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Cover Page Footnote

Portions of the present essay are taken from my article “Proverbs in Nazi Germany: The Promulgation of Antisemitism and Stereotypes Through Folklore,” *Journal of American Folklore*, 95: 435–64; and a paper delivered at the 12th Interdisciplinary Colloquium on Proverbs, November 4–11, Tavira, Portugal. I thank my colleagues and friends Dennis F. Mahoney and David A. Scrase for their help with the translations from German to English.



“In Proverbiis Non Semper Veritas”: Reflections on the Reprint of an Antisemitic Proverb Collection

WOLFGANG MIEDER

This article concerns the highly questionable 2016 reprint of Ernst Hiemer’s antisemitic proverb collection *Der Jude im Sprichwort der Völker* (1942, *The Jew in the Proverbs of the People*). It begins with a glance at earlier antisemitic proverb collections while also reviewing some of the superb Yiddish and Jewish/Hebrew proverb collections and serious studies on this rich repertoire of proverbs. This is followed by a discussion of the misguided antisemitic publications of the nineteenth century that were precursors of even more slanderous and prejudiced collections that appeared during the time of National Socialism. It is shown that both traditional proverbs and invented pseudo-proverbs discrediting the Jewish population were used to manipulate public opinion in Nazi Germany by claiming that these proverbial stereotypes express absolute proverbial truths. A number of examples show that this campaign against the Jews is a clear indication that stereotypical proverbs can be extremely harmful and that they ultimately played a role in the Holocaust. Hiemer’s collection, published during the height of Nazi rule over Germany, is the most vicious antisemitic proverb compendium that should be a warning against such intentional misuse of stereotypical proverbs that have no truth value. Since it is available in libraries and on the Internet, it certainly should not have been reprinted for fear of fueling present-day antisemitism.

Among my thousands of international publications in the fields of paremiography and paremiology, Ernst Hiemer’s antisemitic proverb collection *Der Jude im Sprichwort der Völker* (1942; *The Jew in the Proverbs of the People*) is without any doubt the

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most slanderous and vicious stereotypical publication. This disgraceful compilation filled with racist prejudice represents the dark side of proverbs that are, to be sure, neither sacrosanct pieces of folk wisdom nor absolute truths. One glance into such scholarly presented surveys of proverbial stereotypes such as Otto von Reinsberg-Düringsfeld's *Internationale Titulaturen* (1863), Abraham A. Roback's *A Dictionary of International Slurs. With a Supplementary Essay on Aspects of Ethnic Prejudice* (1944), and José Estaban's *Refranero contra Europa* (1996) will make it perfectly clear that hateful and harmful stereotypes have been crystalized into proverbial structures that unfortunately supply these generalized untruths with claimed credibility and easy memorability. The widespread dissemination of these proverbial invectives has been analyzed by the renowned folklorist Alan Dundes in his seminal article on "Slurs International: Folk Comparisons of Ethnicity and National Character" (1975) in which he warns against underestimating the psychological danger of ethnic and regional or national character stereotypes (see also Dundes 1984; Jansen 1957; Paredes 1970; Quastoff 1978). Such "blasons populaires," as they have been called in paremiological literature (Grzybek 1994; Taylor 1931, 97–109), have done much harm to people everywhere, and even if they are employed with insidious intent, they would best be avoided and forgotten altogether.

Thankfully Ernst Hiemer's ill-conceived book, originally published in the National Socialist Stürmer Verlag serving the antisemitic propaganda of Nazi Germany, disappeared from the radar screen after the end of Hitler's regime. Thus words can hardly express my shock when I had to discover that this despicable volume has reappeared in the catalogue of the right-wing publishing house Der Schelm at Leipzig as a reprint (identical text with page shifts). Was there any reason or necessity to do this? The 1942 edition is available on the Internet for free via Google, and the book is also readily accessible in many university libraries in Germany, England, Israel, the United States, and elsewhere. There was therefore no *scholarly* reason to bring this distasteful concoction out again, and therefore one is left to assume that the publisher's motivation was to spur new antisemitism. As a native German paremiologist, I am ashamed of Hiemer's book, which

undoubtedly fueled the aggressive antisemitism in the Third Reich and contributed to the mindset that made the Holocaust possible (Mieder 1996).

