

The Dark Side of Modernity? Rethinking Antisemitism and Sexuality

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The idea that modernity might have had some dark sides is not really breaking news. Bookshelves, even libraries are filled with this topic in all its variations, and recent debates on colonialism and the Enlightenment, on postcolonialism and antisemitism fire up newspapers, social media and roundtables. So, while this article does not intend to add to this policy-driven dispute, it will try to show that by thinking antisemitism and sexuality together, we might discover new connections and periodizations that can broaden our understanding of at least one of them: antisemitism.

My reading of the entanglement of these two categories is firmly based on what one could probably term a generational approach not untypical of a young West German student of history in the 1980s. As a feminist, I was fascinated by what Claudia Honegger has termed “ruses of powerlessness”, by female resistance to the impositions of the enlightenment and the nineteenth-century’s new bourgeois gender order.¹ At the same time, Klaus Theweleit’s 1977 bestseller *Male Fantasies* opened my eyes to the male side of the coin,² namely to the fact that gender as an analytical category refers not only to

¹ Claudia Honegger, *Listen der Ohnmacht: Zur Sozialgeschichte weiblicher Widerstandsformen* (Frankfurt am Main, 1994).

² Klaus Theweleit, *Male Fantasies*, vol. 1, *Women, Floods, Bodies and History* (Cambridge, UK, 1987); Theweleit, *Male Fantasies*, vol. 2, *Male Bodies: Psychoanalyzing the White Terror* (Cambridge, UK, 1989).

3 Joan W. Scott, "Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis," *American Historical Review* 91 (1986): 1053–75.

4 Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, trans. John Cumming (1972; repr., London, 2016).

5 Robert S. Wistrich, *Antisemitism: The Longest Hatred* (New York, 1991).

women but also to men and thus has something important to tell us about twentieth-century fascism, among other things.³ Theweleit's findings were, in my eyes, closely connected to the third pillar of my perception of modern history, Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer's *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (1947), which placed the blame for fascism on capitalism and on the repressive culture of bourgeois society, including its gendered structure.⁴ Together, these factors produced what Adorno and Horkheimer called the authoritarian personality, or: Theweleit's Freikorps fighters. In Theweleit's theory, the fear of physical dissolution, the dissolution of the body, stands at the core of what he calls fascist personality (which is not exactly the same as the authoritarian one but has similar traits), for this fear has to be contained by all means, by all kinds of frontiers, defenses, and armors. And this is where the second category of this paper comes in, namely sexuality: For what human activity, theoretically at least, tends more towards the dissolution of physical borders than sexuality? So, it is not by chance that on the other side of this momentum we find the first-mentioned category: antisemitism (and for that matter: racism) as highly effective ways of defending any kind of borders.

In order to relate the two of them, however, it is necessary to assume a specific perspective on antisemitism. While the social construction of "gender" and its changeability over time are by now integral, if not indispensable parts of the theoretical toolbox for historians, this is not the case when it comes to antisemitism. On the contrary, this field of research is not only a very contested one, but also one oscillating between what I would call "closed" and "open" interpretations of antisemitism's long history. Roughly speaking, two directions can be identified, which at their extreme ends could hardly be more different. Emblematic for one such direction is the title of a study by the late British-Israeli historian Robert S. Wistrich, *Anti-Semitism: The Longest Hatred*.⁵ In this perspective antisemitism is a coherent and cohesive concept, employed

to refer to the hardly changing and always present historical phenomenon of hatred of the Jews “since classical antiquity and on into the present”—as many popular book subtitles phrase it. A historical phenomenon for which ultimately—that is the political conclusion drawn by many authors—there is only one viable solution: namely a Jewish state. At the other end of the spectrum stands the much-discussed essay “Away from a Definition of Anti-Semitism” by Wistrich’s American colleague David Engel, who develops a profound critique of this specific view of world history. Instead of taking a concept from nineteenth-century Germany and applying it as a prime tool of explanation to analyze all possible historical events and phenomena worldwide, Engel argues for the radical deconstruction of the concept by means of an exacting contextualization of the respective historical phenomena to be described: “Constituting anti-Semitism as an object of historical study, in whatever form and according to whatever parameters, has diverted and will likely continue to deflect historians from potentially fruitful ways of investigating the specific incidents, texts, laws, visual artefacts, social practices and mental configurations that such rubric customarily subsumes.”⁶

Between these two starkly opposite poles we can find a growing number of widely differing attempts to describe animosity toward Jews, among which I would like to single out one author, who has the rare gift of being able to think in both directions (even if, this must be conceded, at different temporal points in his research career). In his 1996 dissertation, the medievalist David Nirenberg critiqued a teleological understanding of antisemitism that completely excludes the local and temporal context.⁷ While there he had placed his focus on the historical specificity of anti-Jewish persecutions, in his second key work, *Anti-Judaism: The Western Tradition*, he directed his attention to the continuities of anti-Judaism, which he regards—in the fundamental contrast of “flesh” and “spirit”—as defining a structural framework for Western

⁶ David Engel, “Away from a Definition of Antisemitism: An Essay in the Semantics of Historical Description,” in *Rethinking Modern Jewish History*, ed. Jeremy Cohen and Moshe Rosman (Liverpool, 2009), 30–53, esp. 30–31.

⁷ David Nirenberg, *Communities of Violence: Persecution of Minorities in the Middle Ages* (Princeton, NJ, 1996).

8 David Nirenberg, *Anti-Judaism: The Western Tradition* (New York, 2013).

9 For a more general understanding of the pitfalls and shortcomings of this term, see Jonathan Judaken, "Rethinking Anti-Semitism: Introduction," *American Historical Review* 123 (2018): 1122–38.

10 Nirenberg, *Anti-Judaism*, 2–3.

11 Christina von Braun and Eva-Maria Ziege, eds., *Das 'Bewegliche' Vorurteil: Aspekte des internationalen Antisemitismus* (Würzburg, 2004).

thinking since classical antiquity.⁸ Building on Karl Marx, Nirenberg stresses that anti-Judaism (he consciously avoids using the term antisemitism)⁹ is not about a history of relations between real Jews and non-Jews. Rather, what is central are the "basic tools and concepts ... through which individuals in a society relate to the world and to each other," a "set of ideas and attributes with which non-Jews can make sense of and criticize their world."¹⁰

I would argue that it is precisely this binary structure of anti-Jewish sentiment that forms the arc of cognition between the two Nirenbergs: on the one hand, the matrix of anti-Jewish thinking, which over the centuries has repeatedly reactivated itself anew in totally different contexts; on the other, its ability, to date too little examined, of being able to enter into linkages—in part very stable, in part fleeting and fluid—with all other possible hostile sentiment and animosity, its capacity for bonding. This, to be sure, only becomes clearly visible by means of a careful and exacting historical contextualization. The potency of antisemitism to bond and intertwine also determines its obvious tendency toward total incoherence. This, however, contrasts with the exactly investigated anti-Judaism interpretation that Nirenberg develops but helps to explain the often noted "flexibility" of antisemitism: Jews as backward *and* yet as agents of progress, as capitalists *and* yet as communists, and, to finally come to our topic, as hypersexual *and* yet as effeminate.¹¹

