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0521652391 - Defiled Trades and Social Outcasts: Honor and Ritual Pollution in Early Modern Germany

Kathy Stuart

Excerpt

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Introduction: defiled trades

In the winter of 1654 an unusual wedding took place in the free imperial city of Augsburg. A young fisherman, Andreas Anhauser, married Barbara Leichnam, the daughter of the local skinner. When Andreas had proposed marriage to Barbara in the preceding summer his parents had been aghast at this mismatch. Both Andreas and Barbara came from families that had long resided in Augsburg, but the Anhausers were citizens and prominent members of the fishermen's guild, whereas the Leichnam family had filled the post of urban skinner for three generations. Skinners' work consisted of removing animal carcasses, putting down wild dogs, burying the corpses of suicides in the carrion field, and emptying latrines, among other unsavory tasks. Skinners also assisted the executioner in carrying out a variety of criminal punishments, in particular hangings, the most dishonorable form of execution. The very name of the young bride gave expression to the work her family had performed for generations; her surname *Leichnam* translates as "corpse." As skinners, the Leichnam clan belonged to the so-called *unehrliche Leute* or "dishonorable people," an outcast group in early modern Germany in which membership was ascribed by birth. The fishermen, by contrast, constituted an ancient and honorable guild. If the young fisherman were to marry into skinners' stock, his wife's dishonor would fall on him, an outrage to both his family and his guild.¹

The Leichnam family was no less opposed to the marriage, perhaps because they knew the young couple would face social ostracism. And most likely they also believed that Barbara could make an economically more advantageous match within her own social estate. In spite of their dishonorable status, skinners typically were wealthier than the honorable artisans who despised them. In any case, both sets of parents used their considerable authority over their children to prevent the union. They threatened and cajoled, and when that did not help, they had their children imprisoned. With the girl safely locked away, Andreas was released. He then threw himself in the river Lech in an attempt to drown himself, but he was rescued by passersby. Meanwhile Barbara cut her wrists in prison, but she was saved by the jailer. These joint suicide attempts forced the parents to give in to their children's

¹ StadtAA, HAP, 1650–9, fo. 203 on the marriage; Stadt AA, Reichsstadtakten, Stadtbed. 1085/50 on the Leichnam family.

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demands. Before they would endanger the lives and the very souls of their children, they would consent to the marriage. They had done everything in their power to prevent it, the Anhausers claimed, but their boy was “insane from love” (*insania filia amoris*). They conceded that this was a scandalous and dangerous marriage, but their child’s salvation should take precedence over the “mere political consideration of dishonor.”

The fishermen did not agree. To allow this marriage would mean not only accepting Barbara Leichnam into the guild, but her children as well. To incorporate the skinner’s descendants would lead to the everlasting ridicule and dishonor of the entire guild, they wrote in an appeal to the city government. If Andreas insisted on marrying into such dishonorable stock, the fishermen declared, he would be expelled from the guild and forbidden to fish. The city government ruled in favor of the guild. It did not forbid the marriage outright, but the city council decreed that if Andreas went through with it, he could no longer practice his trade. Andreas and Barbara did marry; he was expelled from the fishermen’s guild. Thereafter, he made his living as a day-laborer.²

This case is an example, albeit a dramatic one, of ritual pollution conflicts involving a variety of defiled trades that frequently disrupted early modern German guilds. Defiled tradesmen and their families were known as *Unehrlliche Leute*, or dishonorable people. *Unehrllichkeit* or the concept of dishonor first emerged in the fourteenth century, it hardened and coalesced in the first half of the sixteenth century, and developed its greatest virulence in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Dishonor was a legal and social distinction which did not necessarily convey any moral meaning – although it often did. Dishonor was a vaguely defined term that applied to widely disparate groups bound by little else than the stigma of dishonor: they included vagrants and criminals of all kinds, prostitutes, bastards, the prenuptially conceived, ethnic and religious minorities such as Jews or gypsies, those who had been made legally infamous by honor punishments, and a variety of occupations and trades. Social status was expressed in terms of honor in the early modern German society of orders (*Ständische Gesellschaft*); to be denied status in this society meant to be denied honor. This book does not present a study of dishonor in this generic sense. Instead, we are concerned with social groups who were dishonorable by virtue of their trade. Executioners, skinners, grave-diggers, shepherds, barber-surgeons, millers, linen-weavers, sow-gelders, actors, latrine-cleaners, nightwatchmen, and bailiffs were all defined as “dishonorable people” in this specific sense.

