PART I

NARRATIVES OF BELONGING

1

Producers, Consumers, Jews, and Antisemitism in German Historiography

It is a truism that historians need sources for their research. A good historian, it is generally agreed even by those who emphasize the importance of models and theory, is one who allows her or himself to be guided by the records. Historians of nineteenth-century German antisemitism, for example, usually cite published reports of antisemitic behavior or utterances from the time. Given the importance of allowing documentary evidence to testify to the past, how should historians respond when the material they consult does not paint the expected picture? More specifically, how should they respond when they find an absence of evidence? Currently, what historians imagine the past to be is, perhaps understandably, to a great extent based on what is present in historical sources rather than on what is absent from these records. But too often historians remain complacent about or unaware of the meaning of such omissions and absences. To confront, to study and to theorize what is *not* recorded challenge basic rules of historical theory and methodology. It might also generate new ways of reading the past. This is particularly the case for Jewish histories, which run the risk of misinterpreting the experience of Jews in the past by relying only on Jewish materials.

One example of the pitfalls of Jewish history can be found in Shulamit Volkov's influential essay on antisemitism as a "cultural code."[1] According to Volkov, toward the end of the nineteenth century Germany underwent a process of cultural polarization defined by two opposing concepts

---

[1] Shulamit Volkov, "Antisemitism as a Cultural Code. Reflection on the History and Historiography of Antisemitism in Imperial Germany," *Leo Baeck Year Book* 23 (1978), 25–46.

3

toward Jews: antisemitism and emancipation. Professing antisemitism became a kind of a cultural code. It denoted membership in a cultural camp characterized by a radical antimodern mentality which rejected liberalism, capitalism, socialism, and democracy and called for the reestablishment of a National Community (*Volksgemeinschaft*). Volkov bases her argument on the published speech and writing of antisemites, as well as pleas in favor of Jewish emancipation. By portraying German society's relationship to Jews exclusively through documents that treat Jews as their main subject (either positively or negatively), Volkov generates a picture of straightforward binary opposition that in many ways reproduces the images of the sources she used. The question arises: was the Jewish theme really so central to life in Germany around the turn of the century? Can, and should, the Jews indeed be regarded as the touchstone of German society? If this were the case, we would expect to find the "Jewish theme" or at least anti-Jewish sentiments broadly expressed by members of the nationalistic, antimodern or anticapitalist camp. Yet, as the following will show, this kind of nexus cannot always be established. Jews were not always either included or excluded nor were they always treated, as we might expect based on hitherto research, within the broad framework of so-called reactionary modernism.[2]

THE FIGHT AGAINST DIRT AND TRASH WRITINGS

The first example that I would like to examine here is the fight against so-called *Schund- und Schmutzschriften* (literally translatable as "Dirt and Trash writings"). An amazing number of works that fall under the heading of "the struggle against *Schund- und Schmutzschriften*" emanated from Germany between 1870 and 1933. The fight against so-called pulp and trash writings took place in newspapers, pamphlets, books, lectures, exhibitions, and special journals, in calls to boycott the shops where such documents were sold and in book burnings. The list of institutions and organizations that participated in this struggle is impressively long. Led by the Book Dealers' Association, it was joined by government and local authorities, churches, schools, political parties, libraries, and a variety of cultural and moral associations in more than thirty-three cities. Together,

[2] Jeffrey Herf, *Reactionary Modernism: Technology, Culture, and Politics in Weimar and the Third Reich* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984).

they organized campaigns to wage war on pulp literature and promote so-called good literature.[3] Practically all of Germany's state and local archives have holdings documenting this struggle.

Today's observer may wonder at such intense preoccupation with the phenomenon of *Schund und Schmutz*, especially since there was never a commonly accepted definition of these two concepts. *Schund und Schmutz* was not to describe a particular sort of literary genre but instead to designate writings of reputedly low aesthetic and ethical value.[4] In other words, any publication could be, and clearly was, branded as *Schund und Schmutz*. Before World War I the novels of Karl May, for example, were labeled as "*Schund*" and their distribution attacked. Writings with socialistic touches or radical nationalistic literature were also often treated in the same way. This circumstance seems to explain the great variety of publications about the topic as well as the various types of *Schund und Schmutz* that they referred to.