By now it has become clear why I have discussed Engel and Nirenberg here: on the one hand, a focus on sexuality tends to reinforce the "longest hatred" interpretation: a straight line from the menstruating Jewish men of the Middle Ages to the race defiler of the Nazis on to the U.S. porn industry. On the other hand, this focus can also serve as a lens that sheds light on the manifold entanglements of the anti-Jewish with other forms of resentment, which is what I will stress in this contribution—not as a general challenge to our overall approach to the topic, but rather as a window of opportunity, as a potential

line of thought that might lead to new insights or connections. In doing so, I will start with a hypothesis that, for the moment, still rests on rather shaky grounds but will hopefully instigate further research. It reads as follows: while there are certain anti-Jewish images that relate to Jewish (and other) bodies in the Middle Ages and in premodern times, it is only with the advent of modernity that Judeophobia becomes intimately and, it seems, universally connected with gender images and fantasies about deviant or dangerous sexual predilections, performances or activities. This hypothesis therefore links “modern antisemitism” not so much to the invention of “race”¹² but rather to the enormous importance of clear-cut gender roles and ascriptions for the structure of modern, capitalist, and bourgeois society—a development that would start roughly with the Enlightenment, and which has been described so convincingly in its economic, social, and cultural aspects by Karin Hausen in her pathbreaking article “The Polarization of The Polarization of ‘Gender Characters.’”¹³

In order to assess the changes that occurred with the advent of “modernity,” a look back in history, if only a brief one, is necessary here. Regarding the monotheistic divide between Christians and Jews, the need to watch the borders between the distinct communities was for the first time clearly formulated in church regulations in the results of the 4th Lateran Council of 1215, which marks the change from a basically protective albeit hierarchical to a repressive Christian theology towards the Jews and—nota bene—towards Muslims. The Council’s Canon 68 deplors:

In some provinces a difference in dress distinguishes the Jews or Saracens from the Christians, but in certain others such a confusion has grown up that they cannot be distinguished by any difference. Thus, it happens at times that through error Christians have relations with the women of Jews or Saracens, and Jews and Saracens with Christian women. Therefore, that they may not, under pretext of error of this sort, excuse themselves in the future for the excesses of such prohibited intercourse, we decree

12 Stefanie Schüler-Springorum, “Missing Links: Religion, Rassismus, Judenfeindschaft,” *Jahrbuch für Antisemitismusforschung* 29 (2020): 187–206.

13 Karin Hausen, “Die Polarisierung der ‘Geschlechtscharaktere’ – Eine Spiegelung der Dissoziation von Erwerbs- und Familienleben,” in *Sozialgeschichte der Familie in der Neuzeit Europas: Neue Forschungen*, ed. Werner Conze (Stuttgart, 1976), 363–93.

14 Peter Schäfer, *Kurze Geschichte des Antisemitismus* (München, 2020), 126.

15 Sara Lipton, *Dark Mirror: The Medieval Origins of Anti-Jewish Iconography* (New York, 2014).

that such Jews and Saracens of both sexes in every Christian province and at all times shall be marked off in the eyes of the public from other peoples through the character of their dress.¹⁴

It is very clear, therefore, that special dress codes or marks for Jews and Muslims were introduced in order to prevent sexual contacts between the different religions, contacts that could lead to a blurring of religious difference and might eventually lead to conversion. While the decree obviously points to quite extended social and sexual contacts between the different groups (and others, since, later on, it would be extended towards heretics, prostitutes and lepers), sexuality—or rather its prohibition—here merely serves as an instrumental barrier and not as something that in its specific quality is formed by Jews or Muslims and therefore dangerous. Sex was sex, so to speak, and what had to be avoided was its outcome: social intimacy and offspring.

A similar function can be observed with regard to the visual presence of Jews and Muslims in the medieval imagery. First of all, it is important to note that this imagery was far less static, homogenous, and aggressive than our present-day gaze is inclined to think. Sara Lipton has reconstructed the development of images of Jews from benign, if exoticized, figures connoting ancient wisdom to increasingly vicious portrayals inspired by (and designed to provoke) fear and hostility.¹⁵ Interestingly enough, these changes occur only after the Fourth Lateran Council in the thirteenth century, meaning they seem to have worked hand in hand with stricter segregation. In a similar line, Alexandra Cuffel has analyzed medieval Jewish, Christian, and Muslim uses of gendered bodily imagery and metaphors of impurity in their visual and verbal polemic against one another. Foul smell, bodily fluids and states, and animals were employed as powerful tropes to mark religious opponents as sinful, filthy, and unacceptable, with a special emphasis on women. By defining and denigrating the religious “other,” *each* group, sharing basic assumptions about purity, wielded bodily insult as a means

of resistance, of inciting violence, and of creating community boundaries.¹⁶ In my lay view, we might also place the idea of menstruating Jews or the famous *Judensau* sculptures at Christian churches within this tableau of religious competition which by the invention of somatic markers served to foster biological ideas of difference and, at various times in history, persecution. Cuffel's study is fascinating insofar as these purposes are remarkably similar to how we would describe the intentions of modern antisemitism, while at the same time this was apparently a joint monotheistic, that is Jewish, Christian, and Muslim endeavor—if we leave aside the differing power relations over time and space.

As far as the Jews are concerned, they were obviously the most vulnerable group in this triangle, and it is their depiction, illustrating *religious* difference, that over the centuries transmuted into purported *physical* difference. One topic, however, is conspicuously missing in these visual narratives, a topic that would in later centuries develop into a key symbol of Jewish difference and a powerful trigger of sexual fantasies of all kinds—namely, circumcision. In those few Christian texts that mention it, there is hardly any trace of the later obsession with this tiny missing part of the male Jewish body. Rather, it is taken as yet another symbol of Jewish theological arrogance or stubbornness or both; see Luther, for example.¹⁷ As such, it was reflected upon by Jewish intellectuals as well, such as Spinoza, who argued that “they have incurred universal hatred by cutting themselves off completely from all other peoples.”¹⁸ As Sander Gilman has demonstrated, the practice of de-circumcision—medical ways of reconstructing the foreskin—became fashionable and feasible only in the nineteenth century.¹⁹ There are sources, especially medical ones, that focus on Jewish physical difference in the second half of the eighteenth century, although at the beginning rarely with negative overtones. The circumcised penis was at that time not automatically considered unmasculine. Rather, it could serve as a trigger for Christian fantasies about the

16 Alexandra Cuffel, *Gendering Disgust in Medieval Religious Polemic* (Notre Dame, IN, 2007).

17 See Armin Langer: “A Barbaric, Bloody Act”: The Anti-Circumcision Polemics of the Enlightenment and Its Internalization by Nineteenth-Century German Jews,” *Body Politics* 7 (2019): 55–74, 60.

18 Sander Gilman, in his article in this issue.

19 Sander Gilman, *Illness and Image: Case Studies in the Medical Humanities* (New Brunswick, NJ, 2015); and also Sander Gilman, *The Jew's Body* (New York, 1991).

