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Threats and Premonitions: German Intellectual Debates on Antisemitism in 1932

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This article evaluates intellectual debates on antisemitism in Germany in 1932, the last year before the establishment of Nazi dictatorship. The focus is on understudied cases of journals and books, in which both Jewish and National Socialist authors published right next to each other and on the same pages. In this context, the article makes three arguments: first, it analyses apologetic themes by right-wing authors and shows that a significant number of National Socialists still pretended that they were not actually antisemitic in 1932. Second, it reflects on the problem that Jewish intellectuals often disagreed on how to respond to the rise of antisemitism and thus entered into very different forms of debate with the German right. Finally, and perhaps paradoxically, the article also demonstrates that Weimar media had simultaneously developed an acute awareness of future threats and the possibility of large-scale atrocities on German territory.

Introduction

‘They love no nation as much as the German’, wrote the Catholic writer Karl Anton Rohan in the journal *Die Europäische Revue* in August 1932. In his article, ‘they’ was the most common pronoun used for ‘the Jews’. Just a few months before the establishment of Nazi dictatorship, Rohan claimed that ‘the instincts of the German people would rebel’ against their allegedly ubiquitous presence. Simultaneously, he referred to the German nation as a ‘host body’ [*Wirtsvolk*] which linguistically implied that Jews were mere parasites.

In light of this vocabulary, it seems contradictory, even bizarre that the antisemite Rohan defined himself as a friend and admirer of Jewish culture. He stressed that Judaism had brought ‘positive achievements for Germany’. ‘To denounce Judaism as inferior’, he went on, ‘only occurs to people who themselves suffer from an inferiority complex towards this Jewishness.’ ‘The Germans’, Rohan concluded in 1932, ‘would be unthinkable without the Jews.’ The ‘Jewish question’, therefore, was ultimately (and euphemistically) rephrased as an ‘enormous question of destiny – for both’.¹

Facing such contradictory sources, this article focuses on public debates on antisemitism in 1932, the last year before Hitler’s ‘seizure of power’. Crucially, this was the last year in which journalism remained free of censorship and political control. Yet, 1932 was also the fourth consecutive year of economic crisis and was shaped by the presidential election in March and two parliamentary elections in July and November that were each accompanied by violent street fights. In this environment of crisis and political instability – so goes the classical historiographical narrative – Nazi antisemites and their liberal enemies allegedly acted as clearly defined groups that had little contact with each other aside from direct clashes in parliament and on the streets. This article, in contrast, is a reminder that the final phase of the Weimar period was marked by a rush of publications that brought the

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¹ Karl Rohan, ‘Einige Bemerkungen zur Judenfrage’, *Europäische Revue*, 8 (1932), 456.

issue of antisemitism to the forefront of German media attention. In journals and book publications, Nazi ideologues, liberal authors and Jewish intellectuals often published side by side on the same pages. They quoted each other, attacked each other, but also reflected on each other's arguments in order to win over the readership of the opposing camp.² While National Socialists, communists and democrats each had their own journals and newspapers, an astonishing number of authors also published in periodicals of different political groups. More importantly, still, there were magazines, such as *Die Europäische Revue*, which claimed to uphold an image of 'neutrality' and thus printed articles by both National Socialist and Jewish authors. These publications featured a large variety of authors, such as Rohan, who claimed to 'intermediate' in political conflicts.

Most works on antisemitism in the Weimar Republic either focus on right-wing antisemites or their Jewish victims, but rarely look at these groups together.³ Historians such as Alan Levenson, Shulamit Volkov, Stefan Vogt and Phillipp Nielsen, in contrast, have begun to research in what ways antisemites and their opponents communicated and debated from the *Kaiserreich* to the interwar period.⁴ This article seeks to deepen these newer approaches, but shifts the attention to the last phase of the Weimar Republic. Although Julius Schoeps has recently published a monograph on Jewish reactions to Nazism in the first years of the Third Reich, the year 1932 has not been subject to a separate historical analysis since Werner Mosse and Arnold Paucker's edited volume *Entscheidungsjahr 1932* that was published in the 1960s.⁵

In order to assess the state of German debates on antisemitism directly prior to the Nazi Party's ascension to power, this article relies on three sources that were each published in 1932 and have previously received little attention. The first is the journal *Europäische Revue* that was edited by Karl Anton Rohan. As a descendant of the highest Austrian aristocracy, Rohan was able to attract many readers from the upper classes.⁶ While conservative authors sympathising with Italian fascism made regular contributions, the journal was also popular within the European intellectual avant-garde, featuring articles from Thomas Mann, Paul Valéry, Theodor W. Adorno, Juan Ortega y Gasset and Ernesto Grassi. In August 1932, immediately after the Nazi Party's landslide victory in July's parliamentary election, Rohan published a special edition on the 'Jewish Question'. All the political contradictions and conflicts within *Die Europäische Revue* were compounded in this issue, which included not only antisemitic articles by Nazi writers, but also contributions of Jewish authors such as Leo Baeck or Jakob Wassermann.

² See Eva Reichmann, 'Diskussionen über die Judenfrage 1930–1932', in Werner E. Mosse and Arnold Paucker, eds., *Entscheidungsjahr 1932. Zur Judenfrage in der Endphase der Weimarer Republik* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1966), 503–31; Stefan Vogt, 'Vertraute Feinde. Zionisten und konservative Revolutionäre in der Weimarer Republik', *Zeitschrift für Geschichtswissenschaft*, 61 (2013), 713–32; Walter Zwi Bacharach, 'Jews in confrontation with racist antisemitism 1879–1933', *Leo Baeck Institute Yearbook*, 25 (1980), 197–219.

³ See Donald L. Niewyk, 'Solving the "Jewish Problem". Continuity and Change in German Antisemitism 1871–1945', *LBIYB*, 35 (1990), 335–70; Wolfgang Benz, Arnold Paucker and Peter Pulzer, eds., *Jüdisches Leben in der Weimarer Republik* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1998); Anthony Kauders, *German Politics and the Jews: Düsseldorf and Nuremberg 1910–1933* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996); Dirk Walter, *Antisemitische Kriminalität und Gewalt: Judenfeindschaft in der Weimarer Republik* (Bonn: Dietz, 1999).

⁴ Alan Levenson, *Between Philosemitism and Antisemitism: Defenses of Jews and Judaism in Germany 1871–1932* (Lincoln: Nebraska University Press, 2004); Stefan Vogt, *Subalterne Positionierungen. Der deutsche Zionismus im Feld des Nationalismus in Deutschland, 1890–1933* (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2016); Philipp Nielsen, *Between Heimat and Hatred: Jews and the Right in Germany, 1871–1935* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019); Shulamit Volkov, *Germans, Jews, and Antisemites: Trials in Emancipation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

⁵ Julius Schoeps, *Düstere Vorahnungen. Deutschlands Juden am Vorabend der Katastrophe, 1933–1935* (Berlin: Hentrich & Hentrich, 2018); Werner E. Mosse and Arnold Paucker, eds., *Entscheidungsjahr 1932: Zur Judenfrage in der Endphase der Weimarer Republik* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1966).

⁶ Guido Müller, 'Von Hugo von Hofmannsthal's "Traum des Reiches" zum Europa unter nationalsozialistischer Herrschaft: die "Europäische Revue" 1925–1936/44', in: Hans-Christof Kraus, ed., *Konservative Zeitschriften zwischen Kaiserreich und Diktatur: Fünf Fallstudien* (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 2003), 155–86. On aristocratic antisemitism see Stephan Malinowski, 'Vom blauen zum reinen Blut. Antisemitische Adelskritik und adliger Antisemitismus 1871–1944', *Jahrbuch für Antisemitismusforschung*, 12 (2003), 147–68.

The second source of this article is the so-called *Anti-Anti*, a collection of articles published in 1932 by the 'Central-Verein deutscher Staatsbürger jüdischen Glaubens', the Central League of German Citizens of Jewish Faith.⁷ The *Centralverein*, an organisation of about 60,000 members, sought to actively fight antisemitism in German society and simultaneously promoted a conservative–patriotic and assimilatory worldview.⁸ Most prominently, perhaps, the Verein included members such as Alfred Wiener, a world-war veteran and scholar who gathered extensive material on antisemitism in the Weimar Republic. As one of the *Centralverein*'s largest projects, *Anti-Anti* was meant to debunk antisemitic myths, lies, 'fake news' and conspiracy theories in order to highlight instead the positive achievements of Jewish citizens for the German nation. Explicitly edited as a 'fact book', it consisted of 189 loose pages on different topics that could also be distributed as individual leaflets.

The third source of this paper is a collection of essays that was published under the title '*Der Jud ist schuld . . . ? – Diskussionsbuch über die Judenfrage*'.⁹ Again, this book included both openly National Socialist as well as Jewish authors. In total, it featured fourteen antisemitic, nine supposedly neutral and sixteen critical contributions. The editors themselves defined this book as a 'neutral platform on which both pro- and contra-speakers can be sure to be heard and acknowledged by an unbiased audience'.¹⁰

What makes these sources so unique is that they featured direct confrontations and public discussions between antisemitic and Jewish authors. A deliberately narrow focus on 1932 permits us to assess whether some long-held beliefs on Judaism were questioned under the imminent threat of Nazi dictatorship. Effectively, it allows for a litmus test on the question of to what extent the sphere of what could and what could not be said in German media had already shifted before the events of 1933. This article seeks to explain how National Socialist concepts tacitly found their way into public discussions and to what degree Nazi vocabulary was able to transcend political boundaries.¹¹ Authors such as Rohan illustrate that antisemitic ideas penetrated the language of the bourgeoisie and the political mainstream. Hence, sources such as *Die Europäische Revue* or the *Diskussionsbuch* are pieces of evidence for an intellectual transformation of Weimar's public sphere that had already taken place before 1933.