A surprisingly broad coalition of people from all political and religious stripes viewed pulp literature as a social problem of the first order.[5] The vast amount of extant documentary material attests to how widespread were fears about the destructive influence of these works, referred to variously as pulp (*Schmutz*), trash (*Schund*), smut (*Unzucht*), and inferior (*untergeistige*) writings and kitsch. *Schund und Schmutz* writings became the scapegoat for all of society's social ills. Those educated men most actively engaged in fighting trash writings (*Schundkämpfer*) considered them a manifestation of a rival culture threatening to undermine the social order at whose head the educated male bourgeoisie had established itself. In particular pornography, homosexuality, internationalism and capitalism were viewed as diseases of society driving the popularity of *Schund und Schmutz* writings. At the same time, these alleged social ills were associated

---

[3] "Organisationen, Vereine etc. zur Bekämpfung der Schund- und Schmutzschriften" in: Geheimes Staatsarchiv Preußischer Kulturbesitz. Berlin, Rep 77 Tit 2772 Nr. 12.

[4] Wolfgang Kaschuba and Kaspar Maase (eds.), *Schund und Schönheit: Populäre Kultur um 1900* (Cologne: Böhlau Verlag 2001), and Mirjam Storim, *Ästhetik im Umbruch: Zur Funktion der "Rede über Kunst" um 1900 am Beispiel der Debatte um Schmutz und Schund* (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag, 2002).

[5] Georg Jäger, "Der Kampf gegen Schmutz- und Schund. Die Reaktion der Gebildeten auf die Unterhaltungsindustrie, *Archiv für Geschichte des Buchwesens* 31 (1988), 163–191; Detlev Peukert, Der Schund- und Schmutzkampf als "Sozialpolitik der Seele," in: *Das war ein Vorspiel nur . . .* (Berlin: Akademie Verlag der Künste, 1983); Gideon Reuveni, "Der Aufstieg der Bürgerlichkeit und die bürgerliche Selbstauflösung. Die Bekämpfung der Schund- und Schmutzliteratur in Deutschland bis 1933 als Fallbeispiel, *Zeitschrift für Geschichtswissenschaft* 51 (2003), 131–144.

with Judaism and the Jews.[6] However, despite the prominence of Jews in the publishing world, an examination of the history of the war on *Schund und Schmutz* writings shows that it was not particularly marked by anti-semitism. Even a magazine designed to wage war on trash, such as the *Hochwacht*, with its manifestly nationalist leanings, did not use antisemitic language or images in its struggle against pulp literature.[7] On the contrary, during the period prior to World War I, articles in the anti-trash struggle praised the cultural virtues of the Jews and their superior taste in reading. And both before and after the war, Jewish individuals and organizations played an active role in the struggle against *Schund und Schmutz* in the name of high culture and *Bildung*.[8] After 1918 the first official lists of pulp publications contained a number of works with a manifestly nationalistic and antisemitic character. These works, which fell into the category of patriotic trash literature (*patriotische Schundliteratur*), were banned from distribution by the 1926 Law for the Protection of Young People against Trash and Filth (referred to as "the Law").[9]

Despite the positive image enjoyed by the Jews in the context of the struggle against pulp writings, alongside efforts to repress works with a manifestly antisemitic character, it would be going too far to conclude that the struggle against pulp literature was used as a tool for combating antisemitism. At the end of 1928 for example, the Rhine-Westphalian Youth Welfare Department in Düsseldorf tried to ban an issue of the Nazi Party newspaper *Westdeutscher Beobachter* because of an article entitled "Sex Crime in the House of Tietz." The article described in great detail indecent sexual acts which a Jew was alleged to have perpetrated against a German girl at the department store owned by Leonhard Tietz, a Jew, in Cologne. The Düsseldorf Youth Welfare Department considered

---

[6] On these images of the Jew see for example Sander L. Gilman, *Smart Jews: The Construction of the Image of Jewish Superior Intelligence* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1996); Michael Schmidt and Stefan Rohrbacher, *Judenbilder. Kulturgeschichte antijüdischer Mythen und antisemitischer Vorurteile* (Reinbek: Rowohlt, 1991); Julius H. Schoeps and Joachim Schlör (eds.), *Bilder der Judenfeindschaft* (Augsburg: Bechtermünz Verlag, 1999).

[7] On this magazine and its publisher Karl Brunner, who became famous after the War as the Weimar Republic film censor, see Paul Samuleit, "Aus der Geschichte des Kampfes gegen den Schund, in Samuleit Paul and Brunckhorst Hans, *Geschichte und Wege der Schundbekämpfung* (Berlin: Carl Heymanns Verlag, 1922), 3–22.