Throughout the Holy Roman empire dishonorable tradesmen suffered various forms of social, economic, legal, and political discrimination on a graduated scale of dishonor at the hands of “honorable” guild artisans and in “honorable” society at

² StadtAA, HWA, Fischer 11, 1653, correspondence between the Anhausers, guild, and magistrates; StadtAA Strafamt, Zucht- und Strafamtsprotokolle, 1659–67, fo. 153 names Andreas Anhauser as a *Tagwerker* (day-laborer) in 1664.

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large. As a matter of course, dishonorable people were excluded from most guilds. In the case of the most extreme dishonor, that of executioners and skinners, *Unehrllichkeit* could lead to exclusion from virtually all normal sociability.³ Executioners and skinners might be pelted with stones by onlookers,⁴ they might be refused access to taverns,⁵ excluded from public baths,⁶ or denied an honorable burial.⁷ Dishonor was transmitted through heredity, often over several generations. The polluting quality of dishonor is one of its defining characteristics. By coming into casual contact with dishonorable people or by violating certain ritualized codes of conduct, honorable citizens could themselves become dishonorable. Being labeled dishonorable had disastrous consequences for an honorable artisan. The guildsman who was tainted by dishonor suffered a kind of social death. He would be excluded from his guild and forbidden to practice his trade, so that he would lose both his livelihood and the social and political identity which guild membership conferred. The fear of pollution through personal contact could go so far that neighbors and onlookers would refuse to help a dishonorable person even in the face of mortal danger. A dramatic example is the executioner's wife who was left to die in childbirth in the north German town of Husum in the 1680s, because the midwife refused to set foot in the executioner's house.⁸

DISHONORABLE PEOPLE, MARGINALITY, AND SOCIAL DISCIPLINING

The history of dishonor is closely related to the history of sovereignty and lordship (*Herrschaft*). What does it tell us about the nature of social control and the relationship of the popular classes to governmental authority that the very instruments who exercised this authority were dishonorable people? Throughout the empire executioners, bailiffs, and other low-level police officers were at the center of dishonor. Both the authorities and the dishonorable officers of law enforcement fended off accusations of dishonor with the argument that they were "the arm of justice." One executioner argued, for example, that he did not "swing his sword for his own pleasure" but executed the judgments meted out by the "honorable"

³ Karl-Sigismund Kramer, "Ehrliche/Unehrlliche Gewerbe," in Adalbert Erler and Ekkehardt Kaufmann, eds., *Handwörterbuch zur deutschen Rechtsgeschichte*, vol. 1 (Berlin, 1971), pp. 855–8. Richard van Dülmen, "Der infame Mensch. Unehrlliche Arbeit und soziale Ausgrenzung in der frühen Neuzeit," in Richard van Dülmen, ed., *Arbeit, Frömmigkeit und Eigensinn. Studien zur historischen Kulturforschung* (Frankfurt a.M., 1990), pp. 106–40.

⁴ StadtAA, HWA, Bäcker 3, September 9, 1570.

⁵ StaatsAA, Lehen und Adel 302c (Herrschaft Babenhausen), August 2, 1637.

⁶ StadtAA, RP 31, fo. 49r, for June 11, 1560. ⁷ StadtAA, HWA, Maurer 2, June–December 1677.