To be clear, some of the articles and publications presented in this article have featured in historical studies, such as Stefan Vogt's extensive analysis of German Zionism's rhetorical strategies. In addition,

⁷ Anonymous, *Anti-Anti: Tatsachen zur Judenfrage* (Berlin), Centralverein deutscher Staatsbürger jüdischen Glaubens/Philo-Verlag.

⁸ Avraham Barkai and Pavel Golubev, 'Die Abwehr des Nationalsozialismus durch den Centralverein', in: *Hamburger Schlüsseldokumente zur deutsch-jüdischen Geschichte*, 22 Sept. 2016 [online edition]; Johann Nicolai, '*Seid mutig und aufrecht!* Das Ende des Centralvereins deutscher Staatsbürger jüdischen Glaubens 1933–1938' (Berlin: BeBra, 2016); Annegret Stalder, *Der Central-Verein deutscher Staatsbürger jüdischen Glaubens. Organisation, Ziele, Probleme des jüdischen Abwehrvereins* (Munich: GRIN, 2013); Inbal Steinitz, *Der Kampf jüdischer Anwälte gegen den Antisemitismus. Die strafrechtliche Rechtsschutzarbeit des Centralvereins deutscher Staatsbürger jüdischen Glaubens 1893–1933* (Berlin: Metropol, 2008); Avraham Barkai, *Wehr dich! Der Centralverein deutscher Staatsbürger jüdischen Glaubens (C.V.) 1893–1938* (Munich: C.H. Beck, 2002); Jürgen Matthäus, 'Kampf ohne Verbündete. Der Centralverein deutscher Staatsbürger jüdischen Glaubens 1933–1938', *Jahrbuch für Antisemitismusforschung*, 8 (1999), 248–77.

⁹ Hermann Bahr et al., eds., '*Der Jud ist schuld . . . ?; Diskussionsbuch über die Judenfrage*' (Basel, 1932); about Bahr's surveys, also see Thomas Gräfe, '*Was halten Sie von den Juden?* – Umfragen über Judentum und Antisemitismus 1885–1932' (Norderstedt, 2020), 62–73.

¹⁰ Anonymous, 'Vorwort', in Bahr et al., eds., *Diskussionsbuch*, 8; also see Hermann Bahr's previous publication: Hermann Bahr, *Der Antisemitismus. Ein internationales Interview* (Berlin: Nabu Press, 2011[1894]).

¹¹ Of course, not every antisemitic statement in 1932 was National Socialist. Nationalist, National Socialist, *völkisch* and conservative arguments often overlapped, were not always clearly distinguishable, but were also not interchangeable. In recent years, therefore, historians of the Weimar Republic and the Third Reich have begun to understand the success of the Nazi Party in terms of a 'plurality' of voices that could eventually be integrated into a loosely consensual but ideologically heterogeneous *Volksgemeinschaft* after 1933. On this discourse see, in particular, Lutz Raphael, 'Pluralities of National Socialist Ideology: New Perspectives on the Production and Diffusion of National Socialist Weltanschauung', in Martina Steber and Bernhard Gotto, eds., *Visions of Community in Nazi Germany: Social Engineering and Private Lives* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 73–86.

it should be noted that these three sources were certainly not the only German publications on anti-semitism in 1932. In a similar context, one may list, for example, the radio debate in May 1932 between the right-wing writer Wilhelm Stapel and the lawyer Ludwig Holländer. Likewise, the correspondence between Stapel and the Zionist writer Robert Weltsch was published in the journal *Deutsches Volkstum* in response to the *Diskussionsbuch*.¹² Finally, historians have also engaged with the book *Klärung – 12 Autoren, Politiker über die Judenfrage* that showed many parallels to the *Diskussionsbuch*.¹³ Stefan Vogt, in particular, must be credited for having given us not only an overview and a chronology of these publications, but also for having analysed Jewish and Zionist reactions to antisemitic ideas. Building on his findings, this article further explores the conceptual history of how German intellectuals defined antisemitism and how they thought to draw conceptual borders.

Of course, journals such as *Die Europäische Revue* had a relatively small audience among readers of the educated middle and upper classes. Therefore, the findings of this article cannot easily be extrapolated to Weimar's mass media at large, which also featured a range of aggressively antisemitic daily and weekly newspapers.¹⁴ Clearly, more intellectual publications had a smaller collective societal impact than antisemitic mass journals such as *Der Stürmer*.¹⁵ However, more sophisticated bourgeois publications allow us to scrutinise the axioms and, more importantly, the conceptual contradictions within German antisemitism.

Unlike other forms of European racism, antisemitism is not primarily an ideology, but rather a loose set of images that circulate in culture and society – images that constantly evolve and are constantly reinterpreted and redefined. The sources of this article allow for a very close look precisely at this process at a most fateful moment in German history. They offer a glimpse into a debate between various German thinkers, both Jewish and non-Jewish, and on what antisemitism was or was not in their eyes.

At the same time, antisemitic intellectuals such as Rohan sought to present themselves as friends and admirers of Jewish culture. More importantly, however, the article shows that even staunch National Socialists, who were far more radical than Rohan, equally tried to deny or to embellish their antisemitism in public. While we have come to see open and explicit antisemitism as Nazism's key characteristic, it must be explained why Nazi authors attempted to relativise or to hide their views. In this context, this article further researches how opponents of the Nazi movement reacted to antisemitism in German media. Racialised distinctions of 'Jews' and 'Germans', for instance, were often not recognised as antisemitic or inherently 'right-wing'.¹⁶ Instead, this paper shows that even Jewish authors were caught in a number of debates and contradictions on national identity and citizenship which impeded the formation of a coherent Jewish opposition against antisemitism in the German public.

Contrary to that finding, however, this paper also argues that German media featured surprisingly open discussions about the possibility of antisemitic violence in 1932. The sources analysed in this article are full of threats, warnings and dark premonitions. This awareness of looming atrocities runs counter to the classical narrative that neither Jews nor ordinary Germans could have anticipated

¹² Wilhelm Stapel, Besprechung von 'Klärung' und 'Der Jud ist schuld', *Deutsches Volkstum*, 34 (1932), 465–7.

Also see Robert Weltsch, 'Imperare necesse est . . .' – Unsere Auseinandersetzung mit Wilhelm Stapel, *Jüdische Rundschau*, 98 (1931), p. 574; Wilhelm Stapel, Die Antwort der Jüdischen Rundschau, *Deutsches Volkstum*, 33 (1931), 977–9; Weltsch and Stapel also exchanged a number of letters in summer and fall 1932. For more details see Vogt, *Subalterne Positionierungen*, 337.

¹³ See *Klärung – 12 Autoren, Politiker über die Judenfrage* (Berlin: Tradition, 1932).

¹⁴ For an overview, see Bernhard Fulda, *Press and Politics in the Weimar Republic* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

¹⁵ On *Der Stürmer* see Daniel Roos, *Julius Streicher und 'Der Stürmer'* (Paderborn: Schöningh, 2014).

¹⁶ Friedrich Battenberg, 'Antisemitismus als kultureller Code in der deutschen Geschichte. Anmerkungen zu Elementen einer antijüdischen Denkweise', in Doron Kiesel and Leonore Siegle-Wenschkewitz, eds., *Der Aufklärung zum Trotz. Antisemitismus und politische Kultur in Deutschland* (Frankfurt: Haag & Herchen, 1998), 15–51; Stefanie Schüler-Springorum and Uffa Jensen, 'Gefühle gegen Juden. Die Emotionsgeschichte des modernen Antisemitismus', *Geschichte und Gesellschaft*, 39 (2013), 413–42; Peter Alter, Claus-Ekkehard Bärsch and Peter Berghoff, eds., *Die Konstruktion der Nation gegen die Juden* (Munich: Wilhelm Fink, 1999).

the violence of the Nazi regime. It thus points to the historiographical task of disclosing what contemporary Germans took to be thinkable. Jane Caplan, for example, recently formulated the question of 'how, historically, it was possible to arrive at that previously thought non-existent.' This article reconstructs this process from the previously neglected perspective of 1932: 'how did something become thinkable and thereby actionable? Or, to expand this to the full process, what was the path from non-existence, to existence in thought, and then to existence and enactment in the real?'¹⁷

Denial and Apologetics

'Antisemitism does not exist in Germany at all', wrote the politician Ernst zu Reventlow in 1932.¹⁸ At this point, he was already a well-known figure in Germany. Holding a seat for the Nazi Party in parliament, Reventlow had used his influence to publish numerous antisemitic texts, including articles affirming the alleged authenticity of *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*. In 1932, however, he did his best to convince the readers of the *Diskussionsbuch* that he was no antisemite at all. 'The Germans', he argued, for example, had always been sympathetic to the cause of 'the Arabs', whom Reventlow considered to be Semites as well. He explained that German Jews who criticised Islam could be seen as equally antisemitic as Nazi authors who rejected Judaism. This 'amusing paradox', he went on, would show that the concept of antisemitism was inherently meaningless.¹⁹ By conflating Judaism with the racial label 'Semitic', however, Reventlow also showed to what extent he was entrapped in racial thought. In his opinion, the 'solution of the Jewish question' could only be the 'exclusion of the Jews from German life'.²⁰

It is astonishing that even a National Socialist such as Reventlow refused to call himself an 'anti-semite'. From a present-day perspective, we tend to think that National Socialist authors made no efforts to hide their antisemitism. Publications such as *Mein Kampf* indicate that at least Hitler himself had already openly announced his ultimate goals in the 1920s.²¹ In contrast, the example of Reventlow illustrates that other exponents of an exterminatory kind of racism simultaneously tried to morally defend themselves against accusations of being antisemites.

