

German Jewish Intellectuals and the German Occupation of Belgium

by Ulrich Wyrwa

Abstract

In August 1914 the majority of German Jews expressed their patriotic approval of the war and their loyalty to the German state. They identified with Germany, and a large number signed up voluntarily for military service at the front. The Jewish population in Germany affirmed the war not least because it was directed against Russia, the harshest adversary of the Jews. This paper concentrates on the first acts of war conducted by the German military forces during the German occupation of Belgium; it examines whether and in what way German-Jewish Intellectuals perceived Germany's violation of Belgian neutrality and the new feature of war as a war against a civilian population. The first part examines autobiographical sources to reconstruct the experiences and the perception of German Jewish soldiers, German military rabbis, and other German Jewish witnesses to the war. The second part then analyzes the coverage of German Jewish newspapers regarding the warfare against Belgium; and, finally, the third and last part scrutinizes the commentaries of German Jewish intellectuals and Jewish socialists regarding the German war against Belgium.

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Introduction

For European Jewish history, the First World War marked the end of the long tradition of transnational exchange of European Jewry; the Great War even

implied a “Jewish fratricidal war of the greatest magnitude.”¹ According to Shulamit Volkov, European Jewry during/as a result of the war seemed irrevocably divided into Jews of different nationalities. “The legendary unity of the Jews seemed destroyed for ever.”² Coincidentally the First World War was a turning point for both German-Jewish and general German history, marking the beginning of the short 20th century.³ In both cases, to come to terms with the implications and meanings of war one needs to take into account the specific features of the very first acts of war by the German army, and that, in turn, means to study the German occupation of Belgium in August and September 1914.

In August 1914 the majority of German Jews identified with Germany, and a large number signed up voluntarily for military service at the front.⁴ The

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¹ Egmont Zechlin, *Die deutsche Politik und die Juden im Ersten Weltkrieg* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1969), 94.

² Shulamit Volkov, “Juden und Judentum im Zeitalter der Emanzipation. Einheit und Vielheit,” *Juden in der europäischen Geschichte*, ed. Wolfgang Beck, (München: C.H. Beck, 1992), 86-108; Derek J. Penslar, *Jews and the Military. A History* (Princeton-Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2013), 152-160.

³ Eric Hobsbawm, *The Age of Extremes: The Short Twentieth Century, 1914-1991* (London: Michael Joseph, 1994).

⁴ After the influential opening up of historical research on Jews and the First World War with the monumental study of Egmont Zechlin, *Die deutsche Politik und die Juden im Ersten Weltkrieg*, in 1969, the topic received increased scholarly impetus with the publication of the volume in the series of the Leo Baeck Institute: *Deutsches Judentum in Krieg und Revolution 1916-1923*, ed. Werner E. Mosse, (Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 1971). Werner T. Angress, a contributor to this volume, subsequently published Werner T. Angress, “Das deutsche Militär und die Juden im Ersten Weltkrieg,” *Militärgeschichtliche Mitteilungen* 19/1 (1976): 98-105, in which he touched also one of the most widely discussed subjects, the Jewish census of 1916: Werner T. Angress, “The German Army’s ‘Juden-zählung’ of 1916: Genesis - Consequences - Significance,” in *Leo Baeck Institute Yearbook* 23 (1978): 117-138. The unpublished dissertation of Stephen Magill, *Defense and Introspection. The First World War as a Pivotal Crisis in the German Jewish Experience*, (Phil. Diss. Los Angeles 1977), however has widely been left out of consideration. Nevertheless, on the basis of the current state of research, Peter Pulzer has given a dense and inspiring overall presentation for the series on German-Jewish History in Modern Times, published in its German version as: Peter Pulzer, “Der Erste Weltkrieg,” *Umstrittene Integration 1871-1918, Deutsch-jüdische Geschichte der Neuzeit*, eds. Steven M. Lowenstein, Paul Mendes-Flohr, Peter Pulzer, Monika Richarz, vol. 3, (München: C. H. Beck, 1997), 356-380. Published also

patriotic feelings were by no means restricted to the established Jewish middle classes - even the Zionist movement and the Orthodox minority became attuned to German jingoism. Only a few Jewish intellectuals or converts, who nonetheless still bonded with their Jewish heritage, and some socialist Jews were able to resist the suggestive impact of this historical moment. Only some outsiders warned of the horror of a war in an age of technologically advanced killing machinery.

The vast majority of German Jews expressed their patriotic approval of the war and their loyalty to the German state and culture. In view of Emperor Wilhelm II's solemn declaration to no longer recognize any political or confessional boundaries but only Germans, they enthusiastically hoped to overcome the last obstacles blocking their full civil and political recognition while also bringing their struggle against anti-Semitism to a successful conclusion.⁵ The German political class had effectively spread the rumour that Germany together with its ally, the Habsburg Empire, had been attacked.⁶ During the War Germany made extensive use of pictures and photographs for propaganda purposes, and the weekly *Illustrierter Kriegs-Kurier* (Illustrated War Courier) published by the Berlin-based *Illustrierter Kurier Verlagsgesellschaft* (Illustrated Courier

in English in *Integration in dispute 1871 - 1918*, eds. Steven M. Lowenstein, Paul Mendes-Flohr, Peter Pulzer, Monika Richarz, (New York, NY: Columbia Univ. Press, 1997), 366-384. In 2001, Ulrich Sieg published a landmark study on German Jewish Intellectuals in the First World War: Ulrich Sieg, *Jüdische Intellektuelle im Ersten Weltkrieg. Kriegserfahrung, weltanschauliche Debatten und kulturelle Neuentwürfe*, (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 2001). And in 2007 Jacob Rosenthal presented a volume on the Jewish census of 1916: Jacob Rosenthal, "Die Ehre des jüdischen Soldaten." *Die Juden zählung im Ersten Weltkrieg und ihre Folgen*, (Frankfurt/M - New York: Campus, 2007). Recent scholarship has scrutinized the overwhelming importance of the Jewish census: David J. Fine, *Jewish Integration in the German Army in the First World War* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2012). Most recently, Sarah Panter has published a comprehensive comparative study on Jewish experiences in the First World War, comparing Germany, Austria, Great Britain, and the United States: Sarah Panter, *Jüdische Erfahrungen und Loyalitätskonflikte im Ersten Weltkrieg*, (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2014). See the review of this volume by Elisabeth Weber in this issue of *Quest*. For a discussion of new studies of the First World War at its 100th anniversary, including studies in Jewish History, see: Ulrich Wyrwa, "Zum Hundertsten nichts Neues. Deutschsprachige Neuerscheinungen zum Ersten Weltkrieg (Part I)," *Zeitschrift für Geschichtswissenschaft* 62/11 (2014): 921-40; Ulrich Wyrwa, "Zum Hundertsten nichts Neues. Deutschsprachige Neuerscheinungen zum Ersten Weltkrieg (Part II)," *Zeitschrift für Geschichtswissenschaft* 64/7-8 (2016): 683-702.

⁵ Peter Pulzer, *Jews and the German State. The Political history of a Minority. 1848-1933*, (Oxford-Cambridge/ Mass: Blackwell, 1992), 194-207.

⁶ Jörn Leonhard, *Die Büchse der Pandora. Geschichte des Ersten Weltkriegs*, (München: Beck, 2014); Anne Lipp, *Meinungslenkung im Krieg. Kriegserfahrungen deutscher Soldaten und ihre Deutung 1914-1918*, (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2003).

Publishing House) provided images showing the harm wrought by the war while also giving the impression of the virtuous German mission in the world. This weekly appeared simultaneously in a German-Italian-French edition (*Corriere della Guerra* = *Courrier de la Guerre*), a German-Dutch-French edition (*Oorlogs Koerier* = *Courrier de guerre*), and a German-Russian-French edition (*Illjustrirovannyi kur'er voiny* = *Courrier de guerre*), and last but not least in a German-Yiddish edition. [Fig. 1] The Yiddish edition included a picture meant to illustrate the equal treatment of Christian, Jewish, and Muslim religious services in the German armed forces [Fig. 2], another issue showed peaceful images of Belgian cities during the German occupation [Fig. 3]. In a clear attempt to demonstrate the vital cultural activities of Germans in Belgium, the magazine printed a photograph of Germans attending a performance of Richard Wagner's opera *The Ring of the Nibelungen* at the *Theater de la Monnaie* in Brussels [Fig. 4], another photograph presented the warm welcome that Russian Jewish refugees received in a Berlin synagogue [Fig. 5]. The German-Dutch-French edition (*Oorlogs Koerier* = *Courrier de guerre*) of April 1917 on the other hand printed a picture of the photography agency 'Photo-Samson,' depicting German Jewish soldiers at the Pesach ceremony in Brussels [Fig. 6]. Another picture produced by the same photographic agency and depicting German Jewish soldiers in Brussels observing *Yom Kippur* in 1915, was used for postcards, too, and entered in private photographic albums as well. [Fig. 7]



Fig. 1: The weekly *Illustrierter Kriegs-Kurier* (Universitätsbibliothek Potsdam)



Fig. 2: Illustrierter Kriegs-Kurier Jiddische Ausgabe n. 18, 1916, p. 277.

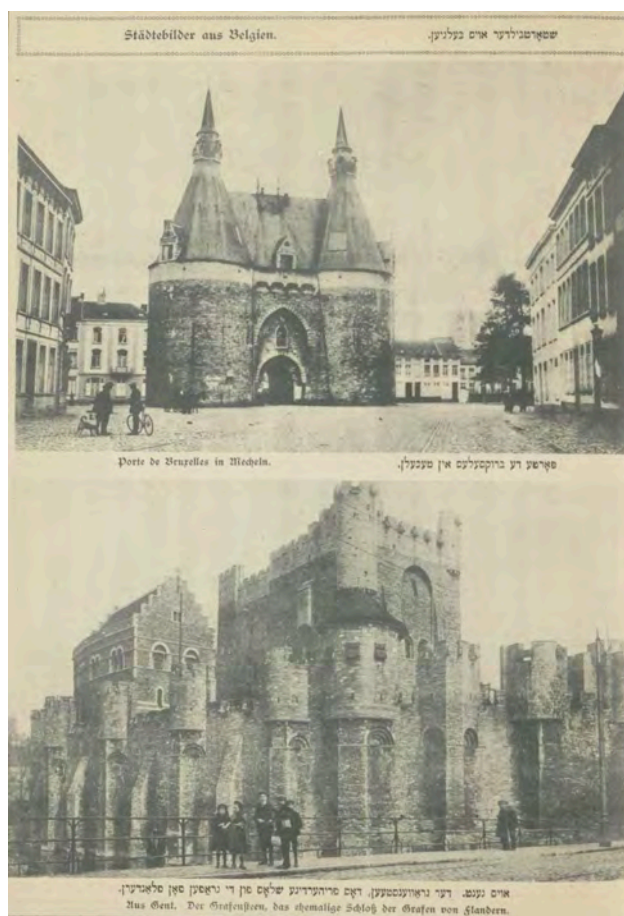


Fig. 3: Illustrierter Kriegs-Kurier Jiddische Ausgabe, n. 9, 1916, p. 143.



Fig. 4: Illustrierter Kriegs-Kurier Jiddische Ausgabe, n. 7, 1916, p. III



Fig. 5: Illustrierter Kriegs-Kurier Jiddische Ausgabe N. 5, 1916, p. 80.