⁸ [Augustus Giese], *Der weheschreiende Stein, über den Greuel, daß man die Diener der Justiz bis anher nicht zu Grabe tragen, und nun auch Ihrer etlichen Frauen in Kindsnoth niemand helfen will* (n.p., 1687), pp. 38–45. Though this tract was published anonymously, its author was Augustus Giese, a doctor of law who served for many years as a city counselor of Husum. In this function he was responsible for arbitrating dishonor conflicts, a task which he found deeply frustrating.

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authorities, which left him with a clear conscience.⁹ Such arguments notwithstanding, punishment meted out in the name of sovereign authorities (*Obrigkei*t) was central to plebeian ideas about dishonor. There were certain things honorable men did not do, namely hunting down, capturing, whipping, torturing, or executing criminals.¹⁰ A stigma attached to the performance of criminal punishments. One goal of this study is to understand what the existence of this stigma reveals about the nature of lordship and sovereignty, about the process of state-building, and about common folk's responses to governmental attempts to "discipline" them.

The paradigm of "social disciplining," first developed by Gerhard Oestreich, has been one of the dominant theoretical approaches of historians of early modern Germany in recent years.¹¹ Social disciplining and "confessionalization"¹² are seen as two interlocking processes. During the implementation of the Reformation and Counter-Reformation, Lutheran, Calvinist, and Catholic territories developed distinct confessional cultures. But despite differences in religious culture, state-building followed a broadly similar pattern in Catholic and Protestant territories. Government authorities and territorial churches cooperated to form the "confessionalized" absolutist state. This modernizing state set out with growing efficiency to "discipline" its subjects, i.e. to control the burgeoning population of the poor, to impose labor discipline, to impose stricter norms of sexual morality, to impose confessional orthodoxy, and to eradicate popular superstitions. The effect was, as historians who apply the social disciplining model suggest, to transform and domesticate popular culture in general, and to inculcate an all-round obedience to the instruments of the state. Historians of other European countries have described a similar process. Peter Burke has described the repression of popular festivities, and the drunkenness, gluttony, and moral disorder elite reformers associated with them, as "the triumph of Lent."¹³ Robert Muchembled has interpreted the witch-hunt in France as a comprehensive effort by the absolutist state to "acculturate" rural society and to extirpate popular "superstitions."¹⁴

According to the German social disciplining paradigm, this process began in the late middle ages in the cities. Urban disciplining practices were then imitated by the nascent absolutist territorial states in the sixteenth century. Social discipline really

⁹ Quote from 1676. StadtAA, HWA, Maurer 2. ¹⁰ StadtAA, HWA, Weber 61.

¹¹ Gerhard Oestreich, "Strukturprobleme des europäischen Absolutismus," in his *Geist und Gestalt des frühmodernen Staates* (Berlin, 1969). On social discipline, see also R. Po-Chia Hsia, *Social Discipline in the Reformation: Central Europe 1550–1750* (London/New York, 1989), especially pp. 141–73; Stefan Breuer, "Sozialdisziplinierung. Probleme und Problemverlagerungen bei Max Weber, Gerhard Oestreich und Michel Foucault," in *Soziale Sicherheit und Soziale Disziplinierung. Beiträge zu einer historischen Theorie der Sozialpolitik*, eds. Christian Sachße and Florian Tennstedt (Frankfurt a.M., 1986), pp. 45–69; Winfried Schulze, "Gerhard Oestreichs Begriff 'Sozialdisziplinierung in der frühen Neuzeit'," *Zeitschrift für historische Forschung* 14 (1987), 265–302.

¹² Kaspar von Greyerz, "Confession as a social and economic factor," in *Germany: a New Social and Economic History*, vol. II (New York, 1996), pp. 309–49.

¹³ Peter Burke, *Popular Culture in Early Modern Europe* (London, 1978), pp. 207–43.

¹⁴ Robert Muchembled, *Popular Culture and Elite Culture in France, 1400–1750* (Baton Rouge, 1985), pp. 235–78.