This pattern can be discerned among a wide range of intellectuals. Ernst von Wolzogen, for example, a journalist who wrote for the Nazi newspaper *Der Völkische Beobachter*, published a very similar contribution in the essay collection of the *Diskussionsbuch*. Here, he argued that his 'racial instinct' was only directed against the 'Ashkenazim, the Jews from the East', and not against German Jews who had mixed with 'European blood'. More significantly, the antisemite Wolzogen simultaneously criticised that some 'narrow-minded racial fanatics hastily dismiss all Jewish accomplishments'. In contrast, he insisted that he was no antisemite and that he merely demanded to separate 'Jews' from 'Germans'. 'Only if the Jew ceases to be a German citizen and if he becomes a cordially tolerated foreigner instead', Wolzogen ultimately argued, 'only then will antisemitism lose its poisonous teeth'.²²

In this twisted logic of segregation, the exclusion of the German Jews was described as a necessary condition to halt antisemitism.²³ In a similar tone, the right-wing intellectual Wilhelm Stapel complained that German Jews allegedly destroyed German culture: 'they always try to teach us that our

¹⁷ Jane Caplan, 'Utopisch und Udenkbar. Zu einem Aufsatz Hans Mommsens aus dem Jahr 1983', *Trivium. Deutsch-französische Zeitschrift für Geistes- und Sozialwissenschaften*, 22 (2016), 3. In this context, also see Alon Confino's widely debated book *A World Without Jews: The Nazi Imagination from Persecution to Genocide* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2014).

¹⁸ Ernst zu Reventlow, 'Was sind für uns die Juden?', in Bahr et al., eds., *Diskussionsbuch*, 14.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid., 38.

²¹ Christian Hartmann et al., eds., *Hitler, Mein Kampf: Eine kritische Edition* (Berlin: Institut für Zeitgeschichte, 2016).

²² Ernst Freiherr von Wolzogen, 'Grundsätzliches und Persönliches zur Judenfrage', in Bahr et al., eds., *Diskussionsbuch*, 44, 47, 51.

²³ On such ideas of segregation and their history see Magnus Brechtken, 'Madagaskar für die Juden'. *Antisemitische Idee und politische Praxis 1885–1945* (Munich: Institut für Zeitgeschichte, 1998). In Magnus Brechtken's analysis, 1932 was not a

moral values – honor, humility, courage, patriotism, *Führertreue*, *Volkstreue* etc. – are wrong.²⁴ In this context, Stapel even argued that German antisemitism had been caused by a Jewish ‘anti-Germanism’. Yet, he still claimed that he did not ‘consider the Jewish people to be unworthy or “evil”’.²⁵ ‘There would be no antisemitism’, he proclaimed in 1932, ‘if the Jews were able to keep their mouths shut.’²⁶

It was Carl von Ossietzky, the editor of the left-wing journal *Weltbühne*, who foresaw the political consequences of these ideas and how they would turn into actions. ‘These people’, he wrote in direct reference to Stapel during the electoral campaigns of July 1932, ‘forget about our Zeitgeist and what impact they can have . . . One pointed word is enough to bring hands into motion. In this time, there is much blood in the air. This literary antisemitism is providing the immaterial weapons for manslaughter.’²⁷

Traditionally, historians have often observed that the Nazi Party consciously toned down its anti-semitic rhetoric in the early 1930s in order to win over middle-class and bourgeois voters. Yet, the publications presented in this article rather point to the high visibility of debates on antisemitism in the public discourse. Thus, the electoral successes of the NSDAP (*Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei*) in spring and summer 1932 led to new forms of public discussions on antisemitism that had been rarer in the 1920s.

Some Nazi authors were explicit about their threats of violence. ‘Either our nation will be completely enslaved by the Jews’, the journalist Ottokar Stauf von der March prophesised, ‘or there will be a pogrom.’ In 1932, however, Stauf also referred to ‘reasonable Jews’ who foresaw ‘all sorts of doom’ and were thus ready to leave Germany. To illustrate his position, the Nazi Stauf von der March quoted Chaim Weizmann, then president of the World Zionist Organization: ‘the world should not forget that there is a Jewish question which can become stained with blood.’²⁸

While staunch National Socialists claimed that they were no antisemites at all, the ubiquity of racial thought about Judaism facilitated the acceptance of Nazi ideas in German society and lent credibility to Nazi authors. This is perhaps most evident in an article published by the economist Werner Sombart in the *Diskussionsbuch*. While the Nazi-sympathiser Sombart had already extensively published on Judaism and capitalism before the First World War, he tried to prove that his ideas were anything but antisemitic.²⁹ ‘Do I have to say that the Jewish nation . . . is one of the most valuable races that the human species has ever engendered?’, he asked in 1932. ‘A gigantic gap would emerge in mankind if the Jewish race would disappear!’³⁰ Ultimately, he concluded that ‘we never want to lose these deep and sad Jewish eyes! [*traurige Judenaugen*]’ Yet, Sombart also argued that ‘a true race wastes away if it cannot unfold in its pure form.’ Accordingly, he strictly opposed the intermarriage of Jews and Germans.³¹ ‘Precisely this mix of Jewish and German nature’, he argued, ‘has contributed to

central year in this discourse. In contrast, Henry Hamilton Beamish’s advocacy for a ‘compulsory segregation’ in 1926 seems far more important than any publication in 1932. See f. 34.

²⁴ Wilhelm Stapel, ‘Aphoristisches zur Judenfrage’, in Bahr et al., eds., *Diskussionsbuch*, 172.

²⁵ Wilhelm Stapel, *Antisemitismus und Antigermanismus* (Hamburg: Hanseatische Verlagsanstalt, 1928), 108.

²⁶ Stapel, ‘Aphoristisches’, 172.

²⁷ Carl von Ossietzky, ‘Antisemiten’, *Die Weltbühne*, 19 July 1932, 96.

²⁸ Ottokar Stauf von der March, ‘Der Feind’, in Bahr et al., eds., *Diskussionsbuch*, 92–3.

²⁹ See Werner Sombart, *Die Juden und das Wirtschaftsleben* (Leipzig: Duncker & Humblot, 1911); on the connections between anti-capitalism and antisemitism see Matthew Lange, *Antisemitic Elements in the Critique of Capitalism in German Culture, 1850–1933* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2007); Avraham Barkai, ‘Judentum, Juden und Kapitalismus. Ökonomische Vorstellungen von Max Weber und Werner Sombart’, *Menora. Jahrbuch für deutsch-jüdische Geschichte*, 4 (1994), 25–38; Georg Iggers, ‘Academic Antisemitism in Germany 1870–1933’, *Tel-Aviver Jahrbuch für Deutsche Geschichte*, 27 (1998), 473–89. For more background on Sombart, see Jürgen G. Backhaus, ed., *Werner Sombart (1863–1941): Social Scientist* (Marbach: Metropolis, 1996). On Sombart and economic antisemitism see Derek Penslar, *Shylock’s Children: Economics and Jewish Identity in Modern Europe* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2001), chapter ‘homo economicus judaicus’, in particular 163–171.

³⁰ Werner Sombart, ‘Artvernichtung und Arterhaltung’, in Bahr et al., eds., *Diskussionsbuch*, 251.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 251.

deteriorating both races.’ While Sombart claimed that Jews were a ‘gain for mankind’, his final conclusion read as follows:

I hope that the German racial soul will free itself from the embrace of the Jewish spirit so that it can develop in purity. I hope that the Judaisation [*Verjudung*] of our public and intellectual life will end: for the equal benefit of both German and Jewish culture. Because Jewish culture equally suffers under this unnatural unification.³²

It must be asked how such statements affected the reception of Nazism in German society. Perhaps surprisingly, Ottokar Stauff von der March considered Sombart to have been ‘incredibly friendly’ towards Judaism in Germany.³³ More significantly and even more disturbingly, however, the Jewish publication *Anti-Anti*, which sought to expose antisemitism in German society, equally praised Sombart for his supposedly pro-Jewish attitude. In fact, the previous quotations were all reprinted in 1932 in *Anti-Anti*, where Jewish authors sought to illustrate that the famous Sombart really was an advocate of the Jewish minority in Germany.³⁴ Hence, it must be asked what actually constituted antisemitism in the eyes of contemporary readers. If Sombart’s antisemitic tone could go unnoticed even by the Jewish *Centralverein*, then this lack of political sensitivity must have also been symptomatic for German debates on Nazism.