Fig. 6: Illustrierter Kriegs-Kurier - Oorlogs Koerier - Courrier de guerre, April 1917, p. 369. ((Universitäts- und Landesbibliothek Düsseldorf).



Fig. 7: Bernhard Bardach Collection, Archive Leo Baeck Institute, New York

Jews as well as other Germans were convinced that their country had been forced to fight a defensive war. The Jewish population in Germany was all the more keen to affirm the war because it was directed against Russia, the harshest adversary of the Jews, and the country in Europe where the Jews' situation had been most traumatic, where Jews as well as non-Jews had no political rights, and where the greatest acts of violence against Jews had broken out only a few years earlier. German as well as Habsburg Jews were extremely patriotic; additionally, they viewed Russia as the archenemy of the Jews.⁷ In this vein, the *Allgemeine Zeitung des Judentums* wrote at the end of August that Russia is still ruled by an "asiatic barbarism."⁸ Again and again German-Jewish public opinion denounced the Czar's despotism, and the journal *Der jüdische Student*, organ of the organization of Jewish students' fraternities, insisted in its first issue after the war began, that they would support this German war unconditionally, because it is directed against Russia. Here, the author underlined, a bit of decidedly Jewish work has to be done: "Finally, our hate, bottled up for centuries, against this bestial country finds satisfaction."⁹ In the same way, the journal *Im deutschen*

⁷ For the patriotism of Habsburg Jews see: Marsha Rozenblit, *Reconstructing a National Identity. The Jews of Habsburg Austria during World War I*, (Oxford-New York: Oxford University Press, 2001); David Rechter, *The Jews of Vienna and the First World War*, (Oxford-Portland: The Littman Library of Jewish Civilisation, 2001).

⁸ "Als Deutsche und als Juden," *Allgemeine Zeitung des Judentums* [= AZJ], August, 28th, 1914.

⁹ "Die deutschen Juden und der Krieg," *Der jüdische Student*, November 1st, 1914.

Reich, organ of the of the *Centralverbandes der deutschen Staatsbürger jüdischen Glaubens*, spoke of the bestiality of the Cossack mob and underlined the huge impact of the horrendous treatment of the Jews in Russia on the struggle of the Jews against the Russian “Moskowitertum.”¹⁰ The journal of the Zionist movement in Germany, the *Jüdische Rundschau*, likewise, proclaimed: “we as Jews have still to settle a special bill with the barbarians in the East.”¹¹ Like most other Germans, German Jews believed as well that a short military campaign would be sufficient to win the war.

Technological progress, however, had drastically changed the features of any future war. Peace activists had warned of this dangerous development. The converted Jew Jan Gotlieb Bloch from Poland, for example, had published a huge six-volume book about the future of war, describing all the atrocities to come.¹² The public, though, largely ignored these warnings. One of the few Jewish contemporary observers to note the horrifying consequences of technological progress for war was the historian Martin Philippson. In his end-of-year review for the year 5674, published in the *Jahrbuch für jüdische Geschichte und Literatur*, he wrote that we now know how to send to their death thousands of people “from the depths of the sea and from the height of the heavens.”¹³ Nevertheless, Philippson, too, emphasized that German Jews should go to war even more zealously and boldly, since this war was aimed at Russian Czarism, which threatened all culture, justice, tolerance, and freedom.

It was more difficult for German Jews, however, to legitimize the war against France and England, those countries that had been seen in the German-Jewish public sphere as shining examples of modern civility because of their successful history of emancipation. Liberal as well as orthodox and Zionist German Jews now condemned France and England for having entered into an alliance with Russia. The *Allgemeine Zeitung des Judentums* proclaimed that these civilised states had capitulated in the face of Russian barbarism.¹⁴ In the same way the

¹⁰ “Unter den Waffen,” *Im Deutschen Reich. Zeitschrift des Central-Vereins deutscher Staatsbürger jüdischen Glaubens*, September 9th, 1914.

¹¹ Heinrich Loewe, “Ringsum Feinde,” *Jüdische Rundschau*, August 7th, 1914.

¹² Jan Gotlib Bloch, Ivan Stanislavovich Bloch, *The Future of the War in Its Technical, Economic, and Political Relations*, translation from Russian (Boston: Ginn, 1899). Published also in a German (Johann von Bloch, *Der Krieg*, 6 voll., (Berlin: Puttkammer & Mühlbrecht, 1899) and French translations (Jean de Bloch, *La guerre*, (Paris: Guillaumin, 1899).

¹³ Martin Philippson, “Rückblick auf das Jahr 5674,” *Jahrbuch für jüdische Geschichte und Literatur*, 18/1 (Berlin 1915): 1-14.

¹⁴ “Als Deutsche und als Juden,” *AZJ*, August 28th, 1914.

newspaper of the CV, *Im deutschen Reich*, wrote: “By forming an alliance with this state, France and England have made themselves guilty of the same lack of culture.”¹⁵ Even Martin Philippon proclaimed England and France to be the true creators and the most unscrupulous and deceitful operators of the global conflagration.¹⁶ The *Jüdische Rundschau*, too, accused France of defending Russia and of dragging our people – and here the Zionist author did not mean Jews but Germans – with outrageous blindness into war.¹⁷ Liberal, orthodox, and Zionist German Jews alike condemned France and Great Britain for this alliance with Russia. Again and again they underscored the legitimacy of the defensive war that Germany was forced to conduct. In this way, the first issue under the title “The War and Us Jews” of a small series of pamphlets published for Jewish soldiers, Lamm’s *Jüdische Feldebücherei*,¹⁸ remarked: “Wars of conquest – this is what Jewry teaches – are reprehensible from an ethical point of view; defensive wars, however, are not only allowed but also imperative.”¹⁹

Since contemporary observers did not have complete access to the plans of the military command, they could not recognize how the German Supreme Army Command, in direct coordination with the Habsburg Army, had already transformed the war into one of conquest, establishing far-reaching war aims,²⁰ or even the downright conquest of world power.²¹ Neither could they foresee the war dynamics. They could have discerned, however, even by official statements in August 1914 how the conduct of the war violated international law and their own humanistic convictions. Still, in the early days of the war, contemporary Jewish and non-Jewish observers alike were not willing, in the excitement of the historical moment and with the emphatic declaration of German patriotism, to recognize these discrepancies, although they could have been discerned from the published speech given by Chancellor of the German Reich, Theobald von

¹⁵ “Unter den Waffen,” *Im Deutschen Reich. Zeitschrift des Central-Vereins deutscher Staatsbürger jüdischen Glaubens*, September 9th, 1914.

¹⁶ Martin Philippon, “Rückblick auf das Jahr 5674,” *Jahrbuch für jüdische Geschichte und Literatur*, 18/1 (Berlin, 1915): 1-14.

¹⁷ Heinrich Loewe, “Ringsum Feinde,” *Jüdische Rundschau*, August 7th, 1914.

¹⁸ Eva Edelman-Ohler, “Frontlektüre – Poetische Mobilmachung in Lamm’s ‘Jüdischer Feldebücherei’ (1915/16),” *Europäisch-jüdische Literaturen und Erster Weltkrieg/European-Jewish Literatures and World War One*, ed. Petra Ernst (Berlin: De Gruyter Mouton 2014), 100-115.

¹⁹ “Der Krieg in der Auffassung des Judentums,” *Der Krieg und wir Juden. Gesammelte Aufsätze von einem deutschen Juden*, (Berlin: Lamm, 1915), 20-55; 28.

²⁰ Annika Mombauer, *The Origins of the First World War: Controversies and Consensus*, (London: Longman, 2002); Annika Mombauer, *Die Julikrise*, (München: Beck, 2014).

²¹ Fritz Fischer, *Der Griff nach der Weltmacht*, (Düsseldorf: Droste, 1961).

Bethmann Hollweg, in the August 4th session of the German parliament.²² There he conceded that Germany had opened this war with a violation of international law by invading neutral Belgium.²³ Moreover, attentive contemporary witnesses could also perceive the fact that this war – in sharp contrast to the few wars of the 19th century – developed into a war against the civilian population from the very outset.²⁴ Again, Belgium was one of the first theatres of the war where this new characteristic of warfare had emerged.²⁵

Contemporary German observers – Jews and non-Jews alike – were, therefore, compelled to find subtle strategies to legitimize Germany's violation of Belgian neutrality and to repress this new feature of war against a civilian population. This article therefore examines how Jewish contemporaries – involving some voices of Habsburg Jews as well as of some converts, who had been afflicted by anti-Semitic prejudices – perceived the violation of international law and whether they had discerned this new quality of warfare.²⁶ After considering the testimonies of German-Jewish eye-witnesses, whether they served as soldiers in the German army or as rabbis for the soldiers in Belgium, this article will then scrutinize the ways that the German-Jewish press covered the German occupation of Belgium. It aims by these means to ultimately examine the ways in which German-Jewish intellectuals, including certain converted Jews, and Jewish socialists perceived the Belgian war.

²² *Verhandlungen des Reichstags. XIII. Legislaturperiode. II. Session, Band 306. Stenographische Berichte. Von der Eröffnungssitzung am 4. August 1914 bis zur 34. Sitzung am 16. März 1916*, (Berlin: Norddeutsche Verlagsanstalt, 1916).

²³ John Horne, Alan Kramer, *German Atrocities 1914: A History of Denial* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001).

²⁴ Anton Holzer, *Das Lächeln der Henker: Der unbekannte Krieg gegen die Zivilbevölkerung 1914-1918*, (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2008).

²⁵ Jeff Lipkes, *Rehearsals: The German Army in Belgium, August 1914*. (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2007); Belgian eyewitnesses had documented extensively the German atrocities in published diaries and memorandums. For a brief presentation, see: Wilhelm Alff, "Die Deutschen aus unbekannter Sicht: Belgische Aufzeichnungen von 1914 bis 1918," *Materialien zum Kontinuitätsproblem der deutschen Geschichte*, ed. Wilhelm Alff, (Frankfurt/M.: Suhrkamp, 1976), 109-126; see also the contemporary report of the British historian Arnold J. Toynbee, *The German Terror in Belgium: An Historical Record*, (New York: George H. Doran Company, 1917).

²⁶ Ulrich Sieg in his monumental study on German Jewish intellectuals in the First World War provides helpful comments at several points on the Jewish perception of the German warfare in Belgium: Ulrich Sieg, *Jüdische Intellektuelle im Ersten Weltkrieg: Kriegserfahrungen, weltanschauliche Debatten und kulturelle Neuentwürfe*, (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 2001), 69-71; 147; 178.

The study focuses on the very first moment of the war. The question of how these initial attitudes changed over the course of the war will not be taken into consideration. Necessary, however, is a brief overview of the German occupation of Belgium.

The German occupation of Belgium

According to the plan devised by the chief of the Prussian general staff in 1905, the way to defeat France in the case of a war on two fronts was through a surprise attack from the north, through Belgium.²⁷ On August 4th, German troops did just this, invading in four formations. In doing so, they not only broke international law by violating Belgian neutrality,²⁸ but also by conducting a war against Belgian civilians, they paved the way for German war crimes.²⁹ The very same day, they arrived near the strategically important town of Liege. To the great surprise of the German military commanders, the Belgian people did not accept the violation of their neutrality.³⁰ Only twelve days later, the German army succeeded in conquering Liege.³¹

From the outset rumours spread among German soldiers that Belgian civilians carried out cunning ambush attacks.³² In this context, old myths dating back to the Franco-German war of 1870/71 about so-called *Franc-tireurs*, or civilian

²⁷ *Der Schlieffenplan: Analysen und Dokumente*, eds. Hans Ehlert, Michael Epkenhans, Gerhard P. Groß, 3rd ed. (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 2007).