[8] Rudolf Schenda, *Die Lesestoffe der Kleinen Leute* (Munich: C.H. Beck, 1976), 172; Gabriele v. Glasenapp and Michael Nagel, *Das jüdische Jugendbuch* (Stuttgart: Verlag Metzler, 1996), 103.

[9] Margaret F. Stieg, "The 1926 German Law to Protect Youth against Trash and Filth: Moral Protectionism in a Democracy," *Central European History* 23 (1990), 22–56.

this article to be pornographic and harmful to young people, and demanded
that distribution of the relevant issue of the newspaper be banned. After the
application was rejected by the Berlin Examining Bureau for Trash and
Filth on the grounds that banning the paper would constitute political
censorship, the Chief Examining Bureau for Trash and Filth ruled that
the need to protect young persons against corruption of their moral values
outweighed the defense of the freedom of political expression. However,
since the article was published in a daily newspaper the Bureau ruled that
the risk of corrupting youth had passed and it no longer saw fit to ban the
newspaper.[10]

CONSUMER DISCOURSE VS. PRODUCER DISCOURSE

Antisemitism was viewed as a political outlook, not a social problem.
Why, in the light of this state of affairs, did antisemitism as political
ideology that provided a response to the "social question" not play
a key role defining the struggle against pulp writings?[11] Undoubtedly
many factors contributed to this situation. I would argue that a key
element was the special nature of the struggle against pulp works: it was
what may be called a "consumer discourse" rather than a "producer
discourse." That is, it was a discourse dealing with consumption and the
relationship between consumer and producer, rather than dealing with
production or the character and the situation of the bourgeois classes.
It should be emphasized that the two concepts of "consumer-discourse"
and "producer-discourse" are not "two sides of the same coin" or "dis-
course" and "counter-discourse," as could be assumed from the two terms
"consumer" vs. "producer." Instead, they are two types of discourse with
different sorts of references and functions.

The "consumer-discourse" is concerned with the "masses," which as
the main audience for commercialized culture are most exposed to suppo-
sedly detrimental or harmful influences. In many ways this discourse
reflects the fears about a potential "dictatorship of the consumers":

---

[10] Archiv der Deutschen Bücherei Leipzig, 351/4/1, Protokolle der Oberprüfstelle für
Schund- und Schmutzliteratur 1929, 13. See also Hans Wingender, *Erfahrungen im
Kampf gegen Schund- und Schmutzschriften* (Düsseldorf: Published by the author,
1929), 50–54.

[11] On the "social question" and antisemitism: Moshe Zimmermann, "Die Judenfrage" als
"die soziale Frage. Zu Kontinuität und Stellenwert des Antisemitismus vor und nach dem
Nationalsozialismus," in *Faschismus und Faschismen im Vergleich* (Cologne: HS-Verlag,
1998), 149–163.

a situation in which consumers' tastes and demands would completely determine production and supply. One of the main features of this discourse is the implicit contrast between self-controlled bourgeois individuals on the one hand and the easily manipulated, undifferentiated masses on the other. Whoever belonged to these masses (mainly women, workers and youth) were seen by members of the bourgeoisie as "the other without" and were considered as a danger to the dominance of bourgeois values. In other words the "consumer-discourse" was used as a means to strengthen bourgeois self-definition.[12]

On the other hand, it is the producers who are at the center of the "producer discourse" which reflects the competition between and within the bourgeoisie. This type of discourse deals more with the division and conflicts among the middle classes, i.e. with what can be defined, from the point of view of this class, as "the other within." There is here a certain affinity between the so-called other without" and the "other within." Both others are frequently characterized by such perceived negative traits as femininity, materialism and imitation. Yet, while the "consumer-discourse " is defensive in attempting to preserve bourgeois values, the "producer-discourse" reflects schisms and frictions within the middle classes.

Bearing this proposed division between producer and consumer discourse in mind, let us return to our example and try to explain why antisemitism was not a defining feature of the anti-"dirt and trash" campaigns. The Jews, I would argue, were not considered members of the masses, and thus targets of commercialization, but instead were seen to belong to the producing classes, whose power was weakened in direct proportion to the growing power of the consumer masses.

The so-called capitalism debate is a further striking illustration of this state of affairs. While Jews played a central role in early discussions on the origins of capitalism, especially following Werner Sombart's notorious book *Juden und das Wirtschaftsleben* (1911), they were absent in discussions on the need to discipline consumers.[13] Even Sombart himself,

---

[12] For more on this notion see, for example: Martin Jay, "In the Empire of the Gaze: Foucault and the Denigration of Vision in Twentieth-century French Thought," in *Foucault: A Critical Reader* (ed.) David Counzens Hoy (New York: Basil Blackwell, 1986), 175–204.