Sombart’s article was typical of a right-wing pattern of thought in the early 1930s that sought to legitimise racial segregation through a supposedly objective and politically neutral description of racial differences. By abstaining from obvious defamations of Judaism, in other words, the demand to separate ‘the Jews’ from the rest of German society could be reformulated in a seemingly less threatening manner. In the *Diskussionsbuch*, for instance, the nationalist writer Franz Schauwecker further elaborated the argument that a true admiration of Jewish culture should go hand in hand with the demand to separate Germans and Jews. Explicitly, he wrote that he admired the Zionist movement because Jewish activists such as Martin Buber were allegedly fighting against the racial mixing of ‘Germans’ and ‘Jews’. At the same time, Schauwecker claimed that ‘antisemitism in any form is a product of the assimilatory Jews’. Ultimately, he propagated that ‘Buber’s pure Judaism is a positive value’ while ‘assimilatory Judaism’ was a ‘symptom of decay’. This would lead authors such as Schauwecker to the conclusion that the ‘Jewish Question’ could only be solved if Jews were to become Zionists and to leave Germany once and for all.³⁵

Historians have remarked on numerous occasions that German antisemitism was inherently contradictory: while some authors called for measures of racial segregation, others demanded that Jews should abandon their own identity and become ‘fully German’. What is less understood, however, is that both of these narratives simultaneously allowed right-wing authors to deny their antisemitism and to argue that their ideas were not in fact antisemitic. Authors such as Sombart and Schauwecker, for that matter, pretended to represent Jewish interests as well.

In *Die Europäische Revue*, the editor, Rohan, employed a different strategy to embellish his own antisemitism. In contrast to other authors, Rohan argued that the ‘Jewish Question’ could be solved if Germans and Jews were to mix. Thereby, he defined the ‘Jewish Question’ as a challenge for ‘reconciliation’ and wrote that a mix of ‘German and Jewish blood’ could be culturally beneficial. ‘Doesn’t mixed blood’, he asked, ‘produce a great tension, which pushes the *Geist* to extreme creativity?’³⁶ In 1932, accordingly, Rohan still rejected calls for racial separation in the Nazi Party. ‘Anyone

³² Ibid.; Sombart took this article out of a previous book: Werner Sombart, *Die Zukunft der Juden* (Leipzig: Duncker & Humblot, 1912).

³³ Stauff von der March, ‘Feind’, 88.

³⁴ See Anonymous, *Anti-Anti*, 33b.; quoted from Sombart, *Die Zukunft der Juden*, 56.

³⁵ Franz Schauwecker, ‘Über den Antisemitismus’, in Bahr et al., eds., *Diskussionsbuch*, 232, 233, 236. On German interpretations of Zionism see Fabian Weber, *Projektionen auf den Zionismus: nichtjüdische Wahrnehmungen des Zionismus im Deutschen Reich 1897–1933* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Rupprecht, 2020).

³⁶ Rohan, ‘Einige Bemerkungen zur Judenfrage’, 458.

who appreciates the Jews and what is specifically Jewish', he explained, 'cannot support the current "Anti-movement" [i.e. National Socialism], even if one acknowledges its deep historical and psychological causes.' Although Rohan rejected the 'barbaric principles' and the 'primitive emotional methods' of the Nazi Party, he acknowledged that 'people, who are less assertive of their old Aryan roots, sometimes fear the superior talent and the high moral qualities of the Jews'. Antisemitism, from this apologetic perspective, was a regrettable yet understandable side-effect of Germany's lack of national self-confidence.

Overall, German antisemites were typically divided in their argumentation. While some called for a strict racial separation of 'Jews' and 'Germans', others expected German Jews to adopt a German-nationalist identity. 'The Jew' was either a foreigner, a *Fremdkörper* of obvious racial difference, or they were accused of being featureless and hiding within the liberal bourgeoisie in order to destroy German culture from within.³⁷ While these narratives have been discussed by historians such as Stefanie Schüler-Springorum, Abigail Green, Peter Longerich, or Donald Niewyk in depth, we also need to consider that they each allowed right-wing authors to hide, to downplay or even to deny their antisemitism.³⁸

What makes sources such as *Die Europäische Revue* and the *Diskussionsbuch* so peculiar is the problem that antisemitic and supposedly philo-Semitic statements were often combined and intertwined. These publications featured a wide spectrum of antisemitic ideas that were mutually connected, but also wildly contradictory. Ultimately, we are confronted with a plurality of antisemitic voices and it might thus be helpful to conceptualise the discourse with the help of the term 'Allosemitism'. Describing Jews as 'Others' clearly was a unifying feature of various branches of *Völkisch*, National Socialist, bourgeois and even religious antisemitism in Germany.³⁹ Yet, there was no single coherent form of antisemitism in 1932 that was politically hegemonic and unified in an exclusory and exterminatory logic. It was, however, precisely this hidden, flexible and structural nature of antisemitism that allowed National Socialist authors to gain a wider audience. In the political climate of Weimar, antisemitic arguments could often go unnoticed. Ultimately, therefore, historians should not underestimate the extent to which apologetic or relativising arguments gained credibility among more moderate German readers who did not necessarily identify with the Nazi party.

Reactions to Antisemitism

While it would seem intuitive to assume that obviously antisemitic and apologetic texts of authors such as Rohan or Sombart were quickly discarded as absurd expressions of crude worldviews, these examples lead to a more fundamental problem: at what point was racial ideology actually recognised as dangerous? On numerous occasions and over several decades, historians such as Avraham Barkai or Daniel Fraenkel have discussed the problem that Jewish authors, particularly in conservative and nationalist milieus, sometimes failed to recognise antisemitism or even excused antisemitic positions.⁴⁰

³⁷ See Peter Longerich, *Antisemitismus: Eine deutsche Geschichte von der Aufklärung bis Heute* (Munich: Siedler, 2021); Abigail Green and Simon Levis Sulam, eds., *Jews, Liberalism, Antisemitism: A Global History* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020).

³⁸ Stefanie Schüler-Springorum, ed., *Liberalismus und Emanzipation – In- und Exklusionsprozesse im Kaiserreich und in der Weimarer Republik* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner, 2010); Donald Niewyk, *The Jews in Weimar Germany* (London: Routledge, 2001); Cornelia Hecht, *Deutsche Juden und Antisemitismus in der Weimarer Republik* (Bonn: Dietz, 2003).

³⁹ The term was first introduced by Artur Sandauer and then popularised by Zygmunt Bauman. See Artur Sandauer, *O sytuacji pisarza polskiego pochodzenia żydowskiego w XX wieku* (Warsaw: Czytelnik, 1982); Zygmunt Bauman, 'Allosemitism: Premodern, Modern, Postmodern', in: Bryan Cheyette and Laura Marcus, eds., *Modernity, Culture, and 'the Jew'* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998); Valerie Weinstein, 'Dissolving Boundaries: Assimilation and Allosemitism in E.A. Dupont's "Das Alte Gesetz" (1923) and Veit Harlan's "Jud Süß" (1940)', *The German Quarterly*, 78, 4 (2005), 496–516.

⁴⁰ Daniel Fraenkel, 'The *Jüdische Rundschau*'s Response to the Rise of National Socialism, 1930–1932', in Michael Nagel and Moshe Zimmermann, eds., *Judenfeindschaft und Antisemitismus in der deutschen Presse über fünf Jahrhunderte. Erscheinungsformen, Rezeption, Debatte und Gegenwehr* (Bremen: Edition Lumière, 2013), 609–17; Avraham Barkai,

Already, in 1975, Jehuda Reinharz wrote that many Jewish authors 'did not deal with a defense against antisemitism' until the last years of the Weimar Republic.⁴¹ In contrast, I argue that the problem lies rather in the manner of *how* they dealt with antisemitism.

In the *Diskussionsbuch*, for instance, the politician Max Neumann, the president of the *Verband nationaldeutscher Juden* [Association of National German Jews], published an article that was meant to condemn antisemitism but which simultaneously criticised members of the Jewish minority for their lack of assimilation. 'We have to ignore the uncivilised Jews who live in the past', Neumann wrote in 1932. Instead, he called upon German Jews to embrace a specifically German form of patriotism:

The rootless Jews in transition [*Übergangsjuden*] . . . should be repressed or be kept on a short leash, wherever they try to push themselves into the foreground and wherever they distract the German nation from its work for a German future. But one should not create barriers for those who honestly want to embrace Germanism. They can become valuable members of the German people.⁴²

In light of the fact that Neumann would be arrested by the Gestapo a mere two years later, these words read as being particularly ill-fated. Yet, they represent an intellectual pattern among Jewish authors who sought to combat antisemitism by embracing nationalist world views and vocabularies.⁴³

Notably, the *Centralverein* featured numerous nationalist undertones and sought to stress the value of Jewish patriots for the German nation. In order to counter right-wing claims that Jews could never be Germans, *Anti-Anti* reprinted a collection of statements from figures such as Bismarck or Wilhelm II that were meant to prove that these nationalist idols had never actually been antisemites. More importantly, the *Centralverein* believed it could observe significant parallels between anti-German and anti-Jewish propaganda in other European countries. Authors diagnosed, for instance, that anti-semitism in France was regularly combined with anti-German stereotypes. 'The same ridiculous things', an anonymous author claimed, 'are said about both Germans and Jews.'⁴⁴ Thereby, the *Centralverein* sought to convince its readers that Jews and Germans were really 'brothers' who shared common cultural characteristics and common political enemies abroad. In particular, the author meant to justify a political alliance between German nationalists and German Jews in the struggle against the country's Slavonic neighbours in the East: 'Wherever Germany is fighting for its right to survive, in upper Silesia, Bohemia, Moravia, in Czechoslovakia, in East and in West Prussia, the Jews are on Germany's side without exception.'⁴⁵