20 Hanna Lotte Lund, *Der Berliner "Jüdische Salon" um 1800: Emanzipation in der Debatte* (Berlin, 2012), 402–408.

21 See Stefanie Schüler-Springorum, "Gender and the Politics of Antisemitism," *American Historical Review* 123 (2018): 1210–22, where I discuss the following at further length.

sexual potency of Jewish male competition. One can find telling illustrations of this, for example, in the 1790s in the letters written to the Swedish diplomat Gustav von Brinckmann by young Wilhelm von Humboldt, who was obsessed with talking about "the circumcised," that is male Jews, while both frequented the literary salons of Jewish women, Rahel Varnhagen and others, as enthusiastic guests.²⁰ Their behavior can serve as a fitting example for the ambivalent nature of the period around 1800, where the role of women and of Jews came under scrutiny at the same time and with similar intellectual fervor, resulting in hundreds of books and pamphlets arguing for or against female and Jewish difference—or, to put it differently, when the great promise of equality, fostered theoretically by Enlightenment philosophy and in practice by the French Revolution, had to be watered down in order to maintain fundamental hierarchical structures between the sexes and between the religions. One should not forget that this was a long and torn historical process, the outcome of which was far from certain in the beginning.²¹

If we take, for example, the debates on general conscription between 1780 and 1810 in Prussia, it becomes clear that their main focus was on military homogeneity and how to maintain it if everybody were called to arms. In these debates, doubts about the Jews as soldiers were generally connected with their religious and cultural otherness, and only a few authors mentioned an alleged physical incapacity. And if they did so, this incapacity was attributed to the lamentably poor condition of health among the (impoverished) Prussian population as a whole rather than to specific male Jewish traits. By marked contrast, the advocates of compulsory military service for Jews in this debate argued for Jewish inclusion by citing certain especially masculine qualities ascribed to the Jewish character, features that had evolved historically and were ostensibly proven. In 1784, one Prussian minister wrote that the Jews' "hot oriental temperament (that) would render them furious in attack," while "their cunning and mischievous nature (rec-

commended them) for the tasks of reconnoitering.” Neither he nor his colleagues were sympathetic toward Jews, but rather thinking in terms of utility and how to make use of the “manly strength” of their Jewish underlings. It is important to note, thus, that in the early nineteenth century the physical ability of Jewish males was not doubted, and their masculinity was not yet called into question. But again, we need to be cautious about sweeping conclusions: At that time, around 1800, the general concept of “patriotic manliness” was far less militaristic than later. Rather, manliness was closely bound up with bourgeois virtues like loyalty, piety, readiness to sacrifice and fraternity, all family values claimed by both religions, Christianity and Judaism.²² We cannot understand the dynamics of anti-Jewish resentment if we do not take into account its entanglement with general society, in this case with the gender discourse of the time—something that might sound banal to gender historians, but is fiercely debated, as shown above, among historians of antisemitism.

It was thus not by chance that it was Jewish women who bore the brunt of what was to become the “modern” anti-Jewish discourse, probably the only time in the long history of Judeophobia. This discourse was closely entangled with an anti-feminist one: First and foremost, the women of the famous Berlin and Viennese salons were denied their femininity, the standard reproach against educated women and one that is still prevalent. Letters, pamphlets, and stage plays from that era are replete with malicious representations of educated women/Jewesses behaving in an affected manner. With the demise of the literary salons and the advent of the Restoration period after 1815, however, Jewish women vanished from the field of view of the Judeophobes, only to come back more or less a hundred years later as dominant spouses of the by then feminized Jewish male, or more frequently, as an ambivalent, erotically threatening fantasy in the image of the “Beautiful Jewess”, who as an exotic temptress, an Oriental, darker-skinned beauty, inspired male sexual fantasies.²³

22 See Karen Hagemann, *Revisiting Prussia's Wars Against Napoleon: History, Culture, and Memory* (New York, 2015).

23 Ulrike Brunotte, *The Femininity Puzzle: Gender, Orientalism and the 'Jewish Other'* (Bielefeld, 2022), 137–157.

24 Achim Rohde, "Der Innere Orient: Orientalismus, Antisemitismus und Geschlecht im Deutschland des 18. bis 20. Jahrhunderts," *Die Welt des Islams* 45 (2005): 370–411; Gil Anidjar, *Semites: Race, Religion, Literature* (Stanford, Calif., 2007).

25 Edward W. Said, *Orientalism: Western Conceptions of the Orient* (London, 1978).

26 George L. Mosse, *Nationalism and Sexuality: Middle Class Morality and Sexual Norms in Modern Europe* (Madison, Wis., 1985).

27 See Sander L. Gilman, "The Jewish Foot: A Foot Note to the Jewish Body," in *The Jew's Body*, 38–59.

It is interesting to note that, again, here we find entanglements with anti-Muslim depictions, which by the nineteenth century, had morphed into what would later be called Orientalism. Achim Rohde has written extensively about the links between German orientalism and modern antisemitism, links that were defined by the still (or again) powerful idea of a Christian Occident, or *Abendland*, or by the dichotomy between "Aryan/German" on the one side and "the 'Semites'" on the other.²⁴ Directed towards the Muslim world, the Othering consisted in creating an inferior but threatening outside enemy, whereas antisemitism targeted the enemy from within. While the old "Turks before Vienna threat" lost much of its power during the nineteenth century and morphed into narratives of colonial superiority, we can still find traces of this link during the German Empire when, for example, Treitschke calls Jews "Asians" and warns of "Asian Hordes" threatening Germany's well-being. In contrast to antisemitism, however, there always existed an ambivalent gaze towards the Muslim world, one that would combine exotic cruelty with exotic erotism, and in this regard, the dark beautiful Jewess with the equally dark and beautiful inhabitants of the Harems from Granada to Damascus.²⁵

None of this—no beauty, no exotism, no desirable sexuality—is part of the image of the Jewish male in the early nineteenth century, which over time became firmly anchored in the ideological discourses of German nationalism.²⁶ Now, doubts emerged about whether Jews were really physically fit for military service, a key argument being their supposed proclivity to being flat-footed. This purported minor malformation was to mark the Jews unfit to serve in the military ranks, because, as Sander Gilman has pointed out, in times of the glorification of the foot soldier as a hero and the liberal citizens' militias in the period 1815 to 1848, the alleged flat foot rendered sustained marching difficult and thus served as concrete proof of the inability of the Jewish male to integrate into the community of able-bodied citizens of the state.²⁷ Nonetheless, the physical exclusion and segregation of the

male Jewish body did not emerge in a comprehensive way until the last third of the nineteenth century, when “the Jew” was construed as the counter-image to the classical “Greek” ideal of masculine beauty, which suggested the unity of the ideal body and perfect spirit or intellect.²⁸