²⁸ See therefore chapter 2 in Isabel Hull, *A Scrap of Paper. Breaking and Making International Law during the Great War*, (Ithaca, NY: Cornell Univ. Press, 2014), 16-50.

²⁹ Christoph Jahr, "Verbrechen," *Der Weltkrieg 1914-1918: Der deutsche Aufmarsch in ein kriegeres Jahrhundert*, eds. Markus Pöhlmann, Harald Fritz Potempa, Thomas Vogel, (München: Bucher-Verlag, 2013), 301-319.

³⁰ Ernst Piper, *Nacht über Europa: Kulturgeschichte des Ersten Weltkriegs*, (Berlin: Propyläen, 2013), 151-212.

³¹ Lipkes, *Rehearsals: The German Army in Belgium*.

³² Lothar Wieland, *Belgien 1914: Die Frage des belgischen 'Franktireurkrieges' und die deutsche öffentliche Meinung von 1914 bis 1936* (Bern and Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1984). For the long and difficult path to Belgian-German rapprochement, see: Winfried Dolderer, "Der schwierige Weg zum 'moralischen Frieden': Der Disput um den angeblichen belgischen Franktireurkrieg 1927-1958," *Zeitschrift für Geschichtswissenschaft* 64/7-8 (2016): 661-682. Here is no place to repulse the revisionist theses of Gunter Spraul, *Der Franktireurkrieg 1914. Untersuchungen zum Verfall einer Wissenschaft und zum Umgang mit nationalen Mythen*, (Berlin: Frank & Timme, 2016) who replicates the old German legends, that in fact Belgian people had undertaken a franc-tireur war against German soldiers.

snipers, emerged once more among Germans.³³ Time and again German newspapers published articles about Belgian civilian attacks on German soldiers.³⁴ Numerous pamphlets and novels circulated at the time, some with illustrations of the cruel assaults of the *Franc-tireurs*; [Fig. 8, Fig. 9] likewise, picture postcards and, significantly, posters of a similar nature circulated widely.³⁵



Figs. 8 and 9: Title pages of two widely circulating German pamphlets and novels depicting the alleged violent assaults by Belgian *Franc-tireurs*.

The drawing “From the Belgian theater of war: Assault by Franktireurs” by Felix Schwormstädt for example signed on August, 21, 1914, was first printed in the *Illustrierte Zeitung* in Leipzig, [Fig. 10] reprinted in the *Illustrierte Weltkriegschronik der Leipziger Illustrierten Zeitung*,³⁶ and then widely used for

³³ Friedrich Engels at that time sharply repudiated the legends of the *Franc-tireurs*: Friedrich Engels, “Preußische Franktireurs,” in Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Werke*, vol. 17 (Berlin: Dietz Verlag, 1962), 203-207.

³⁴ Wieland, *Belgien 1914*, 17-22.

³⁵ See for example: Felix Renker, *Der Franktireur: Dramatische Scene* (Mühlhausen i. Thür.: Danner, 1914); Robert Hillmann, *Der Franktireur: Episode aus dem Kriege 1914 in einem Aufzug*, (Warendorf: Wulff, 1914); Victor Martin Otto Denk, *Die Franktireurs von Diest. Erzählung aus Belgien*, (München: Manz, 1915); Peter Saget, *Der Franktireur: Trauerspiel in 1 Akt*, (Recklinghausen: Vollmer, 1915).

³⁶ *Illustrierte Weltkriegschronik der Leipziger Illustrierten Zeitung*, 3 voll., ed. Paul Schreckenbach, (Leipzig: J. J. Weber, 1914/15 – 1916/18), vol. 1, 31.

propaganda postcards. Even a satirical journal like *Simplicissimus*, formerly known for its anti-militaristic position, felt obliged to publish a sinister story and drawing of Belgian *Franc-tireurs*, complete with a poem titled “Belgian infamy” seething with hatred against Belgians.³⁷ [Fig. 11]



Fig. 10 Felix Schormstädt, “From the Belgian theater of war. Assault by Franktireurs”, *Illustrierte Zeitung*, Leipzig n. 3714, September, 3, 1914, p. 385.

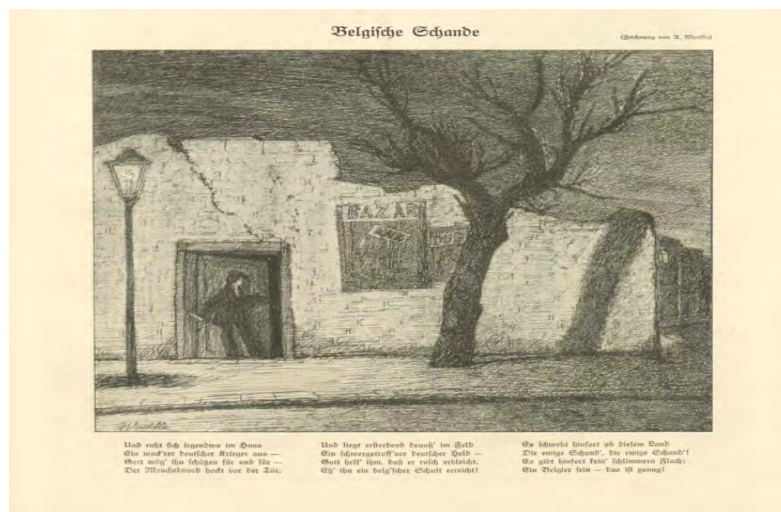


Fig. 11: Alphons Woelfle, *Belgische Schande*, (Belgian Infamy), *Simplicissimus*, n. 21, 25 August 1914.

Some German intellectuals tried at the time to legitimize this obsession with academic arguments. The Königsberg art historian Berthold Haendcke, for

³⁷ Alphons Woelfle, “Belgische Schande,” *Simplicissimus*, August 25th, 1914.

example, published in the first issue of the 1914/15 volume of the journal *Nationale Rundschau: Zeitschrift für deutsches Geistesleben* a scholarly article about Belgian art history, in which he purported that the behaviour of Belgian *Franc-tireurs* during the war had already been anticipated in the Flemish art of the 17th century.³⁸

In addition to the legend of the *Franc-tireurs*, rumours of Belgian mutilating the wounded and desecrating fallen soldiers spread both among German soldiers and the general public in Germany. As early as 1916 the Belgian sociologist Fernand van Langenhove published a study, based on German sources, testimonial evidence of soldiers, newspaper coverage, and official documents, of the origin, logic, and dynamics of these rumours. He showed how they had arisen from military letters sent by ordinary German soldiers and from accounts given by wounded soldiers. Taken up by the newspapers and revised in their accounts, the rumours contributed widely to the shaping of German public opinion.³⁹ Relying heavily on van Langenhove's study, the French historian Marc Bloch published an article in 1921 regarding false reports in war times, in which he underscored the fact that rumours emerging on the basis of collective imaginations arise from feelings of exhaustion, emotional fatigue, and moral unease. Soldiers, in this situation, had repeated as truth the stories they had heard. And these rumours, Marc Bloch explained, in turn prompted German soldiers to exercise extreme violence and brutality against Belgian civilians.⁴⁰

Hence, during the struggle for Liège, German soldiers destroyed a large part of the nearby small village of Soumagne killing 165 civilians, including children and the elderly.⁴¹ After the conquest of Liège, German troops moved on toward Brussels, continuing their terror against civilians in the small village of Aarschot where they killed more than 150 people.⁴² Three days later they carried out a massacre in the small town Dinant, killing nearly seven hundred civilians, while

³⁸ Berthold Haendcke, "Die belgischen Franktireurs und die Kunst Belgiens," in *Nationale Rundschau: Zeitschrift für deutsches Geistesleben* 1/1 (1914-15): 5-8.

³⁹ Fernand van Langenhove, *Comment nait un cycle de légendes: Franc-Tireurs et atrocités en Belgique*, (Paris: Payot, 1916); translated into German as: *Fernand van Langenhove, Wie Legenden entstehen! Franktireur-Krieg und Greuelthaten in Belgien*, (Zürich: Orell Füssli, 1917).

⁴⁰ Marc Bloch, "Reflexions d'un historien sur les fausses nouvelles de la guerre," in *Revue de synthèse historique*, 1921, republished in *Ecrits de guerre 1914-1918*, ed. Etienne Bloch, (Paris: Colin, 1997) 169-184. Alff, "Die Deutschen aus unbekannter Sicht," 109-126.

⁴¹ Toynbee, *The German Terror in Belgium*, 35-36.

⁴² Horne, *Kramer, German Atrocities* 1914; Lipkes, *Rehearsals: The German Army in Belgium*.

also destroying a large part of the city by burning down virtually all the houses.⁴³ German troops subsequently conquered the town of Namur. In the meantime, the northern line of the German army invaded the town of Leuven killing two hundred citizens and destroying a large part of the historical city centre. During this attack the library of Leuven was burned down.⁴⁴ In other places like Ardennes, Tamines, or Rossignol, German soldiers continued to inflict terror on the civilian population in the form of executions, mutilations, looting, and the burning of houses.⁴⁵ The Belgian army had to pull back, and at the beginning of October it was forced to leave the fortress of Antwerp. Within a period of only a few weeks German soldiers killed more than six thousand Belgian civilians.⁴⁶

While some Belgian Jews collaborated with the German occupation forces – 0.6 per cent of the Belgian population in 1914, that is 46,300, were Jewish – many others joined the resistance.⁴⁷ The chief Rabbi of Brussels, Armand Bloch, who became “the soul of the moral resistance” against the German occupation,⁴⁸ refused to sign the declaration of obedience toward the German General Government of Belgium. On Yom Kippur he expressed his patriotism and held a prayer for the Belgian King Albert. It was two German-Jewish officials who accused Bloch of insults, and he was imprisoned in May 1916.⁴⁹

The later global historian and British citizen Arnold J. Toynbee, as a young scholar, had joined the Foreign Office, and in 1917 he published a broad “historical record” of *The German Terror in Belgium*.⁵⁰ To the written and oral

⁴³ See the eyewitness testimonies in: *The Martyrdom of Belgium: Official Report of Massacres of Peaceable Citizens, Women and Children by the German army*, ed. Gérard François Marie Cooreman (Baltimore Md.: W. Stewart Brown, 1915), 13-15.

⁴⁴ Wolfgang Schivelbusch, *Eine Ruine im Krieg der Geister: Die Bibliothek von Löwen, August 1914 bis Mai 1914* (Frankfurt/M.: Fischer Verlag, 1993).

⁴⁵ Horne, Kramer, *German Atrocities 1914*; Lipkes, *Rehearsals: The German Army in Belgium*.

⁴⁶ According to the report presented in the Belgian parliament and which was passed on to German offices: Generallandesarchiv Karlsruhe, Politische Nachrichten des Generalkommandos des XIV. Armeekorps / Abteilung Ic no. 1479.

⁴⁷ Daniel Dratwa, “The Chief Rabbi of Belgium Confronting the Germans in the First World War,” in *European Judaism* 48/1 (2015): 100–109; 101.