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began to take hold in the seventeenth century when absolutist states imposed a “disciplining of the staff” (*Stabsdisziplinierung*) to shape their officer corps and state bureaucracy into reliable instruments of government. Finally, in the eighteenth century this process reached its successful conclusion with the stage of “fundamental disciplining,” when social disciplining effectively reached all levels of society.¹⁵ There is a striking overlap in this chronology of social disciplining and the history of dishonor. Discrimination against dishonorable people reached its greatest virulence just when the process of social disciplining was allegedly reaching its successful conclusion.

Although social disciplining is seen as a more or less all-encompassing process, this paradigm is obviously of particular relevance in studies of deviance, marginality, and poverty. *Unehrllichkeit* emerged as a social category in the fourteenth century. Discrimination against dishonorable people coincided with the increasing stigmatization of a variety of marginal groups in the late middle ages. In his broad-ranging synthesis *The Emergence of a Persecuting Society*, R. I. Moore has documented a concerted effort by the centralizing institutions of church and state in the late middle ages to persecute deviants of all kinds with new vigor. This was a European-wide trend. Jews, lepers, heretics, sodomites, and prostitutes were symbolically associated in a new coherent ideology of persecution. They were assimilated “into a single rhetoric.”¹⁶ In Moore’s interpretation, the persecution of deviants is a concomitant of the emergence of new bureaucratic regimes. Persecution of deviants was instigated by elites. Popular anti-semitism, for example, was whipped up by the sermons of mendicant friars.¹⁷ Church and state developed a kind of tool-kit of infamy, a flexible array of measures to mark and segregate deviants. According to Frantisek Graus, the treatment of prostitutes was paradigmatic in this regard. Prostitutes enjoyed relative tolerance in the high middle ages, when ecclesiastical authorities justified their existence as a “lesser evil.” But in the fourteenth century, city governments began to issue new legislation restricting prostitutes to certain areas of the city, creating a new social topography of deviance in the process, and imposing “stigma symbols,”¹⁸ vestimentary signs of infamy which would visibly distinguish them from honorable women. Authorities applied the same measures to Jews, lepers, and beggars.¹⁹ Historians see the proliferation of begging ordinances in cities across Europe around 1350 as a first step in governments’ new social disciplining program. These ordinances distinguished between

¹⁵ Breuer, “Sozialdisziplinierung,” p. 54.

¹⁶ R. I. Moore, *The Formation of a Persecuting Society: Power and Deviance in Western Europe, 950–1250* (Cambridge, 1987), p. 88. ¹⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 27–45.

¹⁸ Diane Owen Hughes, “Distinguishing signs: ear-rings, Jews, and Franciscan rhetoric in the Italian Renaissance city,” *Past and Present* 112 (1986), 3–59, and Robert Jütte, “Stigma-Symbole. Kleidung als identitätsstiftendes Merkmal bei spätmittelalterlichen und frühneuzeitlichen Randgruppen (Juden, Dirnen, Aussätzige, Bettler),” *Saeculum* 44 (1993), 65–89.

¹⁹ Frantisek Graus, “Randgruppen der städtischen Gesellschaft im Spätmittelalter,” *Zeitschrift für historische Forschung* 8 (1981), 385–437.

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the “deserving poor” – invalids, widows, orphans – and “strong beggars” who were unworthy of alms and who should be compelled to work by coercive measures. This new public policy towards poverty contributed to the “criminalization” of the able-bodied poor. This was the group on whose back the social disciplining process was carried out, the group that experienced the repressive apparatus of the state in all its brutality.²⁰