It was in this context that the topic of circumcision came up again and was used as a symbol of sexual deviance: Parallel to the process of pathologizing sexuality in general, the circumcised penis was now transformed from a symbol of religious stubbornness—or reluctance to assimilate to bourgeois habits—into a conscious mutilation of a perfect (Greek/German) organ with unpredictable consequences, including an alleged proclivity for venereal diseases.²⁹ According to this logic, it was out of sheer necessity that Jews took to other unspeakable sexual practices, thus seducing or perverting young innocent females.³⁰ While male Jewish sexuality became deviant (but also produced fears of sexual superiority), it was at the same time pathologized in a manner very similar to that of women and—as newcomers to the bourgeois sexuality discourse—homosexuals: as devoid of self-control and subject to their base carnal desires. From this, similar psychological traits were deduced: Women in general, Jewish men, and homosexuals in particular, were all considered prone to melancholy or hysteria, but also deemed immoral, devoid of character, manipulative, mendacious, and unpredictable.³¹ Needless to say, these supposed psychological traits were also reflected in the image of the Jewish (and homosexual) body, which from the last decades of the nineteenth-century onwards was always described as unmanly and unmilitary, chubby and wimpish, and suffering from flat feet, a flat chest, and poor posture.³² Antisemitic representations of the Jewish male were ambivalent about Jewish potency and impotence, just as they persistently blurred the distinctions between the genders and/or hinted at deviant sexual practices. In contrast with earlier discriminations and exclusions, these venomous attacks on male Jewish gender and sexual identity were

28 Brunotte, *The Femininity Puzzle*, 84–89.

29 John M. Efron, *Medicine and the German Jews: A History* (New Haven, Conn., 2001), 228–233; Robin Judd, *Contested Rituals: Circumcision, Kosher Butchering, and German-Jewish Political Life in Germany, 1843–1933* (Ithaca, N.Y., 2007).

30 Kristoff Kerl, *Männlichkeit und moderner Antisemitismus: eine Genealogie des Leo Frank-Falles, 1860er–1920er Jahre* (Köln, 2017).

31 Angelika Schaser and Stefanie Schüler-Springorum, introduction to *Liberalismus und Emanzipation: In- und Exklusionsprozesse im Kaiserreich und in der Weimarer Republik*, ed. Angelika Schaser and Stefanie Schüler-Springorum (Stuttgart, 2010), 9–22.

32 Sander L. Gilman, “Die Juden und die Körperhaltung,” in *Gebannt in diesem magischen Judenkreis: Essays*, ed. Sander L. Gilman (Göttingen, 2022), 165–184.

33 See Schüler-Springorum, "Gender and the Politics of Antisemitism," 1210–1222.

34 Brunotte, *The Femininity Puzzle*, 89–93; see also Christina von Braun, "Zur Bedeutung der Sexualbilder im rassistischen Antisemitismus," *Feministische Studien* 2 (2015): 293–307.

35 David Biale, *Eros and the Jews: From Biblical Israel to Contemporary America* (Berkeley, Calif., 1997), 1.

now, at the turn from the nineteenth to the twentieth century, firmly anchored in the body and supposedly substantiated by science as fundamentally organic in origin. A hundred years after the discussions on civil equality for women and Jews, normality and deviance were defined in medical, biological, and psychological terms and the result was now unambiguous: the norm was male, heterosexual, and Christian; by contrast, deviance was female, homosexual, and Jewish. Antisemitism, racism, homophobia, and misogyny had thus become closely entangled in the antimodern vision of a clearly demarcated and hierarchically structured society.³³

Around 1900, this development found its posthumous literary climax in Otto Weininger and his 1903 publication *Sex and Character*, 600 pages of misogynist furor with anti-Jewish sidebars, which soon became a must-read in educated (male) bourgeois circles, even though one might wonder in hindsight whether this popularity was also related to the author's Jewish background and to his suicide.³⁴ As resentful as his and so many other writings of the time might have been, they did not yet become socially and politically influential. It took a disastrous war and its aftermath to turn ideas that had previously been considered crazy or marginal by many into tools for political action. Now, these gendered images of Jews and biological ascriptions of gender served to consolidate a nation (in Germany, but not only there) whose fundamentals had been shaken by military defeat, revolution, regime change, and economic crisis. In a world perceived as having been turned upside down, feminized men and sexually potent women now represented a confusion of gender and, as David Biale has insisted, the sexuality of the Jews became "a threat to an ordered world, a barbaric affront to civility."³⁵ Thus, it was the symbolic moral degeneration of the nation that had to be counterattacked and overcome at any cost.

Again, this attack was directed against emancipated women *and* Jews, but it was Jewish men and women that represented

this threat in the most coherent and capacious way, while gentile women, albeit in subdued form, obviously had to remain part of the national project.³⁶ Their Jewish sisters, however, now turned into the veritable incarnation of the femme fatale. In an even more dramatic variant, specifically on the cinema screen of the 1920s, she transmuted into the sex-obsessed vampire or man-murdering monster—far removed from the exotic, but salvable sweetheart of Christian men in the nineteenth century. And in order to understand the dynamics of the 1920s, one must be aware of the fact that these images were now to be found not just in novels, bourgeois journals or theater plays, but circulated wildly by all the means available to modern mass culture and especially those with a visual appeal: tabloids, illustrated magazines, movies, cabarets and last but not least postcards.³⁷ Furthermore, as far as antisemitism proper was concerned, these images had moved, in the words of Shulamit Volkov, from the written to the spoken word, from the pamphlets, articles, and books of the nineteenth century to Goebbels and Hitler’s speeches at the election campaign rallies of the 1920s.³⁸ Both, the visual and the visceral, directly targeted the emotions of those involved. So, by the 1930s, racist moral norms regarding the body and sexuality had become deeply anchored mindsets. But it was only with the transfer of power to the National Socialists that these norms were translated into laws.

In order to fully grasp the difference that the Nazis’ ascent to power made for the relationship between antisemitism and sexuality, one must examine the distinct fields involved here: As is well known, antisemitism moved from propaganda to state policies, from words into deeds. It is important to note, though, that the National Socialist preoccupation with breeding and purity did not start or end with the German-Jewish population. From the very beginning, Nazi biopolitics targeted German non-Jews as well: persons with disabilities, the “feeble-minded,” the “hereditary ill,” the socially deviant

36 Birthe Kundrus, “Gender Wars. The First World War and the Construction of Gender Relation in the Weimar Republic,” in *Home/Front: The Military, War and Gender in Twentieth Century Germany*, ed. Karen Hagemann and Stefanie Schüler-Springorum (Oxford, U.K.: Berg, 2002), 159–179; Schüler-Springorum, “Vom Wort zur Tat: Das Erbe des Weimarer Antisemitismus,” in *Weimars Erbe: Das Nachleben der ersten deutschen Republik*, ed. Hanno Hochmuth, Martin Sabrow, and Tilmann Siebeneichner (Göttingen, 2020), 92–108.

37 See the archival collection “Alava” at the Zentrum für Antisemitismusforschung: <https://arthur-langerman-foundation.org/>.

38 Shulamit Volkov, “Das geschriebene und das gesprochene Wort: Über Kontinuität und Diskontinuität im deutschen Antisemitismus,” in *Jüdisches Leben und Antisemitismus im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert*, ed. Shulamit Volkov (München, 1990), 54–75.