⁴⁸ Willy Bok, “Vie juive et communauté, une esquisse de leur histoire au vingtième siècle,” in *La Grande Synagogue de Bruxelles, Contributions à l’histoire des Juifs de Bruxelles, 1878-1978*, eds. Jean Bloch, Marc Kahlenberg, Willy Bok (Bruxelles: Communauté Israélite de Bruxelles, 1978), 151-168, 154.

⁴⁹ Dratwa, “The Chief Rabbi of Belgium,” 104-105.

⁵⁰ Arnold J. Toynbee, *The German Terror in Belgium. An Historical Record*, (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1917).

sources Toynbee had added a series of photographs by unknown photographers to document the destruction of Belgian villages and towns. [Fig. 12-23].



Fig. 12, Liège. Farm House



Fig. 13, Haelen



Fir. 14, Aerschot



Fig. 15, Malines



Fig. 16, Malines



Fig. 17, Capelle au bois



Fig. 18, Louvain. Near the church of St. Pierre



Fig. 19, Louvain. Station Square

Figgs. 12-19: Selected photographs document the destruction of Belgian villages and towns by unknown photographers. Published by Arnold J. Toynbee in his The German Terror in Belgium. An Historical Record, London, 1917.

Some of these photographs are presented above. Because Toynbee was once a famous personality with international reputation a brief excursus should be inserted here.

Excursus: Arnold J. Toynbee (1889-1975)

The British historian Arnold J. Toynbee, who would become renowned as a world historian owing to his twelve volume *A Study of History*, published from 1934 to 1961,⁵¹ an indisputable precursor of global history,⁵² was in spring 1914 employed as a tutor in Oxford following his university education in Oxford and Athens in ancient history.⁵³ The outbreak of the war was a shock for the young scholar who felt wrenched from his secluded scholarly life and studies of ancient Greek. At this momentous time, he found himself compelled to engage in current problems and global politics.⁵⁴ “Throughout his later life, Toynbee referred to this catastrophe as the decisive turning point in his thinking.”⁵⁵ Remarkably, Toynbee opened his voluminous study on nationalism and war, in which he tried to come to terms with the current political conflicts, with the words: “For the first time in our lives, we find ourselves in complete uncertainty as to the future.”⁵⁶ Exempted from military service for health reasons, he worked from May 1915 for the Political Intelligence Department of the Foreign Office, publishing propaganda material opposing the war waged by the Central Powers and their allies. Among his publications were comprehensive documentations of the Armenian genocide and of German warfare in Poland.⁵⁷ He then turned his

⁵¹ Arnold J. Toynbee, *A Study of History*, voll. I-XII, (London/New York: Oxford University Press, 1934-1961).

⁵² Here is not the place to discuss the ambiguities of Toynbee’s concept of world history; for a good overview, see: Michael Lang, “Globalization and Global History in Toynbee,” in *Journal of World History* 22/4 (2011): 747–783, nor is it the place to treat the philosophical issues around universal history and the philosophy of history; on that subject, see Theodor W. Adorno, *Negative Dialektik* (Frankfurt/M.: Suhrkamp, 1966), 295-353; on the problem of the principally religious-Christian foundation of the term “world history,” and Toynbee’s position toward Zionism; see Hedva Ben-Israel, “Debates With Toynbee: Herzog, Talmon, Friedman,” in *Israel Studies* 11/1 (2006): 79–90; Isaiah Friedman, “Arnold Toynbee: Pro-Arab or Pro-Zionist?” in *Israel Studies* 4/1 (1999): 73-95.

⁵³ William H. McNeill, *Arnold J. Toynbee. A Life*, (London/New York: Oxford University Press York, 1989).

⁵⁴ Peter Hablützel, *Bürgerliches Krisenbewußtsein und historische Perspektive. Zur Dialektik von Geschichtsbild und politischer Erfahrung bei Arnold Joseph Toynbee*, (Diss. 1978, Universität Zürich, Philosophische Fakultät), 33-36.

⁵⁵ Lang, “Globalization and Global History in Toynbee,” 760.

⁵⁶ Arnold J. Toynbee, *Nationality and the War*, (London-Toronto: J. M. Dent & Sons, 1915), 1.

⁵⁷ Arnold J. Toynbee, *Armenian Atrocities. The Murder of a Nation with a Speech delivered by Lord Bryce* (London-New York-Toronto: Hodder & Stoughton, 1915); Arnold J. Toynbee, *The Treatment of the Armenians in the Ottoman Empire 1915-1916. Documents* (London: G. P. Putnam’s Sons, 1916); Arnold J. Toynbee, *The Destruction of Poland. A Study in German Efficiency*, (London: Fisher Unwin, 1916).

attention to the German occupation of Belgium, publishing first in 1916 a documentation of the deportation and forced labor of the Belgian people.⁵⁸ In the following year he published documentation of the German occupation, which was translated immediately into French, German, and Danish.⁵⁹ “The subject of this book,” Toynbee declared in his preface, “is the treatment of the civil population.” Relying on the methodological experience he had gathered as a historian, he based his narrative of the war in Belgium on documentary evidence. “Th[is] evidence,” he emphasized, “consists of first-hand statements – some delivered on oath before a court, others taken down from the witnesses without oath by competent legal examiners, others written and published on the witnesses’ own initiative as books or pamphlets.” In concluding his preface, he nonetheless added that “the final critical assessment will [...] necessarily be postponed” till the end of the war.⁶⁰

German-Jewish perceptions of the German occupation of Belgium

In light of the German atrocities in Belgium in summer and autumn 1914, the question remains: what was the perception of German Jews in Belgium, some of whom served as soldiers in the German army, others as rabbis for those same soldiers stationed there? How, that is, did German Jews perceive this violence against Belgian civilians and this new quality of war, which was now directed against the civilian population? And how did the German-Jewish public sphere, as well as Jewish intellectuals in Germany, become aware of the violation of Belgian neutrality and German atrocities there?

German-Jewish Contemporary Witnesses

Among the German-Jewish contemporary witnesses who served as soldiers in the occupation of Belgium were the young Werner H. and his brother. The war letters of German and Austrian Jews collected and published in 1915 by the

⁵⁸ Arnold J. Toynbee, *The Belgian Deportations* (London: Fisher Unwin, 1916).

⁵⁹ Arnold J. Toynbee, *Le terrorisme allemand en Belgique* (London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1917); *Der deutsche Anmarsch in Belgien* (London: R. Clay and sons 1917); *Tyskernes Raedselsherredømme i Belgien* (København: Branner, 1917).

⁶⁰ Toynbee, *The German Terror in Belgium*, V. Later on, in a dialogue with his son, Toynbee explained that he was glad to have gotten rid of these services: Arnold J. Toynbee, *Comparing Notes. A Dialogue across a Generation* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1963), 116-117.

journalist Eugen Tannenbaum include one from Werner H., who had by then been wounded, in which he informs his family that his brother had fallen during the battle near Dinant.⁶¹ He felt obliged, Werner H. noted, to report the death of his brother, while also mentioning his own injury: "Under terrible artillery fire," he wrote, his military unit moved forward against a village, adding that the battle of Dinant raged on the entire day and spread throughout the whole region. Werner H. did not, however, refer to the mass execution of Belgian civilians by the German occupying forces; he only reported soberly that the whole village was completely on fire. His report conveyed in mundane terms his sense of a successful campaign: "Our artillery has merely paved the way."

Another German-Jewish soldier serving in Belgium was Kurt Levy, born in 1898.⁶² Immediately after gaining his high school diploma, Levy, together with his elder brother, enlisted as a war volunteer. Levy kept a diary of his wartime deployment.⁶³ According to his diary entries, Levy had been conscripted on August 2nd. On the next day he left his town by railroad, crossed the Rhine on August 4th, and by midday he entered Belgium together with his company. Already on this very first day in Belgium he made note of an attack by *Franc-tireurs*, which left five soldiers dead and fifteen wounded. On August 7th, his troop moved to Liege, where he examined the coffins at the cemetery for hidden weapons. On the next day, the soldiers marched to Fort de Fléron, near Soumagne, where Levy described the forming of barricades.⁶⁴ On August 20th, his company set off for Leuven, where they entered - as Levy wrote - to the playing of music. Soberly, Levy wrote of burning houses, fleeing citizens, and many dead Belgians. In the marketplace of Leuven the soldiers took a break, and Levy told of a concert and a "dance with Belgian girls." On August 21st, the soldiers moved on to Drogenbos in Flanders, reaching Mons two days later. On August 25th, he marched into France.⁶⁵

⁶¹ *Kriegsbriefe deutscher und österreichischer Juden*, ed. Eugen Tannenbaum (Berlin: Neuer Verlag, 1915), 8-10. For general information about fallen German Jewish soldiers in Belgium, see: *Deutsche jüdische Kriegstote des Ersten Weltkrieges auf Kriegsgräberstätten in Belgien und Frankreich* (Kassel: Volksbund Deutsche Kriegsgräberfürsorge, 2009).

⁶² For Kurt Levy see the biographical outline in: *Bewährung im Untergang: Ein Gedenkbuch*, ed. Ernst G. Lowenthal (Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 1965), 199.

⁶³ Centrum Judaicum Archiv [CJA], Das Kriegstagebuch von Kurt Levy.

⁶⁴ Toynbee, *The German Terror in Belgium*, 31-32.

⁶⁵ Horne, Kramer, *German Atrocities 1914*, 236.

After Werner H. and Kurt Levy, a third contemporary Jewish eyewitness was Felix A. Theilhaber, a Zionist physician and author of several social-science studies on Judaism. In Belgium he served as an army doctor and in 1916 he published a short autobiographical book, or pamphlet really, with the title “Simple wartime experiences.”⁶⁶ In the pamphlet Theilhaber told of his first impressions of the Belgian people upon his arrival in Brussels. The Belgian people were quite haughty, he wrote, adding reproachfully that - in their own minds - they were envisioning the Belgian army returning to their own capital. Hate and emotion had suppressed every conversation. Nevertheless, while buying some cigars, Theilhaber reports of a remarkable encounter he had with a Belgian-Jewish shopkeeper: “ ‘Poor Belgium. Germany will destroy us. And all for what?’ The Belgian then added: ‘Tout le monde est meschuggas [sic].’” Addressing Theilhaber directly the shopkeeper asked: „You are a Jew, aren’t you?’ I only nodded,” Theilhaber wrote. He concluded his memory of that encounter with the words: “I lighted the exclusive cigar my fellow Jews had treated me to, and I went on my way.” After a while, Theilhaber returned to Brussels and he complained that no one had spoken a single word to him or his comrades. They themselves were so haggard, that they hadn’t taken notice of the civilians. Entering the destroyed city of Leuven some days later, Theilhaber noted simply that the spooky collapsing ruins had made little impression on him. Noting that since he had entered Belgium he had seen enough destroyed houses, “One gets used to it,”⁶⁷ he remarked.

A further German-Jewish eyewitness to the German occupation of Belgium was the military rabbi serving in Belgium, Bruno Italiener.⁶⁸ On September 24th, 1914, he gave a report to the Association of German Jews (*Verband der deutschen Juden*) about his stay in Belgium. Arriving at the station of Liege he noticed German soldiers with machine-guns, but he remarked that the town is by and large quiet. In his report he then wrote about how he attended, together with several German-Jewish soldiers, the service in the Brussels main synagogue during a religious holiday. With approval he noted that the Jewish community of Brussels had offered seats in the front rows to the German Jews. Explicitly the German rabbi Italiener emphasized that he was extremely impressed by the well-known melodies: “Particularly in this year and at this place,” and he concluded

⁶⁶ Felix A. Theilhaber, *Schlichte Kriegserlebnisse* (Berlin: Louis Lamm, 1916).