Juxtaposing 'Germans' and 'Jews' as equally victimised peoples who should stand together against a hostile world abroad was a common argumentative strategy against Nazi antisemitism. 'Today', wrote the liberal writer Richard von Coudenhove-Kalergi in 1932, 'contempt against the Germans is at least

'Zionist und Non-Zionist Reactions to the Rise of the Nazi Party in Germany's September 1930 Elections', *Moreshet*, 6 (2009), 119–36; Peter M. Baldwin, 'Zionist and Non-Zionist Jews in the Last Years before the Nazi Regime', *Leo Baeck Institute Yearbook*, 27 (1982), 87–108; Francis Nicosia, 'Resistance and Self-Defence: Zionism and Antisemitism in Interwar Germany', *Leo Baeck Institute Yearbook*, 42 (1997), 123–34; Arnold Paucker, *Der jüdische Abwehrkampf gegen den Antisemitismus und Nationalsozialismus in den letzten Jahren der Weimarer Republik* (Hamburg: Leibniz-Verlag, 1969).

⁴¹ Jehuda Reinharz, *Fatherland or Promised Land: The Dilemma of the German Jew, 1893–1914* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1975), 107–8.

⁴² Max Naumann, 'Der Weg zum Deutschtum', in Bahr et al., eds., *Diskussionsbuch*, 308. Initially, Naumann even praised Hitler as a political leader. He was arrested in 1935. See Matthias Hambrock, *Die Etablierung der Außenseiter. Der Verband nationaldeutscher Juden 1921–1935* (Cologne: Böhlau, 2003).

⁴³ On this problem, see Ulrich Dunker, *Der Reichsbund jüdischer Frontsoldaten, 1919–1938. Geschichte eines jüdischen Abwehrvereins* (Düsseldorf: Droste, 1977); David Engel, 'Patriotism as a Shield: The Liberal Jewish Defence against Antisemitism in Germany during the First World War', *Leo Baeck Institute Yearbook*, 31 (1986), 147–71.

⁴⁴ Anonymous, *Anti-Anti*, 8b.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 10b.

as widespread in the world as antisemitism.⁴⁶ As the Germans had felt this hostility during the First World War, he elaborated, they should recognise that ‘the hatred of an entire planet can wrongfully hit a single nation’: ‘The hatred against Judaism and the hatred against Germanism are closely related. Both peoples were hated, persecuted, and defamed – not for their errors, but rather because of their qualities.’⁴⁷

While such statements read today like naïve relativisations of German antisemitism, they were made in an argumentative context *against* Nazism. In order to show his readers how absurd and unjust anti-Jewish stereotypes really were, both Coudenhove and his Jewish colleague Theodor Lessing further quoted French authors who had mixed antisemitic and anti-German stereotypes. The Frenchman Henri Massis, for instance, had written that ‘the Jew is as irrational as the German’ and even that ‘the Jew is the champion of Germanism in world history . . . the enemy of noble Latindom’.⁴⁸ The images of Western propaganda during the First World War, Coudenhove reminded his readers, had been surprisingly similar vis-à-vis ‘Germans’ and ‘Jews’: both had been presented as greedy materialists who lacked the superior moral values of Western civilisation.

At the same time, the question of whether ‘the Jews’ actually formed a ‘race’ in any biological sense was intensively debated among Jewish authors. In *Die Europäische Revue*, the writer Erich von Kahler argued that ‘Jews and Germans’ should be aware of racial differences, but also open to dialogue and cultural interaction. In the German ‘national community [Volksgemeinschaft]’, explained Kahler, ‘the Jew’ was ‘separated and connected, foreign and related’.⁴⁹ Judaism, in this worldview, was ‘not only a religious confession’. Instead, Kahler believed that ‘Israel is a tribe’. He elaborated that a tribe was ‘a much earlier form of ethnic community [than a nation], one that is united in its blood to a much deeper, denser and more adamant level’.⁵⁰ What constituted Judaism was thus ‘something physical that is also metaphysical: a divine law of nature that is somatically experienced in the blood itself’.⁵¹

Kahler had grown up in an assimilated Jewish family in Austria–Hungary and worked as an independent scholar, writer and poet in Munich’s literary avant-garde. After 1933, he would be forced into emigration and eventually accepted professorships at the New School for Social Research in New York and Cornell University. In the 1920s and 30s, however, Kahler was critical about Jewish assimilation in Germany and Austria. ‘There are important and noticeable differences between the German and the Jewish character’, Kahler was convinced. He described German–Jewish relations as a ‘tension full of destiny that entails both love and hatred and that can be either fruitful or destructive’.⁵² Accordingly, Jews should be aware of this tension and internalise their Jewish identity. Yet, Kahler also pointed to a paradox: ‘Those Jews, who feel strong in their blood’, he argued, ‘can be good and useful Germans’.⁵³ Ultimately, the point was not dissimilar to the arguments expressed by some of his antisemitic opponents in the same issue of *Die Europäische Revue*: Jews could never be racially German, but very good patriots who fulfilled a fraternal function in German society.

Several Jewish authors held the view that Judaism indeed did have a racial component. ‘Whenever I see my own existence under the aspect of racial formation’, argued the writer Jakob Wassermann in *Die Europäische Revue*, ‘memory seems to be the essential and decisive power – not the memory of the mind, but the memory of the blood and in the blood’.⁵⁴ In this context, Jewish authors such as

⁴⁶ Richard von Coudenhove-Kalergi, ‘Deutschtum und Judentum’, in Bahr et al., eds., *Diskussionsbuch*, 301. On Coudenhove’s understanding of nationality, also see Dina Gusejnova, ‘Europe Tomorrow: The Shifting Frontiers of European Civilisation in the Political Thought of Richard Coudenhove-Kalergi’, *Turkish Journal of Sociology*, 38, 2 (2018), 227–53.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 300.

⁴⁸ Ibid.; Theodor Lessing, ‘Die Unlösbarkeit der Judenfrage’, in Bahr et al., eds., *Diskussionsbuch*, 407.

⁴⁹ Erich von Kahler, ‘Juden und Deutsche’, *Europäische Revue*, 6 (1930), 746.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 747.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Ibid., 744.

⁵³ Ibid., 747.

⁵⁴ Jakob Wassermann, ‘Zum Rassenproblem’, *Europäische Revue*, 8 (1932), 477.

Wassermann adopted a *völkisch* language without recognising its connection to the radical right. 'There is something incredibly mysterious about the stream of blood', Wassermann wrote.⁵⁵ Ultimately, he was convinced that Judaism entailed a *Blutsverantwortung*, a 'responsibility of blood'. In the face of German antisemitism, Wassermann argued that 'being Jewish today is nothing else than a commitment to nobility'.⁵⁶

In a similar tone, the philosophy professor Theodor Lessing criticised Jewish assimilation in Germany in 1932 and lamented that 'most Jews will be assimilated, wasted, and featureless'. Ultimately, he expressed his hope that 'those few that remain will form the oldest and the best aristocracy of the planet'.⁵⁷ The point of quoting these sentences, it should be remembered, is not to relativise the obvious political differences between racial thought among Jewish and antisemitic authors. They must be read against the background that Zionism in the Weimar Republic was a reaction against German antisemitism.⁵⁸ Lessing, for that matter, was among the first victims of Nazism and would be murdered in 1933 after having taken part in a protest movement for free speech.⁵⁹ In addition, Wassermann's books were burned and banned in 1933, after which the writer died of a heart attack in social isolation.

Nonetheless, the writings of these authors show that even victims of the Nazi movement upheld clear-cut distinctions between 'Germans' and 'Jews'. While this argument clearly corresponded to an antisemitic strategy to isolate German citizens of Jewish religion, it was also employed by critics of the Nazi movement to emphasise the inherent value of Jewish culture. In the heated political environment of 1932, however, this would lead to forms of dialogue and discussion that seem incongruent and politically nonsensical from our present-day perspective. The observations of this article raise the question of how contemporary readers perceived the racial arguments of the Nazi movement in relation to the *Zeitgeist* at large. The examples of Kahler, Wassermann and others show that liberal and democratic authors were often unable to identify antisemitic statements in German media. The fact that they published together with antisemites such as Rohan or Sombart and did not use the opportunity to criticise their co-authors should give us pause to think about how Jewish intellectuals actually perceived antisemitism before 1933.

'The real Jewish question', wrote the journalist Robert Weltsch, 'starts with the fact that the Jew becomes a problem for himself.' As one of the editors of the journal *Jüdische Rundschau*, Weltsch observed apologetic tendencies among German Jews who tried to explain, to deny or even to justify German antisemitism.⁶⁰ 'There is something within us', he diagnosed in Bahr's *Diskussionsbuch*, 'that hinders us to accept antisemitism as a real fact of life.' In contrast, Weltsch upheld the idea that the 'specific substance of the Jewish people' was fundamentally different from the German and hence provoked antisemitic counter-reactions. While he attacked assimilated German Jews who allegedly tolerated and excused German antisemitism, Weltsch's own conclusion about the relation between 'Germans' and 'Jews' read as disturbingly ambivalent: 'Of course, a lot has to change on the side of the Jews. Zionist Jews who regained their inner freedom do not ignore criticism. They will not take the easy route and react to each form of criticism with the buzzword "antisemitism"'.⁶¹

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 478.