39 Richard F. Wetzell, "Nazi Biopolitics: Eugenics, Racial Policy, and the Persecution of 'Asoziale,' 1933–1939," in *Cambridge History of the Holocaust*, vol. 1, ed. Mark Roseman and Dan Stone (Cambridge, UK, forthcoming 2024), 393–419.

40 Gisela Bock, *Zwangssterilisation im Nationalsozialismus* (Opladen, 1986).

41 Dagmar Herzog, "Sex and the Third Reich," in *Sex after Fascism: Memory and Morality in Twentieth Century Germany* (Princeton, NJ, 2007).

42 The following part of this paper is an abbreviated version of my chapter: "Sex and Violence: Race Defilement in Nazi Germany," in *Contemporary Europe in the Historical Imagination*, ed. Darcy Buerkle and Skye Doney (Madison, WI, 2023).

in whatever variant; all these groups were objects of severe legislation from 1933 onwards,³⁹ and it is not by chance that it was especially women who bore the first brunt of this aggression, as symbolized in the 400,000 forced sterilizations.⁴⁰ Parallel to the manifold repressive policies imbued with the phobia of undesirable procreation or miscegenation, sexuality in a positive and desirable sense became a central part in the construction of the *Volksgemeinschaft*.

As Dagmar Herzog has shown, National Socialist Germany witnessed permanent talk in about sex, but this discourse remained ambivalent in nature.⁴¹ This became especially clear in the "race defilement" trials, proceedings that were initiated after the passage of the Nuremberg Laws (1935) and which the German press had a field day reporting on.⁴² The female partners of the men charged were sometimes questioned in the dock about their sexual preferences in ways that accorded special weight to the proof or admission of so-called "abnormal practices". While such accounts of "deviant" Jewish sexuality were to be found in the local sections of German newspapers on a weekly basis, if the reader moved on to the paper's "world politics" section, he or she could find even more horrendous stories there from the summer of 1936 onwards. For the coverage of the incipient Spanish Civil War was characterized by a breathtaking mixture of mostly sadistic eroticism and violence, committed by the external arch-enemy: Bolshevism.⁴³ It is this close conjunction of desire, fear, lust, and violence that seems to me to typify sexualized propaganda in Nazi Germany—which did not operate in antisemitic terms only but would be extended in a variety of ways towards other internal and later external supposed threats: from the homosexual and/or asocial to the Bolshevik and/or Slav.

43 Stefanie Schüler-Springorum, "Gewalt gegen Tote: Zur Ikonographie des Spanischen Bürgerkriegs," in *Bilder*

kollektiver Gewalt - Kollektive Gewalt im Bild: Annäherungen an eine Ikonographie der Gewalt: Für Werner Bergmann zum

65. Geburtstag, ed. Michael Kohlstruck, Stefanie Schüler-Springorum, and Ulrich Wyrwa (Berlin, 2015), 137–145.

While this tableau of enemies was not a German specificity but rather common—in cultural variations, of course—to all European fascisms, it was its public staging in the middle of German towns and villages over several years that might explain its specific ferocity and *longue durée*. In a large-scale study, Michael Wildt has described the genesis of the *Volksgemeinschaft* by means of anti-Jewish violence inflicted in rural Germany and analyzed the so-called race defiler parades as a ritual of public humiliation.⁴⁴ Such events, at which Jewish males accused of race defilement were forcibly paraded through the streets of their home town, began to occur more frequently during the summer of 1935, so that the Gestapo even spoke of a “kind of race defilement psychosis.”⁴⁵ In numerous localities public amusement at the pillory morphed into brutal violence, while the number of denunciations of race defilers skyrocketed after it became a legal offense with the passage of the Nuremberg Laws in September 1935. Both the wish for harsh punishment and the great numbers of people watching these public rituals account for the success of a policy of segregation driven by fantasies of an abnormal sexuality. Even if we concede that the behavior of the bystanders was not always clear-cut and unambiguous, the bystanders do form part of the triangle that characterizes violence as a social process, which Teresa Koloma Beck has aptly described as something that is “not only exercised and suffered, but also observed and judged.”⁴⁶

Interestingly, this triangle came under duress when, during the war, the race defilement phobia was extended to another, much larger group: the Polish and later Soviet prisoner of war and slave laborers.⁴⁷ With the outbreak of the war, the ideologies and practices of sexual segregation against Jews were applied to Poles in strikingly similar wording: In the “Poland Decrees” issued in March 1940 the image of the Slavic *Untermensch*, the “subhuman”, was radicalized and connected to the already demonized Jews. The compulsory wearing of an identifying badge for Poles was introduced 18

⁴⁴ Michael Wildt, *Volk, Volksgemeinschaft, AfD* (Hamburg, 2017).

⁴⁵ Quoted in: Alexandra Przyrembel, “Ambivalente Gefühle. Sexualität und Antisemitismus während des Nationalsozialismus,” *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 39 (2013): 527–554, esp. 540.

⁴⁶ Teresa Koloma Beck, “The Eye of the Beholder: Violence as a Social Process,” *International Journal of Conflict and Violence* 5 (2011): 345–356, 350.

⁴⁷ Alexander Schmidt, “‘Rassenschande’ und ‘verbotener Umgang’: Die Nürnberger Gesetze als Modell für rassistische Ausgrenzung,” in *Verbotener Umgang mit Fremdvölkischen*, ed. Insa Eschebach, Christine Glauning, and Silke Schneider (Berlin, 2023), 68–87.

48 Quoted in: Birthe Kundrus, "Verbotener Umgang: Liebesbeziehungen zwischen Ausländern und Deutschen 1939–1945," in *Nationalsozialismus und Zwangsarbeit in der Region Oldenburg*, ed. Katharina Hoffmann, Andreas Lambeck (Oldenburg, 1999), 149–70, here 153; see also: Ulrich Herbert: *Hitler's Foreign Workers: Enforced Foreign Labor in Germany under the Third Reich* (New York, 1997), 69–75; Silke Schneider, "Segregation und Geschlechterordnung: Ausländische Zwangsarbeiter:innen und deutsche Zivilbevölkerung im Nationalsozialismus," in *Verbotener Umgang*, ed. Eschebach et al., 33–50.

49 See Herbert, *Hitler's Foreign Workers*, 79–81, 122–129.

months before the "Jewish star" in Germany, and in a leaflet from spring 1940 with the heading "How to behave toward the Poles", it was explicitly stated: "Just as it is considered the greatest disgrace to become involved with a Jew, any German engaging in intimate relations with a Polish male or female is guilty of sinful behavior. Despise the bestial urges of this race!"⁴⁸

Thus, if in the 1930s the sexual-racist anxieties of the regime had targeted mainly German-Jewish males, stigmatized for an allegedly deviant sexuality, after the outbreak of the war the rage of propaganda turned against German women and their "moral inferiority", while the "racial inferiority" of their Polish partners was taken for granted. The punishments for both were much more draconic: The involved Polish and later the Soviet POWs, in contrast with Western prisoners of war, were without exception sentenced to death and executed publicly.⁴⁹ The German women were paraded through the streets and had their hair shorn at the market square in front of large crowds. Here, too, the extreme brutality of such events is evidenced by numerous series of photos.⁵⁰ The public humiliation of these German women was followed by imprisonment for several years, with loss of honor, and, from 1941 on, internment in a concentration camp, which often ended in the inmate's death.