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 5-7.

⁶⁸ *Feldrabbiner in den deutschen Streitkräften des Ersten Weltkrieges*, eds. Sabine Hank, Hermann Simon, Uwe Hank, (Berlin: Hentrich & Hentrich, 2013), 265-268. For biographical information on Italiener; see *ibid.*, 79-83.

this observation with the remarkable expression: “In spite of being away from home I feel at home – in the House of God.” What had made such a strong impression on Italiener was the emotional bond the Belgian Jews felt with their state. The most heart-rending moment, Italiener wrote, came immediately after the prayer for the Belgian king, when the organ softly played the Belgian national anthem. “Many shed tears,” Italiener remarked, and then added an observation that shows that he felt deep empathy not only with the Belgian Jews but also with their Belgian patriotism: “It’s really remarkable how the Jew loves the country in which he is born. There is no House of God in Belgium where sorrow for the poor country is felt more deeply.”⁶⁹

In sharp contrast to Italiener’s empathy with the fate of the Belgian people, a converted German lawyer Fritz Norden,⁷⁰ though having served in Belgium, felt obliged to legitimize the German occupation and the violation of neutrality with juridical arguments.⁷¹ In the introduction to his pamphlet on the subject, he urged the Belgians not to become weak through humanistic ideas, and to avoid seeing only the excesses and cruelties of the war. “Only cowardly and degenerate people,” Norden emphasized, “see in a war a vision of dread.” For others, “it is a thunderstorm that cleans the air of poisonous substance.”⁷² He then, in his presentation, not only claimed that Belgians themselves were responsible for their not having been spared the German invasion, but also asserted that the reports of horrors are tainted by exaggerations and lies. In conclusion, he maintained rather that Belgium had many reasons to criticize itself.⁷³ This pamphlet had caused a broad public debate and provoked one of the few Belgian anti-Semitic reactions in the newspaper *La Libre Belgique*.⁷⁴

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 266. Dratwa, “The Chief Rabbi of Belgium Confronting the Germans in the First World War,” 104.

⁷⁰ In the biographical handbook of the German Foreign Office Norden was registered as Protestant: *Biographisches Handbuch des deutschen Auswärtigen Dienstes* (1871 - 1945), eds. Peter Grupp, Maria Keipert, voll. 5 (Paderborn: Schöningh, 2008), vol. 3 (L-R), 379-380. His father Philipp Norden was, however, mentioned as one of the Jewish entrepreneurs in Leipzig: Wilhem Harmelin, “Jews in the Leipzig Fur Industry,” *Leo Baeck Institute Year Book*, 9 (1964): 239-266; 266. It is not documented when Fritz Norden converted.

⁷¹ Fritz Norden, *La Belgique neutre et l’Allemagne d’après les hommes d’Etat et les juristes belges*, (Bruxelles: Richard, 1915); translated into German as Fritz Norden, *Das neutrale Belgien und Deutschland im Urteil belgischer Staatsmänner und Juristen*, (München: Bruckmann, 1916).

⁷² Norden, “Das neutrale Belgien”, 2.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 87.

⁷⁴ Fidelis, “Une saleté,” *Libre Belgique*, October 1915; Yasmina Zian, “La Libre Belgique en 1915. Quand l’antisémitisme est un argument de souveraineté nationale face à l’occupation allemande,” bildungsblog [2013]: <http://bildungsblog.hypotheses.org/97>.

To conclude, one can observe from these accounts that the German Jews serving in Belgium had no notion of the atrocities of German warfare in Belgium; indeed, many other documents provide accounts that substantiate this view. The German Jew Alice Fabian, for example, working for the German central purchasing company in Brussels, wrote soberly in a letter from November 6th, 1915, that the Belgians are extremely anti-German, so that one should be wary of them.⁷⁵ Another German Jewish soldier serving in Belgium, Kurt Stern, however, wrote in a letter dated October 5th, 1918, that the Belgians are quite friendly, and that they think highly of the Germans.⁷⁶ In his letter of October 21st, however, Stern too remarked that not all the Belgians are well-disposed toward the Germans.⁷⁷ A particular strategy for coming to terms with the war was to apply irony to the experiences, as did a certain Wilhelm in his letter of April 8th, 1915. He described his march through Belgium as a summer trip, during which he experienced a grand display of pyrotechnics, and before entering Liege he told of different kinds of amusements, for instance, with firecrackers. They experienced much joy, he wrote, adding that they passed Leuven on their journey but that the town had made a squalid and highly weather-beaten impression; “we only thought of Belgian sloppiness,” he added.⁷⁸

The coverage by the German Jewish press

At the beginning of August 1914, declaring that Germany is at war and still warning that Europe is on the eve of terrible and momentous events - on the eve of a global conflagration - the *Allgemeine Zeitung des Judentums* still pointed to Belgian neutrality.⁷⁹ Soon thereafter, however, the newspaper informed its readers soberly that according to the declaration of the German Chancellor the army was forced to occupy Belgium.⁸⁰ In the same issue, the paper noted that the fortress of Liege had been conquered by Prussian troops, a conquest achieved in a blitzkrieg attack, the *Allgemeine Zeitung des Judentums* added plainly. The

⁷⁵ *Feldpostbriefe jüdischer Soldaten 1914 - 1918. Briefe ehemaliger Zöglinge an Sigmund Feist, Direktor des Reichenheimschen Waisenhauses in Berlin*, 2 voll., eds. Sabine Hank, Hermann Simon (Teetz: Hentrich & Hentrich, 2002), n. 184, vol. 1, 213.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, n. 629, vol. 2, 612-613.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, n. 630, vol. 2, 614.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, n. 188, vol. 2, 716-719.

⁷⁹ “Die Woche,” *AZJ*, August 7th, 1914.

⁸⁰ “Die Woche,” *AZJ*, August 14th, 1914.

paper noted as well that 4000 Belgian prisoners of war, captured near Liege, were on their way to Germany.⁸¹

A few days later, the historian and chief editor of the *Allgemeine Zeitung des Judentums*, Ludwig Geiger, published a lead article, "The War and the Jews," in which he wrote that the Jews had all enthusiastically answered the call to arms, adding as well that French troops had marched into Belgium.⁸² A consequence of the war, Geiger noted, was that Germans in Belgium as well as in other countries were subject to much suffering, and the problem is compounded by the fact that many German Jews were living Belgium as well as the other countries. In the very next issue, the *Allgemeine Zeitung des Judentums* assured its readers that its suspicions about the great suffering of German Jews fleeing Belgium were confirmed.⁸³ The editor of the weekly report referred in this regard to the coverage by the Catholic newspaper *Germania*, which had reported the outbreak of a bloody persecution of the Jews in Belgium. The *Germania*, too, had picked up the rumours about the behaviour of Belgian *Franc-tireurs*, reporting that they had committed unspeakable cruelties against infants and old people alike. In the same issue, the *Allgemeine Zeitung des Judentums* informed its readers that German soldiers had entered Brussels.⁸⁴

One week later, immediately after the devastation of the town of Leuven and destruction of its library in the night from August 25th to August 26th, Ludwig Geiger published a lead article, "The War and Culture," in which he explained that there are circumstances under which a war is inevitable.⁸⁵ And even if a splendid town like Leuven might be destroyed, even if some splendid buildings and some irreplaceable works of art are destroyed, and even if many innocent people lose their property or their life, "we should not," according to Geiger, "allow ourselves to become confused about this conviction." Referring to the rumours of the *Franc-tireurs*, Geiger argued that the citizens of Leuven brought these sad and deplorable events upon themselves. The soldiers, Geiger emphasized, were not to blame but rather the citizens who had fired with nefarious blindness at the German soldiers. The weekly war report of this issue made overt use of the term *Franc-tireur*, again accusing Belgian civilians of having taken part in the fighting, and the report in *Allgemeine Zeitung des Judentums*

⁸¹ *Ibid.*

⁸² Ludwig Geiger, "Der Krieg und die Juden," *AZJ*, August 21st, 1914.

⁸³ "Die Woche," *AZJ*, 35, August 28th, 1914.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

⁸⁵ Ludwig Geiger, "Der Krieg und die Kultur," *AZJ*, September 4th, 1914.

additionally declared that the advance into Belgium is one of those enormous and admirable acts that are very rare in world history.⁸⁶

The same weekly report informed prosaically about the bombardment of Antwerp by a Zeppelin, quoting here another article of the Berlin *Vossische Zeitung*: “The high explosive bombs released by the airships have done their work.”⁸⁷ On October 9th, the newspaper wrote laconically that the attack on Antwerp is proceeding well,⁸⁸ and the weekly report of October 16th opened triumphantly with the “joyful message” that “Antwerp is ours.”⁸⁹ One week later, however, the journalists changed the personal pronoun “ours” into the more dissociated pronoun “their”: “The German Army is penetrating unstopably into Belgium,” and after the occupation of Flanders by German troops the *Allgemeine Zeitung des Judentums* wrote: “The whole of Belgium is in their possession.”⁹⁰

In its coverage, *Die Jüdische Rundschau*, organ of the Zionist Association in Germany, concentrated primarily on the eastern front and on Russia, but as early as August 7th, only three days after the German invasion of Belgium, the Zionist librarian and journalist Heinrich Loewe wrote in an article titled, “All around enemies” that France in its “wicked blindness dragged our people into war.”⁹¹ It is worth noting that with “our people” the Zionist Loewe meant here not the *Jewish* but rather the *German* people. One week later the *Jüdische Rundschau* commented on the flight of Galician Jews from Belgium, reproducing false reports from other German newspapers about the maltreatment of foreign Jews in Belgium.⁹² Similarly, the next issue repeated news from other journals about the maltreatment of immigrant Jews.⁹³ In early September the *Jüdische Rundschau* reported that a smear campaign against Germans and Jews had begun in Antwerp.⁹⁴ The same paper, however, did not take note of the terror

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸⁸ “Die Woche,” *AZJ*, 41, October 9th, 1914.

⁸⁹ “Die Woche,” *AZJ*, 42, October 16th, 1914.

⁹⁰ “Die Woche,” *AZJ*, 43, November 23rd, 1914.

⁹¹ Heinrich Loewe, “Ringsum Feinde,” *Jüdische Rundschau*, August 7th, 1914.

⁹² R., “Galizische Juden in Berlin auf der Flucht aus Belgien,” *Jüdische Rundschau*, August 14th 1914.

⁹³ “Aus aller Welt. Jüdische Flüchtlinge aus Belgien in Prag,” *Jüdische Rundschau*, August 22nd, 1914.

⁹⁴ H. L., “Die Juden im Krieg,” *Jüdische Rundschau*, September, 4th, 1914.

perpetrated by the German army against Belgian civilians or the violation of Belgian neutrality.

The reflections of the Orthodox newspaper *Jeschurun* were different. In October 1915, the rabbi and journal editor Joseph Wohlgemuth wrote in a lead article that at a historical moment in which the vital interests of its people are in danger every nation will violate international law.⁹⁵ All acts, Wohlgemuth maintained, that are not aimed at self-defence or at rendering the enemy harmless are criminal and immoral acts, a category that for Wohlgemuth, covers all the alleged actions of the Belgian *Franc-tireurs* such as mutilation of the enemy or desecration of their corpses.