⁵⁷ Lessing, 'Die Unlösbarkeit der Judenfrage', 411–12.

⁵⁸ On this point see Mark H. Gelber, *Melancholy Pride: Nation, Race, and Gender in the German Literature of Cultural Zionism* (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer, 2000); Francis Nicosia, *Zionismus und Antisemitismus im Dritten Reich* (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2012).

⁵⁹ On Lessing, see: Julius Schoeps, 'Der ungeliebte Außenseiter. Zum Leben und Werk des Philosophen und Schriftstellers Theodor Lessing', in Walter Grab and Julius Schoeps, eds., *Juden in der Weimarer Republik* (Bonn: Burg-Verlag, 1986), 200–17.

⁶⁰ Robert Weltsch, 'Die Judenfrage für den Juden', in Bahr et al., eds., *Diskussionsbuch*, 366. Also see Jens Fischer, 'Identifikation mit dem Aggressor? Zur Problematik des jüdischen Selbsthasses', *Menora*, 3 (1992), 23–48.

⁶¹ Weltsch, 'Judenfrage', 368, 372; see also Robert Weltsch and Hans Kohn, *Zionistische Politik* (Mährisch-Ostau, 1927).

In 1932, Weltsch signalled that he was ready to enter into discussions with members of the radical right.⁶² Explicitly, he praised Germany's 'new nationalism' and 'its sentiment for proper nationality [*eigenes Volkstum*]' as well as the 'irreplaceable value of the *Blutsgemeinschaft* [community of blood]' that allegedly 'enabled nationally-minded Jews to understand the real national sentiment [of German nationalists]'.⁶³

The seemingly ambivalent distinction between 'Germans' and 'Jews' brought forward by Weltsch was not necessarily predetermined by the latency of antisemitism in German society. Instead, Zionist intellectuals such as Weltsch actively sought to redefine the clearly inferior position of a marginalised minority. This is precisely what Stefan Vogt meant with his concept of a '*subalterne Positionierung*' or a 'subaltern positioning': When German Zionists consciously engaged with nationalist ideas, they did so with the goal of Jewish liberation in mind and with a conscious understanding of their minority status and their own threatened (hence 'subaltern') position. According to Vogt, German Zionism corresponded to an emancipatory strategy, 'which aimed at the building of identity [*Selbstvergewisserung*] and self-confidence [*Selbstermächtigung*] of Jews within the hegemonial society and its nationalist discourse'.⁶⁴ As such, Zionism was both a 'subversion' as well as an 'affirmation' of the hegemonial German nationalism.⁶⁵

To be clear, such Zionist positions cannot simply be generalised onto other Jewish milieus, which always remained politically heterogeneous. Weltsch's ideas, for that matter, were never embraced by liberal Jewish authors within the *Centralverein*. In order to avoid a conceptual conflation of 'Jewish' and 'Zionist' voices in German political debates, the deeply rooted division of Jewish communities needs to be acknowledged: on questions of mixed marriages, for example, there always remained significant disagreements between the branches of orthodox and reform Judaism, liberals, Zionists, communists and socialist Bundists.

Only against this background can we understand the diverse positions of Jewish authors towards German nationalism and the German right. At the congress of the Zionist Federation for Germany in September 1932 in Frankfurt, the issue of how to relate and respond to German nationalist movements was discussed at length. Here, Weltsch claimed that Zionism had many sympathisers among German nationalists. At the same time, authors of the journal *Jüdische Rundschau* backed his position: 'We believe that nationally-minded Jews can find a *modus vivendi* with an internally strengthened German nationalism that has freed itself from the recrements of a plebian antisemitism'.⁶⁶

While Jewish authors in this milieu explicitly excluded the Nazi Party from these considerations, they nonetheless hoped for a new kind of neighbourhood between Zionists and German nationalists as they allegedly shared common principles of national autonomy.

Weltsch and other Jewish intellectuals who published in *Die Europäische Revue* and the *Diskussionsbuch* could be sure that their articles were read by Nazi sympathisers and members of Germany's antisemitic right. Their examples not only show that Jewish and antisemitic authors were engaged in far more direct debates than previously recognised by historians. They also illustrate that Zionist and assimilatory reactions to antisemitism were highly contradictory: while some sought to combat antisemitism by espousing a form of German nationalism, others turned towards

⁶² Particularly relevant are his exchanges of letters with Wilhelm Stapel, in which Stapel explicitly accepted Weltsch's Zionist position ('Mit Weltsch ist ein Sprechen möglich'); see Vogt, *Subalterne Positionierungen*, 337.

⁶³ Quoted from Vogt, *Subalterne Positionierungen*, 332; the quotation can be found in Robert Weltsch, 'Judenfrage und Zionismus', in Ernst Johannsen, Friedrich Hielscher and Richard Euringer, eds., *Klärung: 12 Autoren, Politiker über die Judenfrage* (Berlin: Tradition Wilhelm Kolk, 1932), 136.

⁶⁴ Vogt, *Subalterne Positionierungen*, 83.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 111. The concept of 'subalternity' has also been borrowed from the historiographical context of colonialism and applied to Judaism by other historians. See: Todd Samuel Presner, *Muscular Judaism: The Jewish Body and the Politics of Regeneration* (London: Routledge, 2007), f. 156.

⁶⁶ Robert Weltsch, 'Politik und Terrorakte', *Jüdische Rundschau*, 62 (1932), 295; quoted by Vogt, *Subalterne Positionierungen*, 341.

specifically Jewish identities. The first of these strands of thought was nationalistic, but also assimilatory and explicitly opposed to all kinds of racial ideas. The second, in contrast, was anti-nationalist, but simultaneously prone to further affirming racial distinctions between ‘Germans’ and ‘Jews’. Ultimately, these contradictions prevented the formation of a coherent intellectual opposition against Nazi anti-semitism. Historians such as Donald Niewyk have argued that Zionist responses to antisemitism have been ‘inadequate’ and engendered various degrees of apologeticism.⁶⁷ Yet, the previous quotations also illustrate that the last months of the Weimar Republic were characterised by forms of direct communication that have rarely been considered by historians. Wherever members of the radical right would demand either the racial exclusion of the Jews or their unequivocal commitment to the cause of German nationalism, they were able to pretend that Jewish authors actually shared their intentions. The National Socialist Ernst Reventlow, for instance, explicitly described Zionism as a ‘*völkisch* movement’. Ultimately, this meant that the absurd yet widespread claim that National Socialism was not actually antisemitic could gain credibility in the wider public.

In the face of Nazism, however, any hopes for a constructive Zionist–German dialogue were of course quickly dispelled. Stefan Vogt described in detail how Zionist attempts to come to terms with German antisemites failed. Robert Weltsch himself ultimately concluded that ‘the old world of concepts [*die alte Begriffswelt*]’, in which Zionism was born, had collapsed with the rise of the Nazis.⁶⁸ Likewise, however, also liberal members of the *Centralverein*, who had formerly advocated for assimilation, acknowledged that Hitler’s ‘seizure of power’ would have to fundamentally transform their German-Jewish identity. It was Eva Reichmann, who would highlight this problem in 1934:

The national revolution of 1933 was followed by an intellectual disruption of Judaism. . . . The fact that the Jewish emancipation could be ended in Germany, where it had attained its most creative fertility, unambiguously proved the leading position of the German-Jewish milieu among the Jews of the world. Although the Jewish masses in the countries, in which equal rights still exist, still maintain the calm of their undisturbed lives, their leaders have become most attentive: they are disrupted from the seeming normality of their existence.⁶⁹

Anticipation of Violence

In the face of Nazism, both Zionists, such as Weltsch, and liberals, such as Reichmann, were forced to rethink their positions. Therefore, the question emerges of in what terms authors debated the danger of concrete antisemitic violence. Although the political climate of the early 1930s was characterised by a lack of sensitivity for antisemitism, the possibility of anti-Jewish atrocities on German territory surprisingly received a lot of attention. While the term ‘genocide’ itself was not yet invented, authors anticipated pogroms or used vague language to express their fears of mass violence.⁷⁰ In the *Diskussionsbuch*, the left-wing writer Heinrich Mann explicitly addressed the possibility that German Jews could be persecuted by the Nazi movement if it ever came to power: ‘The antisemites of today are complicit in the unbelievable moral transgressions that could follow tomorrow upon depriving the Jews of their rights.’⁷¹

⁶⁷ Donald Niewyk, *The Jews in Weimar Germany* (New Brunswick, NJ: Routledge, 2001), 94; Jehuda Reinharz, ‘The Zionist Response to Antisemitism in Germany’, *Leo Baeck Institute Yearbook*, 30 (1985), 105–40.

⁶⁸ Vogt, *Subalterne Positionierungen*, 430.