In the sixteenth century the social boundary excluding dishonorable people from honorable society hardened and coalesced, just as the persecution of marginal groups in general reached new intensity. In the age of Reformation and Counter-Reformation, modernizing states hunted deviants more efficiently. The purifying impulse was strongest when governments were confronted by the presence of an opposing religious camp in the immediate proximity. The European witch-hunt, for example, was most bloody in the political and confessional patchwork of the Holy Roman empire.²¹ Goaded on by the presence of a competing religion just beyond their borders, confessional states set out to create a Godly state, a “heavenly Jerusalem,” within their own territory. Bernd Roeck interprets the persecution of Jews, religious dissenters, witches, the resident and vagrant poor, gypsies, dishonorable people, bastards, homosexuals, and highwaymen as part of a general program to create the “ideal Christian state.”²² The disciplining of marginal groups had wider social ramifications, contributing to the formation of the absolutist state. In his study of highway robbery in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Germany, for example, Uwe Danker argues that early modern territorial states instrumentalized the prosecution of bandits in order to consolidate political domination (*Herrschaft*).²³ The exemplary marginalization and punishment of deviants served to inculcate obedience, orthodoxy, thrift, and work discipline in the general population.²⁴

There are significant problems with this social disciplining approach to the topics of marginality in general and dishonor in particular. First, discipline should not be seen as a unilateral process imposed by elites. In an incisive criticism of the social disciplining model, Lyndal Roper has argued that “discipline is not a natural accompaniment of the rise of centralized authority, but a concept around which rival political claims could be staked out.” In fact, sometimes it was the “bastions of

²⁰ Bronislaw Geremek, “Criminalité, vagabondage, paupérisme. La marginalité à l’aube des temps modernes,” *Revue d’Histoire Moderne et Contemporaine* 21 (1974), 337–75; Robert Jütte, *Poverty and Deviance in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge, 1994), pp. 143–77.

²¹ Brian P. Levack, *The Witch-hunt in Early Modern Europe* (London, 1992), pp. 105–6, 177–9.

²² Bernd Roeck, *Außenseiter, Randgruppen, Minderheiten. Fremde im Deutschland der frühen Neuzeit* (Göttingen, 1993), pp. 13–22; Bernd Roeck, “Christlicher Idealstaat und Hexenwahn. Zum Ende der Europäischen Verfolgungen,” *Historisches Jahrbuch* 108 (1988), 379–405.

²³ Uwe Danker, *Räuberbanden im alten Reich um 1700. Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte von Herrschaft und Kriminalität in der frühen Neuzeit* (Frankfurt a.M., 1988), p. 15.

²⁴ Christian Sachße and Florian Tennstedt, “Sicherheit und Disziplin. Eine Skizze zur Einführung,” in Christian Sachße and Florian Tennstedt, eds., *Soziale Sicherheit und Soziale Disziplinierung. Beiträge zu einer historischen Theorie der Sozialpolitik* (Frankfurt a.M., 1986), pp. 11–44, p. 20.

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resistance” to state centralization that were the champions of discipline. In German cities, guild corporations played this role.²⁵ Second, the social disciplining perspective tends to obscure the fact that marginal groups were sometimes persecuted by middling groups in society as a form of resistance to the expanding authority of the state. For example, political conflict between urban commoners and patricians sometimes sparked pogroms. By attacking local Jews, commoners undermined the authority of their patrician lords, who served as the Jews’ patrons.²⁶ By studying marginal groups *en gros* we run the risk of creating a kind of grab-bag of deviance, in which essential differences are obscured, making the stigmatization of these diverse groups appear to be part of the same social process. But the marginality of witches, hunted by church and state with the goal of exterminating them, had little in common with the marginality of their executioners, who, as we shall see, at times derived considerable social advantages from their outcast status. Although popular denunciation was usually the first step in the making of a witch, there would have been no witch-hunt without the participation of elites and the judicial institutions of the state. Women and men who died in the European witch-hunt were, in part, victims of the disciplining drive of the modernizing state.²⁷ Like the prosecution of witches, the criminalization of the vagrant poor was state driven.²⁸ By contrast, the marginalization of dishonorable people followed a different dynamic. Unlike witches and vagabonds, dishonorable people did not suffer at the hands of the state. Much to the contrary, their persecution originated with urban guildsmen, who forced the exclusion of dishonorable people – often against the express commands of the state. For centuries artisans defied governmental attempts to rehabilitate dishonorable people. From 1548 through the eighteenth century imperial and local governments regularly issued mandates attempting to cleanse defiled trades of their stigma of dishonor.²⁹