Another German Jewish journal, the *Israelitische Familienblatt* from Hamburg even used biblical arguments to try and legitimize the violation of the Belgian neutrality, citing an episode from the Book of Moses.⁹⁶ During their migration to Palestine the Hebrews had asked for free passage through a country, and when the ruler refused, they proceeded to conquer the country by force. Therefore, the *Israelitische Familienblatt* wrote, Germany has the right to make its way through Belgium according to the spirit of the Bible.

Even the journal *Ost und West* in the summer of 1914 added its voice to the chorus of enthusiasm for the war.⁹⁷ The journal supported German patriotism despite the fact that at the beginning of the year the journal still had the subtitle “Organ der *Alliance Israélite Universelle*” on its masthead and in August 1914 still published the column “Mitteilungen” of the German office of the A.I.U.”⁹⁸ Most surprising for its authors was the hatred toward Germany. The first extensive paragraph of the lead article of the December 1914 issue, “The War as Master Teacher,” was subtitled: “About Unfounded Hate,” and this chapter lamented the tidal wave of blood red, wild withering hate, shot through with fire

⁹⁵ Joseph Wohlgemuth, “Der Krieg und die Moral,” *Jeschurun*, October 1914.

⁹⁶ “Die Neutralität Belgiens im Lichte der Bibel,” *Israelitisches Familienblatt*, August 20th, 1914; see in this regard, Sieg, *Jüdische Intellektuelle*, 69.

⁹⁷ For the journal *Ost und West* see: Madleen Podewski, *Komplexe Medienordnungen. Zur Rolle der Literatur in der deutsch-jüdischen Zeitschrift “Ost und West” (1901 - 1923)*, (Bielefeld: transcript, 2014). Madleen Podewski, “Krieg in ‘kleinen Archiven’: Überlegungen zum Umgang mit der Medienspezifik der Zeitschrift,” *Jüdische Publizistik und Literatur im Zeichen des Ersten Weltkriegs*, eds. Petra Ernst, Eleonore Lappin-Eppel, (Graz: Studienverlag 2016), 11-25.

⁹⁸ “Mitteilungen des Central-Comités der Alliance Israélite Universelle,” *Ost und West*, August 1914, col. 602-608. The relationship of the journal to the A. I. U. had caused several troubles, see therefore the editorial statement in: *Ost und West*, January 1914.

that was sweeping around the world.⁹⁹ In general, the author remarks, hate can be a natural human emotion, but it becomes pathological if unfounded and without valid reasons. And just such an “unfounded hate,” *Ost und West* wrote, is now pouring out over Germany. Most surprising for its authors was the hatred toward Germany in the neutral countries and those countries that were like Germany. Here, the article proclaimed, the hatred appears masked but is nonetheless present, and hence the German-Jewish journalists decidedly condemned the *Franc-tireurs*.

Furthermore this article from the journal *Ost und West* drew an analogy between the hatred directed toward Germany and hatred directed toward the Jews. “The hate toward Germany,” the author asserts, “has deep kindred with anti-Semitism,” and this analogy extends “up to the unconscious psychological motifs.”

In 1915 the historian Martin Philippson published an end-of-year review in the journal *Jahrbuch für jüdische Geschichte und Literatur*.¹⁰⁰ The journal followed liberal and educated middle-class principles and promoted the ideal of the Bildungsbürgertum. Philippson was very familiar with public opinion in Belgium, thanks to his own longstanding activities at the University of Brussels.¹⁰¹ In 1879 he was offered a professorship in history at the University of Brussels, and was, in 1886, appointed member of the Belgian academy of sciences, shortly thereafter becoming president of the University of Brussels. In 1890, however, he returned to Germany for reasons that remain unclear, but the move was conceivably motivated by anti-German attitudes among Belgian students. Other voices speak of a democratic opposition on the part of students against authoritarian attitudes among the professoriate. Whatever his reasons, Martin Philippson must have been very aware of Belgian attitudes and that the violation of Belgian neutrality by German troops would trigger broad resistance within Belgian society. In his article, however, Philippson complained about the deep mendacity and immoral insidiousness with which the enemies of Germany had

⁹⁹ “Der Krieg als Lehrmeister,” *Ost und West*, September-December 1914.

¹⁰⁰ Martin Philippson, “Rückblick auf das Jahr 5674,” *Jahrbuch für jüdische Geschichte und Literatur*, 18 (1915): 1-14; 1.

¹⁰¹ For Philippson see: Ulrich Wyrwa, “Die europäischen Seiten der jüdischen Geschichtsschreibung. Eine Einführung,” *Judentum und Historismus. Zur Entstehung der jüdischen Geschichtswissenschaft in Europa*, ed. Ulrich Wyrwa, (Frankfurt /M.- New York: Campus-Verlag, 2003), 9-36; 28-30. The Belgian historian Geneviève Warland is currently working on a project regarding Philippson’s experiences in Belgium.

over the years prepared for this war. He also attacked the dreadful atrocities and murderous deeds that the Belgians now ostensibly carried out. Responding to the rumours about the *Franc-tireurs*, Philippson in a bizarre twist condemned the malicious attacks by civilians.¹⁰²

The perception of German Jewish intellectuals and German Jewish socialists

The rumours of the *Franc-tireur* atrocities had exerted so great an influence on the German public sphere that even an author like Arnold Zweig, later known as a convinced pacifist, was unable at this historical moment to evade their mass psychological impact.¹⁰³ In December 1914, Zweig published his novel *The Beast* in the journal *Die Schaubühne*, precursor of the journal *Die Weltbühne*, both edited by Siegfried Jacobsohn. In *The Beast* Zweig tells the story of the brutal and sadistic murder of three innocent German soldiers committed by a Belgian peasant.¹⁰⁴ After being warned, this story tells, of the approaching German troops, the peasant moved his family and animals away from his farm. Shortly thereafter, the three German soldiers arrived, asking for quartering. The peasant offered them accommodation and gave them alcohol to drink. After having gotten them drunk he murdered them in bestial fashion.

A few years later, converted into a pacifist activist, Arnold Zweig criticized himself indirectly in his volume *The Face of Eastern European Jewry* for having succumbed to the German wartime lies and becoming, with his earlier novel, an accessory to Germany's war crimes.¹⁰⁵ He then confessed that this novel had become a thorn in his side.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰² Philippson, "Rückblick auf das Jahr 5674," 1-14.

¹⁰³ Jost Hermand, "Arnold Zweig und die Weimarer Republik," *Carl von Ossietzky und die politische Kultur der Weimarer Republik. Symposium zum 100. Geburtstag*, eds. Gerhard Kraiker, Dirk Grathoff, (Oldenburg: BIS, 1999), 257-277.

¹⁰⁴ Arnold Zweig, "Die Bestie," *Die Schaubühne*, December 17th, 1914; together with other novels published as a book: *Die Bestie. Erzählungen* (München: Langen, 1914); Robert Cohen, "Arnold Zweig's War Novellas of 1914 and Their Versions: Literature, Modernity and the Demands of the Day," *War, Violence, and the Modern Condition*, ed. Bernd Rüdiger Hüppauf, (Berlin, New York: De Gruyter, 1997), 277-289.

¹⁰⁵ Arnold Zweig, *Das ostjüdische Antlitz. Zu 50 Steinzeichnungen von Hermann Struck*, 2nd ed., (Berlin: Welt-Verlag, 1922), 166.

¹⁰⁶ Arnold Zweig, "Nachbericht," id., *Westlandsaga. Erzählung* (Berlin: Rütten & Loening 1952), 132-134.

In the summer of 1914 the vast majority of German Jews believed these rumours, and Arnold Zweig was by no means the only one to harbour this kind of a belligerent attitude. Even Martin Buber succumbed to German war mania and internalized the rumours.¹⁰⁷ In a letter to the Dutch author and psychologist Frederik van Eeden he complained about the Belgian *Franc-tireurs* and defended not only the German occupation of Belgium but also the devastation of Leuven.¹⁰⁸ Buber's letter was a response to an article that van Eeden had published in a Dutch newspaper, criticizing the jingoistic patriotism of his German friends;¹⁰⁹ yet, before the war, Eeden and Buber had been associated with a circle of elitist intellectuals, the Forte-Kreis, and all the members had felt themselves to share in the same aristocracy of the spirit. Van Eeden's open letter, Buber now countered, consisted of partial truths only, and he again defended the German terror in Belgium: "One cannot simply speak in platitudes about Leuven without having proved the facts, reporting what really had happened." And Buber continued repeating the rumours, "one cannot speak of *Franc-tireurs*, as if they only wanted to defend the freedom of their country," revealing to the reader the fact that a Belgian woman had taken pleasure in gouging out the eyes of wounded German soldiers and pressing in the buttons torn from their uniforms. Parenthetically, Buber noted in the same sentence that he knew very well about the behaviour of the Belgian *Franc-tireurs* "not from the newspapers, but on the basis of personal knowledge."¹¹⁰

Martin Buber shared his belief in these rumours with such a sensitive philosopher and sociologist as the baptized Georg Simmel.¹¹¹ He, too, had internalized the German enthusiasm for the war, and only five days after the invasion of Belgium Simmel described in a letter to his friend Hugo Liepmann, a philosopher like himself as well as a psychologist, his patriotism and his war fever: "I have the impression, that the German people will display a power which

¹⁰⁷ For Buber's attitudes regarding the war see: Sieg, *Jüdische Intellektuelle*, 40-50; 139-149; 210-213; 241-254; 303-314.

¹⁰⁸ Martin Buber, *Briefwechsel aus sieben Jahrzehnten*, vol. 1, 1897-1918, (Heidelberg: Lambert und Schneider, 1972), 374-380.

¹⁰⁹ Frederik van Eeden, "Offener Brief an unsere deutschen Freunde," *Der Neue Merkur*, January/February 1915, 489-491; first published in Dutch: *De Amsterdammer Weekblad voor Nederland*, September 6th, 1914.

¹¹⁰ Buber, *Briefwechsel*, 375.

¹¹¹ On Simmel's sociology see *Georg Simmels große Soziologie: Eine kritische Sichtung nach hundert Jahren*, eds. Hartmann Tyrell, Otthein Rammstedt, Ingo Meyer, (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2011).

has never appeared in world history before.”¹¹² Two weeks later, on August 22nd, the day of the battle of the Ardennes, he suggested in a letter to the author Margarete von Bendemann that all the infamy of mankind is surfacing in the behaviour of Germany’s enemies.¹¹³ On October 2nd, just one week after the devastation of Leuven and its library by German troops, Simmel lamented in a letter to the philosopher Harald Höffding “the ridiculous accusations with which the enemies had turned the neutral foreign countries against us.”¹¹⁴ To begin with, Simmel resisted the reproach that Germans are barbarians, a reproach, which has been raised, Simmel wrote in an apologetic and downplaying style, solely “because we have damaged (though by no means destroyed) some old buildings in an act of utter self-defence.” In contrast, Simmel accused France and England “of preparing to relinquish the old cultural ground of Germany to Russian hordes”: “In the towns of Kant and Goethe, Humboldt and Hegel, now the Cossacks would govern if things had gone according to the will of Frenchmen and Englishmen.”¹¹⁵

Even if Stefan Zweig was an Austrian and not a German Jewish writer, it might be helpful to reflect on his experiences here, too, first because of his former friendship with Belgian authors, second because his biography illustrates sharply the emotional confusion and personal discord caused by the German occupation of Belgium, and third because he contributed definitively to the German public sphere and to the German Jewish audience. Finally, he impressively described in retrospect the fundamental break brought about by the First World War, for both general European history and European Jewish history.¹¹⁶ In July 1914 he was in Belgium, visiting, among others, the Belgian writer Emil Verhaeren. Verhaeren was an intimate friend, whose poems Zweig had translated into German and whom he had portrayed sensitively in the German journal *Das literarische Echo* in 1904.¹¹⁷ Then in 1910, Zweig published a biography of

¹¹² Georg Simmel, *Gesamtausgabe, Band 23: Briefe 1912-1918. Jugendbriefe*, ed. Otthein Rammstedt (Frankfurt/M.: Suhrkamp, 2008), 365.