The step of victimizing German, non-Jewish women in public for a sexual act probably produced mixed feelings in the audiences, in particular among the female onlookers. The "unrest in the population," according to police sources, appears to

50 See Klaus Hesse, Philipp Springer and Reinhard Rürup, *Vor aller Augen: Fotodokumente des nationalsozialistischen*

Terrors in der Provinz (Essen, 2002); Sebastian Schönemann, "Stigma und Scham: Zur fotografischen Inszenierung der

öffentlichen Demütigung deutscher Frauen 1940-1941," in *Verbotener Umgang*, ed. Eschebach et al., 88–103.

have become so perceptible that directives were issued at the end of 1941 to do without the public rituals of humiliation on the street. This, however, enraged some of their male *Volksgenossen* in such a way that they consequently called for the death penalty for women who had become intimately involved with foreigners. They justified this by stating that these women were committing “the greatest crime that can at all be imagined in National Socialist Germany.”⁵¹

Such wishes for eradication, even of female members of one’s “own” group, prove once more the destructive power that racisms can unfold—if they are solidly anchored in the body via images of gender and concepts of sexuality, and interwoven with emotions of fear and desire, excitation and loathing, attraction and repulsion. And perhaps, one might speculate, it is precisely the ambivalence of the emotions bound up with this in the way described—the simultaneity of aversion and attraction, but also of shame and desire—which produces the untrammelled aggression. Klaus Theweleit has written extensively about this mechanism in wartime, in the fight against “red women” in the postwar revolutions of 1918/19 and the fantasies about female Jewish partisans in the Second World War.⁵² Based on a vast array of empirical material and impressive case studies, Regina Mühlhäuser, Elissa Mailänder, and Wendy Lower have argued that it was the specific colonial and racist setting of the war in Eastern Europe that produced an extremely widespread sexualized violence against women, regardless of their ethnic background, even though this was forbidden in “racial” theory.⁵³ Thanks to their (and many other) works, we do have some knowledge about the perpetrators’ mindset and more specifically about how the military dealt very differently with these crimes on the Eastern and Western fronts, which, again, is proof of the overarching power of racial practice.

At the home front, the outcome of this often mortal mix of antisemitism, racism, and sexualized violence left palpable

51 See Herbert, *Hitler’s Foreign Workers*, 129 (quote), 132–133.

52 Some of his sweeping analysis regarding the Freikorps has recently been put on firmer social history ground by Jan-Philipp Pomplun: *Deutsche Freikorps: Sozialgeschichte und Kontinuitäten (para) militärischer Gewalt zwischen Weltkrieg, Revolution und Nationalsozialismus* (Göttingen, 2022).

53 Regina Mühlhäuser, *Eroberungen: Sexuelle Gewalttaten und intime Beziehungen deutscher Soldaten in der Sowjetunion 1941–1945* (Hamburg, 2010); Elissa Mailänder, “Making Sense of a Rape Photograph: Sexual Violence as Social Performance on the Eastern Front, 1939–1944,” *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 26 (2017): 489–520; Wendy Lower, *Nazi Empire-Building and the Holocaust in the Ukraine* (Chapel Hill, NC, 2005).

54 Thomas Kühne, *The Rise and Fall of Comradeship: Hitler's Soldiers, Male Bonding and Mass Violence in the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge, UK, 2017); Klaus Latzel *Deutsche Soldaten – nationalsozialistischer Krieg? Kriegserlebnis – Kriegserfahrung: 1939–1945* (Paderborn, 1998).

55 Efrat Yeger, *A History of Violence in Berlin – Prenzlauer Berg: Views and Expressions of Violence 1943–1948* (Berlin, 2022).

56 See for example: Anthony Kauders, *Democratization and the Jews: Munich, 1945–1965* (Lincoln, NE, 2004); Anthony Kauders, *Unmögliche Heimat: Eine deutsch-jüdische Geschichte der Bundesrepublik* (München, 2007); Atina Grossmann, *Juden, Deutsche, Alliierte: Begegnungen im besetzten Deutschland* (Göttingen, 2012); Stefanie Schüler-Springorum, *Perspektiven deutsch-jüdischer Geschichte: Geschlecht und Differenz* (Paderborn, 2014), 138–153.

57 Ian Kershaw, *The End: The Defiance and Destruction of Hitler's Germany, 1944–45* (New York, 2011).

traces in German memory.⁵⁴ As the Israeli historian Efrat Yeger has recently shown, the experience of various forms of (often gender-based) violence—in her case, in the Berlin district of Prenzlauer Berg—characterized both the last war years and the early postwar years, for victims and perpetrators alike, albeit differently.⁵⁵ It is thus more than just an interesting experiment to adopt this perspective when assessing the ways in which Nazi antisemitism as the apotheosis of sexualized racism morphed into its “democratic” variant of the Federal Republic and whether, and (if so) why it changed its specific sexualized character on the way.

If we take a look at the years 1943 to 1949, the answer is easy and not very surprising, thanks to the intensive work on the postwar era that has been done in the fields of gender, Displaced Persons, and Jewish history.⁵⁶ With the turn of the war after the defeat at Stalingrad and the intensification of the air war in Germany, German males were slowly losing not only the war but also their role as protectors of wife and children at home. The intensified Nazi propaganda highlighting the threat that Jewish-Bolshevik rapists posed to German women took an indirect toll on German soldiers, whose fierce resistance in a militarily desperate situation appears to have been rooted to no small extent in the idea that they were protecting their families from the same atrocities that they themselves had committed or at least witnessed at the Eastern front. Thus, more German soldiers died in the last year of the war than in the five preceding ones.⁵⁷ Those who survived came home as losers between 1945 and 1955, where they met with a female population that had learned to take control of their own lives and the lives of their families.⁵⁸ The surprisingly short story of female redomestication and male reconstruction after the war is not our topic here, but there is a clear connection to the sexualized

58 Frank Biess, *Homecomings: Returning POWs and the Legacies of Defeat in Postwar Germany*

(Princeton, NJ, 2006); Svenja Goltermann, *Die Gesellschaft der Überlebenden Deutsche Kriegsheim-*

kehrer und ihre Gewalterfahrungen im Zweiten Weltkrieg (München, 2009).