[13] Werner Sombart, *Die Juden und das Wirtschaftsleben* (Leipzig: Duncker & Humblot, 1911). On the issue of disciplining consumption in Germany, see Warren G. Breckmann, "Disciplining Consumption: The Debate about Luxury in Wilhelmine Germany, 1890–1914," *Journal of Social History* 24 (1990/91), 485–505; Hartmut Berghoff (ed.), Konsumpolitik. Die Regulierung des privaten Verbrauchs im 20. *Jahrhundert*

writing on the problem of consumption, did not mention Jews, but focused exclusively on the role of women as initiators of consumer culture.[14]

THE BOOK-SELLING CRISIS

The absence of Jews and Jewishness from certain type of discussions becomes even more evident in a comparison of parallel debates, for instance in the discussions on the situation of book reading after the Great War. As in many other areas of life, the book trade felt itself to be in crisis after the First World War. At the time, scholars considered the main reason for the so-called "book crisis" (*Buchkrise*) to be the great social changes in German society following the War, and the enduring economic instability and political crises of the period.[15] Hans Thomas, the editor of the German new right magazine, *Die Tat* ("The Deed"), summed up the situation in his characteristic style: "Your buying circles are changing. Readers' intellectual demands are dwindling. The scourge of proletarianization and vulgarization is spreading at the speed of light and supporting the tendency, already present, to a flattening and general leveling out."[16]

The core of this change was perceived as the "disintegration of the bourgeoisie" on the one hand and "the advent of mass society" on the other. Terms such as "*Vermassung*" (literally "massification"), "proletarianization," and "Americanization" were often used to describe the

(Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1999). On Sombart and the Jews: Alfred Philipp, *Die Juden und das Wirtschaftsleben. Eine antikritisch bibliographische Studie zu Werner Sombart: Die Juden und das Wirtschaftsleben* (Strasburg: Heitz, 1929); Arthur Mitzman, *Sociology and Estrangement: Three Sociologists of Imperial Germany* (New Brunswick: Transaction Books, 1987); Toni Oelson, "The Place of the Jews in Economic History as viewed by German Scholars," *Leo Baeck Year Book* 7 (1962), 183–212; David S. Landes, "The Jewish Merchant. Typology and Stereotypology in Germany," *Leo Baeck Year Book* 19 (1974): 11–30; Paul R. Mendes-Flohr, "Werner Sombart's: The Jews and Modern Capitalism. An Analysis of its Ideological Premises," *Leo Baeck Year Book* 21 (1976), 87–107; Avraham Barkai, "Judentum, Juden und Kapitalismus; ökonomische Vorstellungen von Max Weber und Werner Sombart," *Menora* 5 (1994), 25–38. Jehuda Reinhartz, *Fatherland or Promised Land: The Dilemma of the German Jew 1893 – 1914* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1975), 190–195.

[14] Werner Sombart, *Liebe, Luxus und Kapitalismus. Über die Entstehung der modernen Welt aus dem Geist der Verschwendung* (Berlin: Wagenbach, 1983), first published 1913.

[15] Gideon Reuveni, "The 'Crisis of the Book' and German Society after the First World War," *German History* 20 (2002), 438–461.

[16] Hans Thomas was the pen name of Hans Zehrer. Hans Thomas, "Das Chaos der Bücher," *Die Tat* 23 (1931), 647.

transition from a bourgeois society to a mass society. The growing popularity of new media such as film and radio and new leisure activities such as sport and dance were particularly seen as manifestations of the new mass society. When librarian Max Wieser even asked whether books still suited the modern mentality as a means of education, enlightenment and artistic expression he predicted that in the future, books would no longer play such a central role in society as they had in the past three hundred years.[17] In the eyes of contemporaries, the popularity of the new media – film, the gramophone and radio – meant the end of the monopoly of the written word as the repository of human knowledge and marked the transition from a culture in which the book was the main means of mediation between humans and their surroundings to a culture based on seeing and hearing.