¹¹³ Simmel, *Briefe 1912-1918*, 372.

¹¹⁴ Simmel, *Briefe 1912-1918*, 399-400.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*; in November 1914, Simmel had given a public talk in Straßburg on Germany’s inner transition, in which he declared that only with this war “had our people finally become a unity and integrity.” Georg Simmel, “Deutschlands innere Wandlung,” *Der Krieg und die geistigen Entscheidungen*, ed. George Simmel (München-Leipzig: Ducker & Humblot, 1917), 9-29; 29.

¹¹⁶ Stefan Zweig, *Die Welt von Gestern: Erinnerungen eines Europäers*, (Stockholm: Bermann-Fischer, 1942).

¹¹⁷ Stefan Zweig, *Emile Verhaeren (1904), Gesammelte Werke in Einzelbänden*, ed. Knut Beck (Frankfurt/M.: S. Fischer, 1984), 7-22.

Verhaeren, with a second edition appearing just one year before the war.¹¹⁸ Two days after the Habsburg declaration of war against Serbia, Zweig left Belgium.¹¹⁹ Back in Vienna he wrote in his diary on August 4th that he had been shocked by the news that Germany had violated Belgium's neutrality.¹²⁰ Only three days later however he welcomed the successful conquest of Liege, calling it a "heroic deed."¹²¹ In these days, Stefan Zweig presented himself as a war volunteer. On August 11th, he published a brief article in the *Neue Freie Presse* about Liege, declaring its university a "stronghold of French spirit," so that "the town despite the geographical closeness to Germany has become a fortress of Frenchness."¹²² Consequently, Zweig wrote, the strong push of the German army towards Liege was a real incursion into enemy territory. Some days later Zweig must have read in Austrian newspapers about the legends of the *Franc-tireurs*, and he confessed in his diary to be shocked by the news from Belgium. "There is everywhere a mob," he wrote, "that looks only for an occasion to cry, to destroy, and patriotism is for this occasion the easiest mask." Then he confessed: "Between me and my friend something has been broken for years, perhaps forever."¹²³ After the German army's entry into Brussels Zweig called the event a success.¹²⁴ Nevertheless, he was frightened some days later when he saw some guests in a Vienna coffeehouse dividing up Belgium: "I was shuddered by this hubris and asked them to keep quiet."¹²⁵

On September 19th, Zweig published an open letter in the German newspaper *Berliner Tageblatt* to his friend abroad. There he publicly broke with his Belgian friends.¹²⁶ Regarding the rumours of the *Franc-tireurs* he declared, appealing directly to his friends: "You cannot expect that I will speak today for you, that I will say the Belgian people are no assassins or desecrators of wounded soldiers." As soon as Zweig heard that his former friend Verhaeren had fled to London and

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.* 23-250.

¹¹⁹ Knut Beck, "Jeder hat seinen Geist des Bösen und der Verneinung. Stefan Zweigs Verhalten im Ersten Weltkrieg," *Stefan Zweig und das Dämonische*, eds. Matjaž Birk, Thomas Eicher, (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2008), 78-89.

¹²⁰ Stefan Zweig, *Tagebücher. Gesammelte Werke in Einzelbänden*, (Frankfurt/M. S. Fischer 1984), 84.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, 85.

¹²² Stefan Zweig, "Lüttich," *Neue Freie Presse*, August 11th, 1914.

¹²³ Zweig, *Tagebücher*, 87.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, 91.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, 92.

¹²⁶ Stefan Zweig, "An die Freunde im Fremdland," *Berliner Tageblatt*, September 19th, 1914, (Abendausgabe).

had published a poem about the destruction of Belgium, he noted with shock in his diary: “A small catastrophe of my existence. Verhaeren has published a poem that is nearly the most stupid and infamous thing that can be thought.”¹²⁷ Some days later Stefan Zweig began his military service in the archive of the ministry of war.¹²⁸

A kind of intellectual confusion had overcome the German Jewish writer and journalist Heinrich Eduard Jacob.¹²⁹ As a young artist Jacob was in touch with the early expressionists in Berlin and first published theatre critiques in the liberal weekly *Deutsche Montagszeitung*. In September 1914 he travelled as war correspondent through Belgium and the following year published his diary “Travel through the Belgian war.”¹³⁰ Jacob wrote in an excessively subjectivist-individualist language, but he was averse to German patriotism, even criticizing the hysterical expressions of Germanness in the German public sphere.¹³¹ In his diaries of the Belgian war he lamented the millions of perpetrators who have been set off, furious and yelling Germans, but in the very same sentence he blustered likewise about Russians, Frenchmen and Englishmen.¹³² He had some empathy for the fate of the Belgians, and described the situation in the occupied country in expressionist tones, conveying words of misery, tears and tragedy. It is sad to be beaten, he wrote,¹³³ but on the other hand he accused Belgium of having brought this fate upon itself, because it hadn’t given German troops permission to march through the country.¹³⁴

Despite his expressionistic descriptions of the horror of war and occupation mixed with references from the German educational canon, even Jacob had succumbed to the fascination of the war and its “gloomy frenzy.”¹³⁵ He was confused in his subjectivist perception, and he himself declared that his book might have left the impression of “a prism of contradictions.”¹³⁶

¹²⁷ Zweig, *Tagebücher*, 115, see also the note 524.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, 116.

¹²⁹ Anja Clarenbach, *Finis libri. Der Schriftsteller und Journalist Heinrich Eduard Jacob* (1889-1967), Diss. Universität Hamburg 2003 [<http://ediss.sub.uni-hamburg.de/volltexte/2002/948/pdf/dissertation.pdf>].

¹³⁰ Heinrich Eduard Jacob, *Reise durch den belgischen Krieg. Ein Tagebuch*, (Berlin: Reiß, 1915).

¹³¹ Heinrich Eduard Jacob, “Würdelose Verse,” *Berliner Tageblatt*, December 9th, 1914.

¹³² Jacob, *Reise durch den belgischen Krieg*, 9.

¹³³ *Ibid.*, 87.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, 93-94.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, 25.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, 18.

Among the few German Jewish intellectuals who resisted the mass psychological suggestion of war fever in summer 1914 was the utopian messianic writer and political philosopher Ernst Bloch.¹³⁷ The converted and stubborn observer Viktor Klemperer was also sceptical and reserved toward the enthusiasm for the war.¹³⁸ Ernst Bloch, who once had taken part in the private seminar offered by Georg Simmel in Berlin and who, after moving to Heidelberg, belonged to the intellectual circle around Max Weber, fiercely opposed the ramped up patriotism of August 1914 and its new affirmation of German-Prussian militarism. He broke his friendship with Simmel precisely because of Simmel's German patriotism and approval of the war. Bloch went into exile in Switzerland during the conflict, publishing from there sharp critiques in the Bern newspaper *Freie Zeitung*.¹³⁹ Germany, he wrote, has lost its good name on account of Belgium alone.¹⁴⁰ Bloch wrote ironically in another article that since the invasion of Belgium, Germany is famously destined to provide authoritative expertise in the field of constitutional and international law.¹⁴¹ Furthermore, he noted that official German publications had ceased to treat Belgium as a sovereign state.¹⁴² In his weekly report of February, 23rd, 1918 for the *Freie Zeitung* under the title "Flemish plans," Bloch condemned Germany's aim of smashing Belgium, concluding with the observation that Germany has enriched its history since 1914 through a spectacular breach of international law and it has caused a wound to human sensibility.¹⁴³ Bloch sharply criticized Prussian Germany for having burned down the library of Leuven, asserting that the rough and uneducated Prussian squirearchy has rampaged through this gothic land in a way that had not occurred even in the bloodiest and cruellest times.¹⁴⁴ Under the title "Three Sins" Bloch then raised the question: if the German people in August 1914 had really succumbed a kind of a rapid spiritual illness in a war of self-defence and the nefarious lies of William II, then would not the invasion of Belgium alone have

¹³⁷ Arno Münster, *Ernst Bloch. Eine politische Biographie*, (Berlin-Wien: Philo & Philo Fine Arts, 2004).

¹³⁸ Walter Nowojski, *Victor Klemperer (1881–1960). Romanist – Chronist der Vorhölle*, (Berlin: Hentrich & Hentrich, 2004).

¹³⁹ Ernst Bloch, *Kampf, nicht Krieg. Politische Schriften 1917–1919*, ed. Martin Korol, (Frankfurt/M: Suhrkamp, 1985). For the newspaper *Freie Zeitung*, see the introduction of the editor, 37–44.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 79.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 130.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, 140.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, 189.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 281.

been enough to sober them up?¹⁴⁵ In June 1918, Bloch spoke of “moral damage,” noting that the invasion of Belgium cannot be increased by any other catastrophe.¹⁴⁶

Victor Klemperer, by contrast, believed at the very outset of the war that Germany might be innocent, as he noted on August 5th in his diary.¹⁴⁷ Yet, the very same day he felt troubled about how to judge the German army’s violation of Belgian neutrality, and asked himself: “Are we marching peacefully through Belgium or are we at war with Belgium?”¹⁴⁸ Once he read in the newspapers, however, a “dispatch about a failed surprise attack against Liege,” Klemperer noted: “War in Belgium after all.”¹⁴⁹ After the *Frankfurter Zeitung* had labelled the conquest of Liege a marvellous success, Klemperer wrote disconcertingly: “How can we stand this in the long run?”¹⁵⁰ Some days later, on August 15th, he wrote in his diary that the war, with all its cruelties and all its heroism, was horrible and stupid.¹⁵¹ Klemperer was indignant about the way intellectuals distanced themselves from the idea of progress and now made an effort to feel as if they belonged to the masses, to immerse themselves in them completely, to cheer them on and rush forward, in order to die together with them. The rumours of the Belgian *Franc-tireurs* had reached Klemperer, too, and the same day he wrote in his diary: “in Belgium mutilated wounded!” Around two weeks later he expressed his horror at the “terrible retaliatory measures in Belgium.” Returning to the rumours, he noted that the behaviour of the *Franc-tireurs* might be horrible.¹⁵² Yet, in marked contrast to most Jewish and non-Jewish contemporaries, Klemperer interpreted the *Franc-tireurs* as a legitimate form of resistance by the Belgians against the German occupation, and he asked whether an East-Prussian peasant would be friendlier towards Russian soldiers than a Belgian one towards a German one? And would one not, he continued, declare those actions as natural and brave that in the case of Belgium are seen as a symptom of lust for murder? In the entry of the same day Klemperer denounced

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 424.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 460.