⁶⁹ Eva Reichmann, *Größe und Verhängnis deutsch-jüdischer Existenz. Zeugnisse einer tragischen Begegnung* (Heidelberg: Lambert Schneider, 1974), 46f.; the text was originally published in the *CV-Zeitung* on 31 May 1934. On Reichmann see Wilma Schütze, ‘Eva Reichmann – Plädoyers für jüdisches Leben frühen NS-Deutschland’, in Rebekka Denz and Tilmann Gempff-Friedrich, eds., *Centralverein deutscher Staatsbürger jüdischen Glaubens. Anwalt zwischen Deutschtum und Judentum* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2021).

⁷⁰ The term ‘genocide’ was coined by Raphael Lemkin. See *Axis Rule in Occupied Europe: Laws of Occupation, Analysis of Government, Proposals for Redress* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1944). The original definition can be found on p. 43: ‘A coordinated plan of different actions aiming at the destruction of essential foundations of the life of national groups, with the aim of annihilating the groups themselves’.

⁷¹ Heinrich Mann, ‘Gutgeartete Menschen’, in Bahr et al., eds., *Diskussionsbuch*, 298.

In parallel to such warnings, of course, Nazi authors formulated open threats. For years, nationalists had announced that ‘a worldwide pogrom looms above the heads of [the Jews]’.⁷² Simultaneously, Jewish authors issued last-minute warnings against the German population. ‘What they do to the Jews today’, wrote Theodor Lessing in 1932, ‘will become their own destiny tomorrow.’⁷³

Die Europäische Revue was full of statements condemning the brutal methods of the Nazi party. At the same time, however, the editor Rohan insidiously argued that ‘the Jews’ shared part of the responsibility for violence in German society. While he acknowledged that the antisemitic propaganda of the NSDAP was born out of ‘fear and resentment’, he also believed that the Nazi movement represented a ‘spontaneous and fateful revolt of the national instinct’. Antisemitism, from this perspective, seemed partly justified and partly exaggerated. Rohan prompted his National Socialist readers to stop holding ‘the Jews’ accountable for all the ills in German society. Simultaneously, however, he urged his Jewish readers to abandon their ‘fear of the swastika’. ‘Tactfulness on the side of the Jews’, Rohan explained, ‘and self-confidence on the *völkisch* side are the best means against a catastrophic escalation of the conflict that would bring nameless horrors to both.’⁷⁴

Of course, it would be problematic to establish any direct causal connection between such vague statements and later historical events. If anything, we can only observe a shift in language, which slowly pushed the boundaries of what contemporaries thought to be possible in terms of violence and persecution. More importantly, however, these latent anticipations of imminent violence can be contextualised in what historians have labelled the ‘crisis discourse’ of the Weimar Republic. Dirk Blasius, for instance, has argued that German politics in the early 1930s always revolved around fears and anticipations of civil war⁷⁵ while Bernhard Fulda has shown that the subjective perception and panic of a ‘Bürgerkriegslage’ was also induced by mass media.⁷⁶ Finally, threats and warnings of antisemitic violence also corresponded to a general yet often vague sense of cultural ‘crisis’. Rüdiger Graf and Moritz Föllmer have highlighted in this context the rhetorical mechanisms of the German ‘crisis discourse’, in which political thinkers were always constrained to situate themselves in the face of a crisis and to present visions of potential solutions.⁷⁷

Rohan honestly believed that *Die Europäische Revue* would contribute to achieving a ‘reconciliation’ between Jews and German nationalists. The ‘Jewish Question’, in his opinion, was simply too complex to leave it to the ‘ignorant street apostles’ of the Nazi Party. Yet, Rohan also believed that even Nazi primitivism ‘could not belie the fundamental truth of the national instinct’.⁷⁸ The ‘Jewish spirit’, he elaborated,

really acts like a pike in a carp pond. In the right dosage, it is appropriate and necessary for good fish farming – just as German life today would be inconceivable without the Jews. But too many and too large pikes frighten the carp and the majority bands together against the few and tries to defend itself with primitive means against foreign influences: a spectacle that is ignoble, shameful, and not chivalrous at all.⁷⁹

In essence, this bizarre statement condemned antisemitism, but also justified the underlying causes of potential mass violence.

⁷² Quotation from Hans Blüher, cited by Alexander Bein, ‘Der jüdische Parasit’, *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte*, 13 (1965), 151.

⁷³ Theodor Lessing, ‘Die Unlösbarkeit der Judenfrage’, in Bahr et al., eds., *Diskussionsbuch*, 411.

⁷⁴ Rohan, ‘Einige Bemerkungen zur Judenfrage’, 458.

⁷⁵ Dirk Blasius, *Weimars Ende: Bürgerkrieg und Politik 1930–1933* (Frankfurt: Fischer, 2005).

⁷⁶ Fulda, *Press and Politics in the Weimar Republic*.

⁷⁷ Rüdiger Graf and Moritz Föllmer, eds., *Die ‘Krise’ der Weimarer Republik. Zur Kritik eines Deutungsmusters* (Frankfurt: Campus, 2005); Rüdiger Graf, *Die Zukunft der Weimarer Republik: Krisen und Zukunftsaneignungen in Deutschland 1918–1933* (Munich: Oldenbourg, 2008).

⁷⁸ Rohan, ‘Einige Bemerkungen zur Judenfrage’, 458.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 457.

This pattern of threats was even more evident in an article by Josef Nadler, a Professor of Linguistics in Vienna. 'This decision is with the Jews', he wrote about the prospect of violence in *Die Europäische Revue*. In particular, Nadler criticised an alleged contradiction in Jewish intellectual life. On the one hand, he argued, 'the Jews try to convince us of the greatness of their international mission', while on the other, 'the same authors argue that they are fully German'. 'What is correct?', the antisemite Nadler ultimately asked. In particular, he believed that supposedly undecided Jewish intellectuals had a disproportional influence on Germany's public opinion, its literature, theatre and radio. Given these 'observations', it was insupportable for Nadler 'that a civilised nation [i.e. the Germans] of eighty million people does not know where they [i.e. 'the Jews'] belong'.⁸⁰ What Nadler meant by this statement he explained a few years later in one of the books he published after the annexation of Austria in 1938: 'For as long as they were healthy and independent, all European nations have considered cohabitation with the Jews as unwelcome and dangerous. All the young and rising nation states of the Middle Ages have exterminated the Jews down to the root.'⁸¹

The Austrian Nadler joined the Nazi Party as soon as possible after the *Anschluss* of 1938. In fact, some of his works were read by Hitler himself during the Second World War.⁸²

In 1932, however, *Die Europäische Revue* still featured very different voices as well. One of the most farsighted contributions here was written by the rabbi and theologian Leo Baeck, who published an open warning. 'In Judaism', he explained by going back to the Old Testament, 'there is a tale from the old days that countries and states will be called to the judgment seat of God in order to answer for what they did or failed to do.' As Baeck knew he was primarily writing for Christian German readers, he also referred to the New Testament. In the Epistle of the Romans, he reminded his readers, there was a prophecy 'that the nations on earth will be held accountable for the fate of the Jewish community in their midst.'⁸³

Overall, the political direction of *Die Europäische Revue* in 1932 was far from clear. This journal featured National Socialist and aggressively antisemitic articles, but also gave a voice to Jewish fears. We must ask, therefore, why authors such as Baeck were ready to publish alongside right-wing and antisemitic authors. If anything, his example shows that not all Jewish intellectuals had given up the hope of achieving some kind of dialogue. In hindsight, this may seem naïve but, in the eyes of authors such as Baeck, this might have looked like a chance to change the minds of German antisemites. Moreover, it never seemed clear at what point antisemitism would become dangerous and intolerable. Many authors of *Die Europäische Revue* also held contacts in their private lives. Karl Anton Rohan, for instance, invited Leo Baeck to his intellectual club, the so-called 'School for Wisdom', which had been founded by their colleague Hermann von Keyserling in the 1920s.⁸⁴ Hence, it may be wondered if Baeck would have really defined a colleague such as Rohan as a hostile antisemite.

The articles of both Baeck and Nazi authors such as Nadler show that there was substantial awareness of violence in German society. This of course raises the question of why so many Jewish intellectuals chose not to leave Germany as soon as possible after 1933. While some authors of *Die Europäische Revue*, such as Erich von Kahler, would go into exile in Great Britain, the United States or British-ruled Palestine, others decided to stay in Germany. Leo Baeck, for instance, became President of the *Reichsvertretung deutscher Juden*, an umbrella organisation that represented German Jews between 1933 and 1938. In 1943, he was deported to the concentration camp of Theresienstadt

⁸⁰ Josef Nadler, 'Die Juden und die Literatur', in Bahr et al., eds., *Diskussionsbuch*, 521.

⁸¹ Josef Nadler, *Literaturgeschichte des deutschen Volkes* (Berlin: Propyläen, 1938), 2.

⁸² See Franz Graf-Stuhlhofer, 'Opportunisten, Sympathisanten und Beamte. Unterstützung des NS-Systems in der Wiener Akademie der Wissenschaften, dargestellt am Wirken Nadlers, Sbirks und Meisters', *Wiener Klinische Wochenschrift*, 110 (1998), 152–7.

⁸³ Leo Baeck, 'Das Judentum', *Europäische Revue*, 8 (1932), 464.