In the Weimar period, this sort of cultural pessimism was not limited to political conservatives but characterized general attitudes to culture at the time. Right and left, men and women, Jews and Christians were united in the battle for the German book culture and in so doing they formed a joint culturally conservative front. "People practice sports, dance, spend their evening hours by the radio, in the cinema, and, outside working hours, everyone is so busy that nobody has time to read a book,"[18] the famous Jewish liberal publisher Samuel Fischer wrote in 1926. He claimed that the World War and the subsequent economic suffering had destroyed the bourgeois social fabric that had been the bedrock of German intellectual and cultural life.[19] He blamed the collapse of the bourgeois social

---

[17] Max Wieser, "Die geistige Krisis des Buches und die Volksbibliotheken," *Preußische Jahrbücher* 191 (1923), 184. For similar views, cf. Johannes Molzahn, "Nicht mehr Lesen! Sehen!" *Das Kunstblatt*, 12 (1928), 78–82; Hans Siemsen, "Bücherbesprechung," *Die Weltbühne* 21 (1923), 857–859; Siegfried Kracauer, "Die Photographie," in *Der verbotene Blick* (Leipzig: Reclam, 1992), 185–203.

[18] Samuel Fischer, "Bemerkungen zur Bücherkrise," Friedrich Pfäffin (ed.), *Der S. Fischer Verlag von der Gründung bis zur Rückkehr aus den Exil*, (Marbach: Ausstellungskatalog, 1985), 357–360, here 357.

[19] For a late formulation of the thesis of the collapse of the bourgeoisie, which is really a form of the theory of Germany's "special path" in history, cf., particularly, Hans Mommsen, "Die Auflösung des Bürgertums seit dem späten 19. Jahrhundert," Jürgen Kocka (ed.), *Bürger und Bürgerlichkeit im 19. Jahrhundert* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1987), 288–315; Konrad H. Jarausch, "Die Krise des deutschen Bildungsbürgertums im ersten Drittel des 20. Jahrhunderts," Jürgen Kocka (ed.) *Bildungsbürgertum im 19. Jahrhundert. Politischer Einfluß und gesellschaftliche Formation* (Stuttgart: Klett Cotta, 1989), 180–206; Horst Möller, "Bürgertum und bürgerlich-liberale Bewegung nach 1918," Lothar Gall (ed.), *Bürgertum und bürgerlich-liberale Bewegung in Mitteleuropa seit dem 18. Jahrhundert* (Munich: Oldenbourg, 1997), 243–342.

associations, which had previously organized cultural and leisure activities and acted as a social glue, for bringing about the change in German society following the First World War. The loss of interest in reading was a clear reflection of these changes. Literary associations, readings, libraries and drama associations did more than merely disseminate culture: in fact, according to Fischer, they helped to create a special German form of shared culture (*Gemeinschaftsgefühl deutscher Kultur*).

The "Book crisis" was therefore primarily a book-*selling* crisis and mirrored the fear of publishers, booksellers and authors – the core of the male bourgeois educated classes – of the demise of "reading culture," which was regarded as a main component of bourgeois culture. With the decline of reading culture, these men feared that their social position was also at stake. The anxiety about the power of readers to determine the fate of a book reveals that the book crisis was, indeed, a feature of what I have termed "consumer discourse." Hence it is not surprising that Jewishness, despite the prominence of Jews in the German publishing world, was not a topic within this discourse. Even the *CV-Zeitung*, the official publication of *Centralverein deutscher Staatsbürger jüdischen Glaubens* (Central Association of German Citizens of Jewish Faith, hereafter *Centralverein*), which was extremely sensitive to any hint of antisemitism, did not mention it in its discussions of the German book crisis.[20]

THE WAR ON ALCOHOL

A further example of the sometimes surprising absence of antisemitism or Jewish issues from contemporary debates in late nineteenth and early twentieth century Germany is the war on alcohol. Toward the end of the nineteenth century alcohol came to be widely recognized in Germany as a social problem. Military officials, churches, factory owners, and Social Democrats all viewed alcoholism as a sign of moral failure and even as a disease in itself. Antialcohol campaigners linked drinking to lost productivity and warned of the devastating influence on both the human body and on society as a whole. Studies of alcoholism confirmed these fears, presenting insobriety as responsible "for the degeneration of entire nations" and for "the deterioration of the race."[21] These studies reflected

[20] Hanns Martin Elster, "Wer liest noch Bücher? Eine Betrachtung über den Niedergang des deutschen Buches," CV-Zeitung (March 22, 1929), 141–142.
[21] On these studies in: Alfred Hegge, *Alkohol und bürgerliche Gesellschaft im 19. Jahrhundert* (Berlin: Colloquium Verlag, 1988) and Hasso Spode, *Die Macht der*