¹⁴⁷ Victor Klemperer, *Curriculum Vitae. Jugend um 1900, 2. Buch, 1912-1918*, (Berlin: Aufbau Verlag, 1989), 182. In 1914/15 Klemperer taught at the University of Naples, but in July and August 1914 he was in Munich. In winter 1915, he was inducted into the army where he served first at the Western front and later as a censor at the Eastern front.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 183.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 184.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 187.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 189-190.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*, 197.

the bombardment of the town of Antwerp by German Zeppelins. For this kind of cruelty there is still no paragraph in international law, he noted with resignation, but the international law in this case would in any event have been eluded.¹⁵³

Among the few other German Jews who condemned the terror of the German army in Belgium were the Jewish socialists Kurt Eisner und Eduard Bernstein.¹⁵⁴

On August 8th, Kurt Eisner wrote in a letter that a Belgian worker is more appealing to him than a Prussian Junker.¹⁵⁵ At the time, Eisner worked for the socialist newspaper *Volksstimme*, and when the editor tried to defend the violation of Belgian neutrality Eisner contradicted him sharply. He also condemned the military forces for their cruel handling of Belgian civilians. In a letter from February 1915, he wrote: “I am not sentimental, but this German system [...] has created unprecedented war terrorism, which [...] will be our political ruin.”¹⁵⁶

Like Eisner, Eduard Bernstein also sharply criticized German belligerence.¹⁵⁷ In September 1914 he declared that he would not have agreed to the war credits had he known at the time that the war was to be conducted in such a cruel way. In 1917 Bernstein published the book *The Mission of the Jews in the World War*, in which he called attention to the contradictory arguments in the pro-German attitudes of Russian Jewish delegates at a recent conference of socialists from neutral countries.¹⁵⁸ Their position was such, Bernstein declared, that they would have to accept the violation of Belgian neutrality, too.

Conclusion

In conclusion, it is worth noting that none of the evidence suggests that the German atrocities in Belgium were directed in any way against Jews or that the

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, 198.

¹⁵⁴ Bernhard Grau, *Kurt Eisner 1868-1919. Eine Biographie*, (München: Beck, 2001); Francis L. Carsten, *Eduard Bernstein 1850-1932. Eine politische Biographie*, (München: Beck, 1993); Robert S. Wistrich, “Bernstein und das Judentum,” in *Bernstein und der demokratische Sozialismus*, eds. Horst Heimann, Thomas Meyer, (Berlin, Bonn: Dietz 1978), 149-165.

¹⁵⁵ Letter to Adolf Müller, quoted in: Grau, *Kurt Eisner*, 310.

¹⁵⁶ Horn, Kramer, *German Atrocities 1914*, 266.

¹⁵⁷ Sieg, *Jüdische Intellektuelle*, 260-264.

¹⁵⁸ Eduard Bernstein, *Die Aufgaben der Juden im Weltkrieg*, (Berlin: Erich Reiß, 1917), 38.

occupation policy had a specific anti-Semitic character. On the contrary, there is a document telling of a German soldier who saved a Belgian citizen because the person was Jewish.¹⁵⁹ Even the German war rabbis in Belgium mentioned only once the question of anti-Semitism in their conferences in Brussels, when they complained about the depositing of German anti-Semitic brochures in the Belgian railway stations.¹⁶⁰

In August 1914, the majority of German Jews shared the attitudes and opinions of the vast majority of other Germans. They did not criticize the German occupation of Belgium or the violation of the neutrality of this small country. They did not discern the new quality of warfare as a war against the civilian population, which it became during the German fighting in Belgium. The war, in this way, had rather created in its very first moment a complicated or peculiar kind of Christian-Jewish cohabitation in Germany. Even if this social coexistence ultimately broke down over the course of the war, it was so strong at the beginning that German patriotism even superseded the well-known intra-Jewish conflicts between liberal, orthodox, and Zionist Jews in Germany. They all shared, at the moment of the declaration of war, the same German patriotic attitude and the same belligerent dispositions.¹⁶¹ Like Georg Czarlinski, author of a report about Flanders published in the War Chronology of the 'Berlin Tourist Club,' Jews and non-Jews alike celebrated the German soldiers fighting in Flanders as war heroes.¹⁶² Jewish and non-Jewish contemporary observers also also the negative image of a small country like Belgium as had been expressed by Werner Sombart. In an article in the liberal *Berliner Tageblatt* he declared Belgium to be a "miscarriage of politics," adding that Belgian nationalism had for him "a certain quiet touch of comedy."¹⁶³ In the very same way, the Jewish member of the Berlin tourist-club, Hans Zweig, described the Belgian people in his portrait of the atmosphere in Belgium as childish, characterized by a stupid stubbornness and mulishness.¹⁶⁴

¹⁵⁹ Lipkes, *Rehearsals. The German Army in Belgium*, 311-313.

¹⁶⁰ *Feldrabbiner in den deutschen Streitkräften*, eds. Hank, Simon, Hank, 514.

¹⁶¹ Panter, *Jüdische Erfahrungen*, 39-46.

¹⁶² CJA, Z2004/13: Georg Czarlinski, "In Flandern," *Kriegs-Chronik des Berliner Touristen-Club von 1902*, November 20th, 1917.

¹⁶³ Werner Sombart, "Unsere Feinde," *Berliner Tageblatt*, November 2nd, 1914; see therefore: Sieg, *Jüdische Intellektuelle*, 177.

¹⁶⁴ CJA, Z2004/13: Hans Zweig, "Die Stimmung in Belgien," *Kriegs-Chronik des Berliner Touristen-Club von 1902*, May 5th, 1915.

There were some German Jews who did not succumb to the militaristic view and did not support the German invasion of Belgium, but they were more the exception than the rule, and their attitude occasionally led to the end of old friendships like that between Ernst Bloch und Georg Simmel. Even friends like Albert Ballin and Theodor Wolff disagreed with respect to German policy towards Belgium as Wolff noted in his diaries. Ballin, the general director of the Hamburg-American Shipping Company (*Hamburg-Amerikanische Packetfahrt-Actien-Gesellschaft*), the world's largest shipping company, had tried before August 1914 to mediate an agreement between Germany and Great Britain, but even he declared in August 1914 that the invasion of Belgium might be necessary. In contrast, Wolff, as editor of the most important liberal newspaper in Germany at the time, the *Berliner Tageblatt*, expressed serious reservations about this policy.¹⁶⁵ Other Jewish intellectuals, too, were disturbed by their own contradictions like the writer Heinrich Eduard Jacob.

Despite these exceptions and these individual atonements, the Great War in one sense unified German Jewry in the way it evoked an ambivalent unity of the previously contested German Jewish public sphere. On the other hand, the war seemed to have destroyed the former transnational bond that linked European Jewry and the intellectual exchange of Jews in Europe.¹⁶⁶ Furthermore it had deeply damaged the bonds of Jewish families whose branches lived in different countries, like those of the Philipppsons. Whereas Martin chose to support Germany after his stay in Belgium, taking part in German patriotism and promoting the militaristic line, his brother Franz, who had moved to Belgium just before Martin, remained strongly integrated into Belgian society as well as the Belgian Jewish establishment before 1914. He was a member of the *Consistoire Israelite de Belgique* and temporarily president of the Jewish community. He then lost his youngest son in the war, who died as a Belgian soldier in 1918.¹⁶⁷

¹⁶⁵ Theodor Wolff, *Tagebücher 1914-1919. Der Erste Weltkrieg und die Entstehung der Weimarer Republik*, vol. 1, ed. Bernd Sösemann, (Boppard am Rhein: Bold, 1984), 72.

¹⁶⁶ Volkov, "Juden und Judentum im Zeitalter der Emanzipation," 86.

¹⁶⁷ Johanna Philipppson, "The Philipppsons, a German-Jewish Family 1775-1933," *Leo Baeck Institute Yearbook*, 7 (1962): 95-118.

The situation was most problematic for those German Jews who had lived in Belgium and were expelled from the country in August 1914,¹⁶⁸ as happened to a young Jew named Wagner from Siegburg. His situation was exacerbated by the fact that he was conscripted to serve as a foot soldier near the Belgian border. As the German military rabbi serving in Rethel wrote to the association of German Jews, Wagner chose to defect when the opportunity arose.¹⁶⁹

The transnational exchange of European Jewry had broken down. Only in some fleeting moments of some contemporary witnesses, such as the episode of Felix Theilhaber in the cigar shop or the participation of the rabbi Bruno Italiener in the ceremony of the Synagogue in Brussels, can one still see some remnants of these former experiences.

Paradoxically, and in contrast to the research of Fernand van Langenhove, only one of the contemporary witnesses who served as a German soldier in Belgium, Kurt Levy, mentioned the rumours of the Belgian *Franc-tireurs*.¹⁷⁰ The German Jewish newspapers however, cited these rumours extensively, and even contemporary Jewish intellectuals in Germany like Buber and Simmel picked them up, with Buber even claiming to know about this behaviour of the Belgian people “on the basis of personal knowledge.” Not one of them had taken notice of the German atrocities in Belgium, and even those who witnessed the German occupation policy directly ignored the terror of the German army against Belgian civilians. At most, they described the horror of the war and German belligerence, while offering ironic images of Germans in Belgium, as did Kurt Stern or Hans Zweig, the member of the Berlin Tourist Club, who, in his account of the mood in Belgium, commented acerbically that the Belgian people had grown accustomed to the “German barbarians.” They partly “even concede that the image of the Germans as Huns is based on canards only.”¹⁷¹ None of the witnesses, however, scrutinized the violation of Belgian neutrality or the German army’s acts of terror against the Belgian civilians.

In contrast to those German Jews present in Belgium at the time of the invasion, the Jewish press in Germany not only circulated the rumours of the Belgian

¹⁶⁸ To the immigration of German Jews to Belgium in the 18th and 19th century see: Cilli Kasper-Holtkotte, *Im Westen Neues: Migration und ihre Folgen. Deutsche Juden als Pioniere jüdischen Lebens in Belgien, 18. / 19. Jahrhundert*, (Leiden-Boston: Brill, 2003).

¹⁶⁹ *Feldrabbiner in den deutschen Streitkräften*, eds. Hank, Simon, Hank, 349.

¹⁷⁰ Van Langenhove, *Comment naît un cycle de légendes*.

¹⁷¹ Hans Zweig, “Die Stimmung in Belgien.”

Franc-tireurs; the journalists also rarely addressed the violation of international law. Some of the journals even legitimized the occupation of the country. They avoided, however, dealing with the terror of the German army against Belgian civilians.

It is only among Jewish as well as non-Jewish intellectuals in Germany that one can observe some early cases of extreme personal disturbance and intellectual bewilderment at this early point in the war. In contrast to those German-Jewish defenders of the German occupation, only a small number acknowledged or criticized the German occupation policy. Together with German-Jewish socialists, only some of the intellectuals, like Ernst Bloch or Viktor Klemperer, were able to acknowledge the German military actions as war crimes. Needless to say, it was impossible to criticize the German army publicly because of censorship during the war.¹⁷² But even in diaries and autobiographical notes, critical remarks can be detected only rarely. The majority of German Jews in 1914 – like other Germans, including most liberals and many socialists – were deluded by their own German patriotism.

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¹⁷² Wilhelm Deist, “Zensur und Propaganda in Deutschland während des Ersten Weltkrieges,” *Militär, Staat und Gesellschaft. Studien zur preußisch-deutschen Militärgeschichte*, ed. Wilhelm Deist (München: Oldenbourg, 1991), 153-163; Anne Lipp, *Meinunglenkung im Krieg. Kriegserfahrungen deutscher Soldaten und ihre Deutung 1914–1918* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2003).

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