⁸⁴ For more information about this connection see Dina Gusejnova, 'Adel als Berufung. Adlige Schriftsteller im deutschsprachigen Europadiskurs, 1919–1945', in Eckart Conze et al., eds., *Aristokratismus und Moderne. Adel als politisches und kulturelles Konzept, 1890–1945* (Cologne: Böhlau, 2013), 273.

where he would again act as a rabbi and become the Head of the Jewish Council of Elders. At the same time, of course, many non-Jewish authors of *Die Europäische Revue* joined Nazi Party organisations.

In addition to these clear-cut cases of collaborators, critics and persecuted victims of the Nazi regime, there are also authors who maintained ambivalent and contradictory positions vis-à-vis the Nazi ideology. Most notably, the editor Karl Anton Rohan published a whole series of articles about Hitler's 'seizure of power' in the first editions of *Die Europäische Revue* in 1933. Although he attempted to frame these articles as objective 'reports on the current situation', they were really highly personal attempts to come to terms with his own ambiguous feelings towards Nazism. It would be understandable, Rohan argued, to fear 'a rebirth of long-forgotten methods and worldviews' and an 'endless horror of civil war'. Nobody should be surprised, he went on, 'that intellectuals with deeper roots in the native soil of the nation than the agitators of the national revolution are extremely worried about these barbarian concomitants'. At the same time, however, Rohan relativised Nazi crimes committed in 1933:

Revolutions are no affairs of living rooms and universities. A new world cannot be built with satin gloves in our current age of the masses. Compared to the manners of the people in 1789 or the bolsheviks in Russia both our revolution of 1918 and the current counter-revolution have been very mild.⁸⁵

In essence, Rohan acknowledged Nazi crimes against the Jewish minority, but simultaneously belittled them as forms of collateral damage. Even after Hitler's Enabling Act, he tried not to cast a definitive verdict on Nazi dictatorship. According to Rohan, it was not yet foreseeable whether Nazism would result in a 'new twentieth-century nation state and a new *Reich* or in a national catastrophe'.⁸⁶

From this perspective, daily antisemitic violence in the streets was repugnant and unwanted, but not the core of Nazi ambition, which Rohan saw in higher intellectual and political spheres. In essence, this meant that he could by and large subscribe to the Nazi agenda while simultaneously maintaining his pro-Jewish public image. In addition, Rohan's example illustrates that one did not have to agree with all aspects of Nazi ideology and policy in order to subscribe to the aims of Hitler's 'national revolution' in broad terms. More importantly, the writings of Rohan stand for an intellectual separation between Nazism and antisemitism in the minds of many Germans: anti-Jewish policies and National Socialism, it seemed, were still two separate topics of discussion.

Meanwhile, *Die Europäische Revue* did not immediately cease to publish critical articles. In 1933, for example, the theologian Albert Schweitzer published an openly oppositional and remarkably far-sighted contribution titled 'About the Respect for Life'. 'Truly ethical people', Schweitzer reminded his readers, 'take all life as holy even if it seems to be of lower rank from our subjective human point of view'.⁸⁷ In this context, it should also be noted that *Die Europäische Revue* still featured articles from left-wing and Jewish authors such as Theodor W. Adorno in 1933.⁸⁸ In the course of the 1930s, however, the cultural diversity that had defined *Die Europäische Revue* gave way to a more homogeneous focus on Nazi ideologues. The periodical would be continuously published by the German government until 1944 when it was finally shut down due to paper shortages.

In parallel, the Jewish *Centralverein* remained active until 1938 although Alfred Wiener was forced to flee to Amsterdam directly after the Nazi 'seizure of power'. Although no further editions of *Anti-Anti* could be published, the *Verein* continued as best as it could its activities of Jewish counter-action against antisemitism. Small successes, such as the exemption of Jewish world war veterans from anti-Jewish measures in the civil service, however, could not hide the fact that the *Centralverein* increasingly came under political pressure. After several name changes, it was finally dissolved after the November pogroms of 1938.

⁸⁵ Karl Anton Rohan, 'Bericht zur Lage', *Europäische Revue*, 9 (1933), 136.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 140.

⁸⁷ Albert Schweitzer, 'Von der Ehrfurcht vor dem Leben', *Europäische Revue*, 9 (1933), 152.

⁸⁸ Theodor W. Adorno, 'Abschied vom Jazz', *Europäische Revue*, 9 (1933), 313–16; Theodor W. Adorno, 'Notiz über Wagner', *Europäische Revue*, 9 (1933), 439–48.

Conclusion

The year 1932 was the last one of the Weimar Republic. Of course, contemporary Germans did not yet know this and it is this contingency of political outcomes that historians need to acknowledge when writing about the early 1930s.⁸⁹ Nonetheless, it is no mere coincidence that 1932 saw a plethora of new publications on antisemitism emerging. It was Hannah Arendt who wrote in her essay *Aufklärung und Judenfrage* in 1932 that the German Jews ‘once again stand in the face of nothingness’.⁹⁰

The year 1932 was one of crystallisation, in which a discourse that was full of complex and contradictory arguments took a clearer shape. Judging political discussions in 1932 against the background of later developments would of course entail a very anachronistic teleology. Yet, analysing the concepts and precepts which defined the discourse in the early 1930s may help us understand the axioms around which political debates revolved when the Nazi movement became the largest political party in terms of members and voters. A traditional argument, in this context, has been to stress propagandistic strategies by Goebbels and others, who seemingly sought to tone down antisemitism in order to win over more moderate voters. In contrast, this article highlighted moments in the public discourse, at which debates on antisemitism reached a high-point of tension. Towards the end of the Weimar Republic, we can observe surprisingly open public debates on antisemitism. National Socialists and Jewish intellectuals did not act in closed political spheres. Instead, this paper retraced the ways in which they engaged in direct discussions. In fact, antisemitic and Jewish authors sometimes wrote for the same publishers and engaged in public confrontations.

In this context, this article has made three observations. First, it has shown that even staunch National Socialists often rejected the label ‘antisemitism’ and pretended not to harbour anti-Jewish feelings. Second, the paper analysed Jewish reactions to antisemitism and found that even Jewish authors had difficulty at times in recognising antisemitism in German media. Third, however, the paper has also shown that the same media nonetheless featured numerous statements and premonitions about a new quality of mass violence in Germany. Despite right-wing apologetics and manifold difficulties among Jewish authors to expose antisemitism, German intellectuals could clearly see the rising violence of the Nazi movement and developed an acute awareness of future dangers.

In this context, historians seldom sought to explain why Nazi authors and racial theorists tried to deny, embellish and hide their antisemitism.⁹¹ Such embellishments of antisemitism were of course rendered possible by a very widespread ‘unspectacular consensual antisemitism’ within the German bourgeoisie that had harboured anti-Jewish sentiments long before the Weimar Republic.⁹² In this context, I would argue that the fundamental problem of Weimar society was not a lack of awareness of antisemitism and its violent potentials. Instead, the problem was that many authors had difficulty distinguishing what actually constituted an antisemitic idea. Antisemitism, in other words, gained its virulent strength not only from the fact that Nazi authors were granted spaces to openly disseminate their ideology, but also from the fact that the same authors could convincingly spread the illusion that they were not antisemites at all.

This article must be placed within a growing number of scholarly works pointing to the embeddedness of Nazi ideology in Weimar culture. It has highlighted that Nazi antisemitism still existed within a space of political dialogue in 1932. An important observation, in this context, is that Jewish authors engaged in direct discussions with Nazi ideologues in the German public. These reactions, unfortunately, were far from coherent and a wide range of antisemitic ideas by authors such as Sombart or

⁸⁹ On the problem of contingency see Jochen Hung and Godela Weiss-Sussex, eds., *Beyond Glitter and Doom: The Contingency of the Weimar Republic* (London: Institute of Germanic Studies Publications, 2012).

⁹⁰ Hannah Arendt, ‘Aufklärung und Judenfrage’, *Zeitschrift für die Geschichte der Juden in Deutschland*, 4 (1932), 77.

⁹¹ This problem was clearly recognised not only by Stefan Vogt but also by Uwe Puschner. ‘Antisemiten, Alldeutsche, Völkische und der Zionismus. Radikale Diskurse in der langen Jahrhundertwende’, in Sara Han, Anja Middelbeck-Varwick and Markus Thureau, eds., *Bibel – Israel – Kirche. Studien zur jüdisch-christlichen Begegnung. Festschrift für Rainer Kampling* (Münster: Aschendorff, 2018), 223–38.

⁹² See, for example, Klaus Hödl, *Wiener Juden – jüdische Wiener. Identität, Gedächtnis und Performanz im 19. Jahrhundert* (Innsbruck: Studienverlag, 2006), 19.

Rohan could go virtually unnoticed. Making distinctions between ‘Germans’ and ‘Jews’, for instance, was considered common sense to such a degree that many intellectuals failed to understand its anti-semitic implications.

Ultimately, this article is a timely reminder that patterns of apologeticism have a long tradition within the European far right. Advancing antisemitic and xenophobic ideas while simultaneously denying their racist content proved to be an efficient strategy for right-wing politicians to spread their ideology within the political mainstream. We are dealing here with patterns that are in many ways reminiscent of twenty-first-century populism: the result of antisemitic denial and relativism was the loss of a fact-based consensus. The Weimar Republic was a society in disagreement, even confusion about what actually constituted an antisemitic or a racist idea. The vital debate on anti-Jewish violence could thus be buried under endless discussions on the question of who or what was ‘Jewish’ or ‘German’. That does not mean, however, that individual warning voices could not be heard already in 1932.

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