antisemitism and racism of the Nazi era. The rage first directed against the Jewish seducer of the 1930s and then against the “unfaithful wife” of the 1940s, which had let off steam in the rituals of race defilement, appears to have crossed over seamlessly into postwar shared outrage and indignation over German women consorting with American soldiers, the so-called *Ami-Liebchen* (“sweetheart of the Yankee soldier”).⁵⁹ Even in the case of the tens of thousands of German women raped by Soviet soldiers at the end of the war, male German representatives often insinuated that, in reality, the women had “voluntarily consented.”⁶⁰ So while even the rebuilding of gender hierarchies depended on racist images, the same is true of the overall stocktaking of Germans after the war. As Frank Biess has shown, Germans “experienced the post war society as a world upside down with completely inverted social hierarchies.”⁶¹ The fear of revenge, so masterfully orchestrated by Goebbels’ propaganda since 1940, became omnipresent—just as the millions of Polish and Russian slave laborers had been in the last years of the war. But now these former slave laborers were free, and their sheer existence meant that the worst racist nightmare had come true. The fear and aggression this produced would shape the German handling of them and especially those who remained somehow stranded in the country for the decades to come, a situation that was exacerbated by the feeling of racist superiority that quickly became operative again after 1949.⁶²

In case of the Jews, the fear of revenge was much more complex or, to put it differently: traditional antisemitism fulfilled its role. In Nazi propaganda, the “world enemy” was at all fronts, staging an implacable air war against German cities and raping German girls in East Prussia. Germany had been fighting a war against “the Jews” by trying to kill all of them—which 37 percent of Germans in 1945, after capitulation, still deemed as having been necessary for the country’s safety. It should come as no surprise that, after the great defeat, the occupying forces were consequently all perceived as “Jewish” or “Jew Protectors.”⁶³

59 Susanne zur Nieden, “‘Erotic Fraternization’: The Legend of German Women’s Quick Surrender,” in *Home/Front*, ed. Hagemann and Schüler-Springorum, 297–310.

60 Miriam Gebhardt, *Als die Soldaten kamen: Die Vergewaltigung deutscher Frauen am Ende des Zweiten Weltkriegs* (München, 2015).

61 Frank Biess, *Republik der Angst: Eine andere Geschichte der Bundesrepublik* (Hamburg, 2019), 55. All references are to the original German edition; the quotations have been translated by the author of this article. See also the English translation: *German Angst? Fear and Democracy in the Federal Republic of Germany* (Oxford, UK, 2020).

62 See Maria Alexopoulou, *Deutschland und die Migration* (Ditzingen, 2020).

63 Biess, *Republik der Angst?*, 43–46, 52.

64 Biess, *Republik der Angst?*, 49–57.

65 Hans-Hermann Klare, *Auerbach: Eine jüdisch-deutsche Tragödie oder Wie der Antisemitismus den Krieg überlebte* (Berlin, 2022).

66 Klare, *Auerbach*, 379.

67 Werner Bergmann, and Rainer Erb, eds., *Anti-Semitism in Germany: The Post-Nazi Epoch since 1945* (New Brunswick, NJ, 1997).

Germans complained about the few surviving Jews being favored by the US occupation forces in housing, food, and everything else, while their behavior was continuously described with adjectives like cheeky, brazen or unabashed.⁶⁴ These anti-Semitic aggressions found their perfect projection in the “sneaky Jewish black marketeer” on the one hand and in the figure of the powerful and vengeful Jew on the other, be it Henry Morgenthau or Philipp Auerbach, the self-confident commissioner of the Bavarian state government for religious, political, and racial victims of the Nazis, who successfully defended the rights of the formerly persecuted and was driven to suicide in 1952 by an obviously anti-Semitic German judiciary.⁶⁵

Fantasies about Jewish men as wily and vengeful still fitted the traditional gendered imagery of antisemitism, and it is fascinating to see how much of the early revenge fantasies revolved around the images of sexualized racist and anti-Semitic policies. There were rumors, for example, about a marriage ban for Germans or a plan to parade Nazi women shorn and marked with swastikas through the streets. But with the advent of German sovereignty, blatantly sexualized images of the Jewish “Other,” so powerful in the decades before, seem to have mysteriously disappeared from the still potent antisemitic universe, at least in Germany. Descriptions such as Rudolf Augstein’s 1950 characterization of the Jewish lawyer Joseph Klibansky as a “mixture of a Roman tribune and a carpet dealer from Smyrna” who moved around the court room “with the agility of a racoon and the habitus of a penguin” vanished from the media—or at least I suppose they did, because, to my knowledge, no research has been done on this specific topic for the Federal Republic or the GDR.⁶⁶ This hypothesis is not to be confounded with the absence of antisemitism, which, as is well known, aside from age-old practices like attacking cemeteries or Jewish institutions, would, in the coming decades, focus on the Nazi past and the German guilt for the Holocaust, while officially being completely tabooed, first by the Allied occupiers and then by both German states.⁶⁷

So, the question is: where did the gendered imagery of the anti-Jewish resentment disappear to? What happened to the sexual anxieties associated with the threatening “Other” for so long? The first and obvious answer that comes to mind is, of course, racism: First, the black American soldier and the “Slavic rapist” took all the brunt, later to be followed by migrant workers of various waves and provenances up to this very day. Empirical material and social science research on this subject abound but seem to cover only half of the story.⁶⁸ In his book about German *Angst*, Frank Biess analyzes some very concrete projections of postwar anxieties that had striking structural similarities and caused veritable moral panics at the time. The first figure, in the 1950s, was the ominous “recruiter” for the French Foreign Legion, who supposedly corrupted the fatherless male German youth with a mixture of an elegant, rather feminine appearance and a veiled, maliciously seductive and greedy agenda.⁶⁹ While the “recruiter” clearly overlaps with the figure of “the homosexual,” at a time of fierce and unbroken homophobia and persecution, he shares the mixture of deviance, hidden activities, and danger to the fatherland with “the communist,” undoubtedly the new archenemy in divided Germany at the height of the Cold War.⁷⁰ “Similar to the recruiter,” Biess argues, “the ‘communist’ inherited many markers of the preceding stereotypical enemy, the Jew, and thus became a familiar figure in new garb.”⁷¹ Even though Jewish and (homo-)sexual markers became less and less obvious in the coming decades, which saw the *Sympathisant* (“sympathizer”, a derogatory term used with reference to the Baader-Meinhof terrorist group) or the

68 See Maria Höhn, *GIs and Fräuleins: The German-American Encounter in 1950s West Germany* (Chapel Hill, NC, 2002); Heide Fehrenbach, “Black Occupation Children and the Devolution of the Nazi Racial State,” in *After the Nazi Racial State: Difference and Democracy in Germany and Europe*, ed. Rita Chin, Heide Fehrenbach, and Geoff Eley (Ann Arbor, MI, 2009), 30–54; Astrid Messerschmidt, “Nach Köln: Zusammenhänge von Sexismus und Rassismus thematisieren,” in *Die Dämonisierung der Anderen: Rassismuskritik der Gegenwart*, ed. Maria do Mar Castro Varela and Paul Mecheril (Bielefeld, 2016), 159–172.

