidel Castro and discusses why this plot, despite journalistic exposés, never caused major public outrage and had little political consequences. Feld-



stein's case study is not only an entertaining read about spies, murders and the mafia but also makes interesting observations on how changes in journalistic culture can affect media coverage of potentially confrontative issues. The Castro murder-plot is a lesson what happens if the press covers relevant issues extensively but belatedly, i. e. when public interest has faded away, so that scandalization cannot function as a corrective of certain practices, such as misconduct and power abuse in the intelligence community.

In addition to these historical analyses, W. TIMOTHY COOMBS and SHERRY J. HOLLADAY (USA) give empirical insights into two very recent issues that could cause scandalization in the United States: cases of domestic violence by NFL players and enduring misogynistic behavior in the tech-industry. Coombs' and Holladay's main argument is that specific industry cultures in both sectors are fundamentally influencing decision-making and determine whether misbehavior is scandalized in an organization or in the industry. Such industry cultures affect whether specific actions are sanctioned or not. The authors show that deficits in organizational communication, particularly crisis prevention and management, are deeply rooted in industrial culture. By elaborating on the concept of organizational culture, Coombs and Holladay deliver a new explanation why scandalous actions are ignored and public outrage is not necessarily met with sanctions at all.

ROBERTO MINCIGRUCCI (Italy) ventures further into his analysis of the Italian media system and the prevalence of political scandals. The study focuses on the coverage of corruption in major Italian newspapers. The author argues that the journalist's tendency to cover corruption through mediated scandals originates from the process of political popularization. The analysis shows that scandals are so widespread in Italian political news because they transform corruption into an attractive product for a wide range of audiences. Thereby, Mincigrucci improves our understanding of cultures of scandal because his research highlights the connection between the commercialization of media systems and effects on the dynamics of scandalization and political narratives in general.

ADRIANA MONTANARO-MENA (Costa Rica) focuses on scandals in the context of human rights and social movements and discusses a case in Brazilian media and politics: the construction of the Belo Monte hydroelectric plant. The author analyzes the dominant narratives behind the construction of the plant and illustrates how political and corporate public relations managed to frame social movements and the violation of human rights in Brazilian media. Montanaro-Mena argues that the case of Belo Monte was not

a scandal because it became clear that institutions who were responsible for licensing the hydroelectric plant had exploited indigenous communities, as one would expect. Rather, the scandalization revolved around a supposedly undue enforcement of human rights by social movements. Influenced by corporate and political strategic communication, issues about the values of democratic decision-making and precautionary measures that meant to protect indigenous people passed to a secondary level on the media agenda. Thus, the study contributes to the ongoing critical discussion how to evaluate democracies in which journalism has become (too) easily influenced by special interests of corporate and political elites.

GEMMA HORTON (Great Britain) addresses legal questions of media coverage in scandalization processes. Horton evaluates privacy rules in France and the USA in a comparative study by examining the most prominent political scandals in both countries. The paper is also a study on media ethics, which are often based on legal restrictions. Her results show that French law has historically protected politicians' private sphere, while in the US privacy rules have been rather weak until today. Horton argues that these legal differences are changing in the French context right now due to cultural transformations of public conceptions of politics, which she demonstrates with an analysis of the scandalizing media reporting on the private sphere of French presidents Sarkozy, Hollande and Macron.

ANNA KLEIMAN (Israel) analyzes the ›Jerusalem Dress‹ scandal, regarded as a seemingly harmless fashion gesture by some, which received massive media attention in Israel but less so in international news. The ›Jerusalem Dress‹ is an example for a scandal in culture. Social outrage was provoked by a bold dress worn by the Israeli Minister of Culture and Sports at the Cannes Film Festival red carpet event in 2017. The author argues that this reflected how a very refined balance in Israeli culture was roughly undermined. Kleiman offers a thorough media and discourse analysis of the case and illustrates how scandals in culture can result from the overlapping of several social sub-fields. The dynamics of scandalization in this case stemmed from interrelations of discursive practices and social figurations in fields such as fashion, celebrity culture, national and international affairs, national identity politics, religion and new media.

The collection closes with a paper by ANDREJ ŠKOLKAY (Slovakia) who discusses fundamental methodological challenges in our academic culture. Školkay rightly observes that what attracts the attention of scandal researchers may only be the ›the top of the iceberg‹ because such research

is overwhelmingly based on case studies. Case study research has – mostly unacknowledged – deficits both with respect to the selection of cases and in the understanding of overall scientific outcomes and goals of analyses. Especially the imbalanced case selection may lead to wrong generalizations about the nature, frequency of occurrences, types, causes and consequences of scandals, thus problematizing future research in scandalology.

At the end of this introductory chapter, it will probably not cause moral outrage if we, the editors, express our gratitude to everyone who contributed to yet another excellent conference and laid the foundation for this collected volume. A special thank-you goes to our keynote speaker Hans Mathias Kepplinger who is one of the leading researchers in the field of media scandals not only in Germany but also in an international context. His keynote is essential to highlight fundamental misunderstandings in the study of scandalization processes. We would also like to thank the Ludwig-Delp-Foundation for their financial support of the conference and this publication. The Ludwig-Delp-Foundation is a strong and reliable partner in our efforts to build up an international platform for scandal researchers. Without this partnership, the scandalology conferences would not have been possible in the way they were organized. We hope that our biennial conference of scandalology and its subsequent publications advance international scandal research. An increasing number of paper proposals and the high media attention show that there is a great demand for scholarly analyses of this social phenomenon.

Finally, yet importantly, we would like to thank you, dear readers, for your interest in ›Scandalogy‹. We hope this second book provides new insights that will help you to develop new ideas for researching and teaching scandals.

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