DISHONOR, “TABOO,” AND CASTE POLLUTION

In 1629 Leonhard Eder, a journeyman butcher in the small Austrian town of Horn, addressed a petition to the Holy Roman emperor in which he recounted a life-altering misfortune that had befallen him. Leonhard had accidentally killed a dog. One day while he was rinsing slabs of meat at the city well, a “small starving weak

²⁵ Lyndal Roper, *Oedipus and the Devil: Witchcraft, Sexuality and Religion in Early Modern Europe* (London/New York, 1994), p. 149.

²⁶ See R. Po-Chia Hsia, *The Myth of Ritual Murder: Jews and Magic in Reformation Germany* (New Haven, 1988), pp. 66–85; Christopher Friedrichs, “Anti-Jewish politics in early modern Germany: the uprising in Worms, 1613–17,” *Central European History* 23 (1990), 91–152.

²⁷ For an interpretation of the European witch-hunt in the context of social disciplining, see for example, Michael Kunze, *Highroad to the Stake: a Tale of Witchcraft* (Chicago, 1987), and Christina Larner, *Enemies of God: the Witch-hunt in Scotland* (London, 1981).

²⁸ Jütte, *Poverty and Deviance*, pp. 143–77.

²⁹ Hans Proesler, ed., *Das gesamtdeutsche Handwerk im Spiegel der Reichsgesetzgebung von 1530–1806* (Berlin, 1954), pp. 9, 23, 37, 59, 78.

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dog” snapped up a piece of lamb. Leonhard recovered the meat and took it to the butcher’s stall, but the dog followed him into his master’s house. Leonard caught the dog, swung him around by the tail, and flung him into the alley. Unfortunately for Leonhard, the dog landed on his head and died. Even though he had not used a “deadly weapon” or purposefully killed the dog (as his fellow journeyman was willing to attest), Leonhard was now dishonorable in the eyes of his fellow butchers. It was obviously not cruelty to animals the butchers objected to, but the fact that by this action Leonhard had likened himself to the skinner, for it fell within the skinner’s duties to put down wild dogs. Deprived of his livelihood, Leonhard begged the emperor to remove the taint of infamy he had contracted due to the death of the dog.³⁰

Leonhard’s dishonor resulted from his transgression of a pollution prohibition, not from any ethical-moral flaw. The communication of dishonor in this case corresponds to Mary Douglas’s definition of ritual pollution, which occurs *ex opere operato*,³¹ i.e. it is effective regardless of the moral condition of the actor. Intention is irrelevant, and pollution is likely to be sparked inadvertently.³² The contagious quality of early modern German dishonor has led a number of scholars to explain *Unehrllichkeit* as a “taboo.” In *Die Germanischen Todesstrafen* (1922), Karl von Amira argues, for example, that the dishonor of the executioner originated in the conflict between Germanic pagan religion and medieval Christianity. Among the pre-Christian Germanic tribes, public executions took the form of sacrifices offered to the gods. The person who carried out the execution, often a priest, established immediate contact with the gods so that he became endowed with some sacral power (“mana”). Thus contact with this person became dangerous and he was treated with reverence and awe. With Christianization the execution lost its character as a sacrifice and the feelings of awe and reverence for the magical efficacy of the pre-Christian priest were somehow transformed into their opposite (“taboo”). Persons who carried out executions, now mostly slaves or criminals, inspired feelings of revulsion and disgust.³³ Werner Dankert developed the “taboo” theory further, with the goal of identifying the unifying factor, the “fundamental motive,” that would explain the defamation of all outcasts, including witches and Jews. For Dankert the explanation lay in the fact that all pariahs were associated with liminal situations in the human life-cycle (which he groups under such headings as “death and the afterlife” and “eros, vegetation”) and were somehow heir to pre-Christian Germanic cults. These pariahs were invested with “mana,” a magical-religious potency that enabled them to heal as well as to harm.³⁴ Although no sources have

³⁰ HH StA, Restituciones 2/E, Leonhard Eder, 1629. ³¹ By the act itself.

³² Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger: an Analysis of the Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* (London, 1991), pp. 107–13.

³³ Karl von Amira, *Die Germanischen Todesstrafen. Untersuchungen zur Rechts- und Religionsgeschichte* (Munich, 1922), pp. 229–34.

³⁴ Werner Dankert, *Unehrlliche Leute. Die verfeimten Berufe* (Bern/Munich, 1963).

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been identified to back up these speculations, the “taboo” theory continues to hold considerable attraction for scholars of *Unehrllichkeit*.³⁵

The tenacity of the taboo theory is probably due to the fact that there are indeed some intriguing structural parallels between German dishonor and patterns of ritual pollution in a number of non-Western societies. We will briefly sketch out some comparisons here, the purpose of which is not to arrive at any cross-cultural generalizations about pollution behavior, but rather to highlight the unique features of early modern German dishonor. Most obviously, there is considerable overlap in trades defined as dishonorable or impure in different societies. Barber-surgeons, leather-workers, and latrine-cleaners number among the “untouchables” in India.³⁶ In Japan, trades associated with dead animals and leather work were classed among the pariah group of the *burakumin*. *Burakumin* served as village watchmen, executioners, morticians, and night-soil fertilizers.³⁷ However, we should note that butchers, defiled in both Japan and India, did not number among the dishonorable trades in early modern Germany. Sociability and commensality with untouchables, *burakumin*, or dishonorable people could be defiling for members of higher castes or estates. Pariah groups in Germany, India, and Japan practiced social endogamy and formed hereditary castes.³⁸ At first sight Amira’s and Dankert’s analogy with Polynesian mana/taboo seems apt, since dishonor was at times characterized by a similar fundamental ambivalence. The German executioner, as we shall see, was believed to be endowed with the gift of healing, and spent more time practicing medicine than carrying out criminal executions.

However, the taboo theory is based on a profound misinterpretation of the phenomenon of *Unehrllichkeit*. A striking difference between caste pollution in Japan and India or Polynesian mana/taboo and early modern German dishonor lies in the ideological legitimation and the effects of pollution. In India and Japan, pariah groups were described as religiously and spiritually defiled. The selection criteria according to which trades were classed as pariahs were religious in nature. Pollution presented an impediment to worship. For example, a Havik Brahman was required to perform the rite of bathing and thus enter the highest state of religious purity before prayer.³⁹ In the Polynesian context, “taboo” was used to shore up the boundary between the sacred and the profane. Violation of a taboo resulted in

³⁵ See for example Else Angstmann, *Der Henker in der Volksmeinung. Seine Namen und sein Vorkommen in der mündlichen Überlieferung* (Halle an der Saale, 1928), pp. 88–90; Franz Irsigler and Arnold Lasotta, *Bettler und Gauner, Dirnen und Henker. Außenseiter in einer mittelalterlichen Stadt. Köln, 1300–1600* (Munich, 1989), p. 228; Günter Voß, “Henker. Tabugestalt und Sündenbock,” in Bernd-Ulrich Hergemöller, *Randgruppen in der spätmittelalterlichen Gesellschaft* (Warendorf, 1990), p. 107.

³⁶ Adrian C. Mayer, “Caste: the Indian caste system,” in *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences*, vol. II (1968), pp. 339–44, p. 339.