69 Biess, *Republik der Angst?*, 101–104, 122–133.

70 Between 1945 and 1969, about 50,000 homosexual men were judged, more than in the 60 years of the German Empire and the Weimar Republic; see Alexander Zinn: “Gegen das Sittengesetz: Staatliche

Homosexuellenverfolgung in Deutschland 1933–1945,” in *Homosexuelle in Deutschland 1933–1969: Beiträge zu Alltag, Stigmatisierung und Verfolgung*, ed. Alexander Zinn (Göttingen, 2020), 15–47, 45.

71 Biess, *Republik der Angst?*, 128.

72 Biess, *Republik der Angst?*, 451.

73 Werner Bergmann and Rainer Erb, "Kommunikationslatenz, Moral und öffentliche Meinung: Theoretische Überlegungen zum Antisemitismus in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland," *Kölner Zeitschrift für Soziologie und Sozialpsychologie* 39 (1986): 223–246.

74 See Jeanette Jakubowski, "Walters Griff in die antisemitische Mottenkiste oder die verführerische Macht der jüdin- und judenfeindlichen Stereotype," in *Antisemitismus und Geschlecht: Von "maskulinisierten Jüdinnen," "effeminierten Juden" und anderen Geschlechterbildern*, ed. A.G. Gender-Killer (Münster, 2005), 188–222.

75 See Atina Grossmann, "Defeated Germans and Surviving Jews: Gendered Encounters in Everyday Life in the US-Occupied Zone, 1945–49," in *German History from the Margins*, ed. Neil Gregor, Nils Roemer, and Mark Roseman (Bloomington, IN, 2006), 204–225.

76 See Barbara Steiner, *Die Inszenierung des Jüdischen: Konversionen von Deutschen zum Judentum nach 1945* (Göttingen, 2015), 17, 114, 144–153.

"asylum seeker/Muslim" as new variants of this threatening figure, one can conclude with Biess that all of them integrated certain traditional antisemitic features.⁷²

In this context, and if one follows the hypothesis, proposed by Werner Bergmann and Rainer Erb, that antisemitism was taboo in West Germany and thus only survived in private communication, the publication of Martin Walser's key novel *Tod eines Kritikers* can serve as a striking example of the return of the repressed.⁷³ For in Walser's novel the figure of the famous Jewish literary critic (and Holocaust survivor) Marcel Reich-Ranicki is construed in a way that fulfills all the gendered anti-Jewish clichés of the 1920s and 30s: ugly, deformed, lecherous, impotent, deviant, greedy, etc. Whether the author was reassembling childhood memories from the infamous *Stürmerkästen*—display boxes showing the latest issue of the antisemitic Nazi newspaper *Der Stürmer*—here, or just following his own (old-age) male fantasies, this book seemed curiously anachronistic in 2002 because, at the beginning of the new century, the sexualized antisemitic vision of the Jewish "Other" had long morphed into its opposite, namely philosemitism.⁷⁴

Whether it had to do with the complete discrediting of German military manliness, with German guilt or with sheer material necessity, very soon after the war ended, Jewish men suddenly became highly attractive for German women—and have remained so ever since.⁷⁵ As Barbara Steiner has shown, besides "mixed" couples that met in hospitals or Displaced Persons camps, with the women always in a subservient position, there were others, mainly women who were actively searching for survivors to marry. After the foundation of the state of Israel, Jewish men could add the image of the victor to their male portfolio, and Paul Newman in "Exodus" plus the war of 1967 provided an almost unbeatable mixture.⁷⁶ Jewish men had turned into symbols of masculinity, while Jewish women were carrying arms without being turned into threatening *Flintenweiber*: the beautiful Jewess, so it seems,

remained intact even (or especially) with an Uzi dangling from her tender shoulder. In the case of their male counterpart, the antisemitic cliché of the sex-driven, prurient Jew was turned into that of the best lover on earth.⁷⁷

This rather surprising shift hints at a related development to be discussed here: that of changed gender roles in general. As is well known, role models for men and women in the West underwent profound changes from the 1960s onward, discrediting both military masculinity and docile femininity.⁷⁸ It remains an open research question as to how far this played out in the disruption of the connection between sexualized antisemitic images and antisemitism as a political conspiratorial world view. My hypothesis would be that with the continuous blurring of clear-cut gender images in the last decades, the ambivalent sexual character of “the Jew” simply does not serve as a threat anymore in a world full of sexual/gendered ambivalences and has thus become useless for antisemitic mobilization. What is more: with the upsurge of radical right-wing nationalism and populism in recent years, it seems that “gender” and “Jews” have almost changed places. Nothing serves as a better “symbolic glue,” in the words of Andrea Pető, for the highly heterogeneous populist movements’ rejection of the (neo-)liberal order than the fight against “gender” or, in German: *Gender-Gaga*.⁷⁹ It remains an open question whether this might, in the end, re-activate sexualized anti-Jewish images, or whether the Jewish string-puller will remain “invisible” behind the scene, working incessantly to flood the European continent with masses of Muslim/Arab immigrants to take over the task of “destroying German female purity” from a whole parade of predecessors in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries: Jews, Franco-Africans, Afro-Americans, and Russians.

So how can we make sense of the persistence of these entangled mechanisms, of “sexual fantasies operating through racism and racial fantasies operating through sexualized imagery,” as Aidan Beatty so pointedly put it?⁸⁰ First of all, it seems obvious that even though the imagery, antisemitic

77 See Steiner, *Die Inszenierung des Jüdischen*, 135; Mirna Funk, “Warum ich keine Deutschen Männer date,” *Die Welt*, May 4, 2022.

78 See Herzog, *Sex after Fascism*; Axel Schildt and Detlef Siegfried, *Deutsche Kulturgeschichte: Die Bundesrepublik von 1945 bis zur Gegenwart* (München, 2009); Sven Reichardt, *Authentizität und Gemeinschaft: Linksalternatives Leben in den siebziger und frühen achtziger Jahren* (Berlin, 2014).

79 See Eszter Kováts, Maari Poim, and Andrea Pető, *Gender as Symbolic Glue: The Position and Role of Conservative and Far Right Parties in the Anti-Gender Mobilization in Europe* (Brussels, 2015); Sabine Hark and Paula-Irene Villa, eds., *Anti-Genderismus: Sexualität und Geschlecht als Schauplätze aktueller politischer Auseinandersetzungen* (Bielefeld, 2015).

80 Aidan Betty, “The Pornography of Fools: Tracing the History of Sexual Antisemitism,” unpublished lecture, Pittsburgh, 2020, p. 8.

and racist, was present already in premodern times, it was only with the advent of modernity, introducing a solidly constructed new gender order, including cemented forms of acceptable und unacceptable sexuality, that these entanglements developed their totalitarian and often deadly power. We miss much of this story if we only look at the anti-Jewish strand of it, however seductive it may be in order to trace long and longer durées. Furthermore, if we take seriously one of the few uncontested findings of research on antisemitism, namely that anti-Jewish resentment, ideology or practice always refers to the self-image of the antisemite, then we have to look at the whole picture: the longing for a pure, homogeneous, heterosexual, antimodern, strong community of “real” men and “real” women inherently entails the enumeration of the many enemies of this vision, even though often enough and until today “the Jew” is at the core of it all.

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