³⁷ John Price, “A history of the outcast: untouchability in Japan,” in George De Vos and Hiroshi Wagatsuma, eds., *Japan’s Invisible Race: Caste in Culture and Personality* (Berkeley, 1972), pp. 8, 21–2; Herman Ooms, *Tokugawa Village Practice: Class, Status, Power, Law* (Berkeley, 1996), p. 250.

³⁸ Gerald D. Berreman, “Structure and function of caste systems,” in De Vos and Wagatsuma, *Japan’s Invisible Race*, p. 278. ³⁹ Douglas, *Purity and Danger*, p. 32.

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cosmological pollution and brought down direct divine retribution. A violator might suffer a skin disease or might be struck down dead on the spot.⁴⁰ In contrast, dishonor pollution had no cosmological consequences. As will become clear, no “danger” resulted from dishonor other than loss of social status. In this sense, dishonor is clearly distinct from witchcraft and magic. Dishonor pollution was a profane condition that did not impede communication with the supernatural. The attribution of honor and dishonor worked according to a kind of secular liturgy, which operated quite independently of and often in opposition to religion.⁴¹ This will be a surprising statement for historians of early modern Europe, who have long emphasized that early modern people did not experience the sacred and the profane as two distinct realms.⁴² To argue that dishonor was a secular construct, however, is not to say that early modern Germans inhabited a secularized or disenchanting universe, but rather that questions of honor and dishonor occupied a different sphere of relevance than the sacred. When it came to questions of honor and social status, early modern Germans *did* distinguish the religious from the political. We saw that the parents of the hapless fisherman Andreas Anhauser classified dishonor as a “mere political consideration.” It was the livelihood and political identity of their son that was at stake, not his soul.

Early modern German *Unehrlichkeit* was a characteristic of urban society. Augsburg, the site of Andreas and Barbara’s ill-fated marriage, was one of Germany’s oldest and largest cities. Pollution conflicts regarding dishonor occurred almost exclusively in cities, until the mid-eighteenth century when peasants began to imitate the honor pretensions of city folk. In contrast, pariah status in India and Japan were features of rural society. The *burakumin* lived in endogamous village communities, and in certain regions of India untouchable subcastes made up the majority of the agricultural labor force.⁴³ The urban nature of the whole complex of German dishonor flies in the face of much of the anthropological literature on both honor and caste. Anthropologists tend to study honor in rural village societies, emphasizing that stringent and exclusive honor codes flourish mostly in small face-to-face societies where actors are personally known to one another. The anonymity of the city, as J. G. Peristiany among others has suggested, would make it impossible to enforce honor prohibitions.⁴⁴ This approach harks back to Max

⁴⁰ Louis Dumont, *Homo Hierarchicus: the Caste System and its Implications* (Chicago, 1980), p. 49; Roy Wagner, “Taboo” in *Encyclopedia of Religion*, ed. Mircea Eliade, vol. xiv (New York, 1987), pp. 233–6.

⁴¹ For a similar analysis of plebeian honor in early modern Italy, see Thomas Cohen, “The lay liturgy of affront in sixteenth-century Italy,” *Journal of Social History* 25 (1992), 857–77: “Honor and religion were almost separate realms and, to a striking degree, contrary ethical codes” (p. 862).

⁴² On the fluid boundaries between the sacred and the profane, see Robert W. Scribner, “Elements of popular belief,” in Thomas A. Brady, Heiko A. Oberman, and James Tracy, eds., *Handbook of European History, 1400–1600*, vol. 1 (Leiden, 1995), pp. 231–61.

⁴³ Dumont, *Homo Hierarchicus*, p. 54.

⁴⁴ J. G. Peristiany, “Introduction,” in J. G. Peristiany, ed., *Honor and Shame: the Values of Mediterranean Society* (Chicago, 1966), pp. 9–18, p. 11; Julian Pitt-Rivers, *The Fate of the Schem or the Politics of Sex: Essays in the Anthropology of the Schem* (Cambridge, 1977), p. 39.