The owner of Schelm-Verlag, Adrian Preißinger, introduces his publishing house at the beginning of the reprint with the following words: "Im Rahmen unserer Nachdrucke vorkonstitutionellen Schrifttums möchten wir Ihnen das antiquarisch nicht erhältliche Buch 'Der Jude im Sprichwort der Völker' des Hauptschriftleiters der antisemitischen und volksverhetzenden Wochenzeitung 'Der Stürmer,' Ernst Ludwig Hiemer (1900–1974), zur kritischen Bewertung vorlegen" (IV; As part of our reprints of pre-constitutional publications, we would like to provide you, for your critical evaluation, with the unavailable book "The Jew in the Proverbs of the People" by Ernst Ludwig Hiemer (1900–1974), chief editor of the antisemitic and inflammatory weekly newspaper "Der Stürmer"). The book is indeed not to be found in second-hand bookstores, but as already stated, it is easily accessible in libraries and on the Internet. To be sure, Preißinger's preface contains some useful information about Hiemer, who was born on July 5, 1900, in Großweingarten in Middle Franconia, and died on July 29, 1974, in Altötting in Bavaria. As a school teacher, he published the successful antisemitic children's books *Der Giftpilz: Ein Stürmerbuch für Jung und Alt* (1938; *The Toadstool: A Stürmer-book for Young and Old*) and *Der Pudelmopsdackelpinscher und andere besinnliche Erzählungen* (1940; *The Poodle Pug Pointer and Other Contemplative Stories*) with the *Der Stürmer* publisher and wrote contributions for the National Socialist newspaper *Der Stürmer*, for which he became chief editor in 1938 and for which he wrote antisemitic editorials until 1942. In a lead article of May 1942, at the beginning of the mass murder in the extermination camps, he wrote that "die Judenfrage einer endgütigen Lösung zugeführt [wird]" (that the Jewish question is brought to a final solution): "Das Judentum ist organisiertes Weltverbrechertum. Die jüdische Gefahr wird daher erst dann beseitigt sein, wenn das Judentum aufgehört hat zu bestehen" (Klee 2007, 246; Jewry is organized world criminality. The Jewish danger will therefore be eliminated only when Jewry has ceased to exist). After the war, he was from 1945–1948 in the United States internment camp at Nürnberg-Langwasser and continued to live in Nürnberg after being banned as

a teacher. Preißinger emphasizes in his preface that “alle Bücher Hiemers aus der heutigen aufgeklärt-humanistischen Sichtweise als rassistische und fremdenfeindliche Schmähchriften angesehen werden können, die zur xenophobischen Indoktrination Heranwachsender herausgegeben wurden” (VII; all of Hiemer’s books can, from today’s enlightened-humanistic viewpoint, be regarded as racist and anti-foreign invectives that were published for the xenophobic indoctrination of adolescents). Finally, it is stated that “Unser Gohliser Faksimileverlag Der Schelm setzt mit dieser Publikation seine Reihe bemerkenswerter Veröffentlichungen fort. Mit ihr sollen dem interessierten Publikum und mündigen Staatsbürger besonders interessante Titel vorkonstitutionellen Schrifttums als wissenschaftliche Quellentexte zur kritischen Begutachtung vorgelegt werden” (VII; Our Gohliser reprint company The Schelm continues with this publication its series of noteworthy publications. It intends to present to the interested public and responsible citizen particularly interesting titles of pre-constitutional publications as scholarly sources for a critical evaluation).

But who are these interested readers who are supposed to deal in an enlightened or even scholarly way with this book? Or for that matter with reprints by this publisher listed at the end of this book, as for example Franz Schrönghamer-Heimdal, *Judas der Weltfeind: Was Jeder über die Juden wissen muß* (1919; *Judas the World-Enemy: What Everybody Needs to Know About the Jews*); Rudolf John Gorsleben, *Die Überwindung des Judentums in uns und außer uns* (1920; *The Overcoming of Jewry in Us and outside of Us*); Theodor Pugel, *Antisemitismus der Welt in Wort und Bild—Der Weltstreit und die Judenfrage* (1936; *Antisemitism of the World in Word and Image—The World Dispute over the Jewish Question*); Ferdinand Fried, *Der Aufstieg der Juden* (1937; *The Rise of the Jews*); Herwig Hartner-Hnizdo, *Das jüdische Gaunertum* (1939; *The Jewish Rascals*); and Hermann Esser, *Die jüdische Weltpest—Judendämmerung auf dem Erdball* (1939; *The Jewish World Pest—Jewish Twilight on the Globe*)? Incidentally, an uncritical edition of Hitler’s *Mein Kampf* (1925/26) has also appeared with this publisher in 2016 (for Hitler’s use of proverbs, see Mieder 1995). Who is served with such books whose absurd titles reveal their prejudiced worthlessness? Do such reprints really help to educate people about antisemitism, or do they in fact spread antisemitism, which

is unfortunately rising again among neo-Nazis? It is also known that Adrian Preißinger is a convicted right-wing extremist, and that there are presently legal proceedings against him and his publishing activities. There is no doubt in my mind that Preißinger's entire enterprise is highly suspect and has no legitimate value. One can only hope that truly enlightened and responsible people boycott this publishing program or at least ignore it. This also applies in principle to the book *Der Jude im Sprichwort der Völker* (1942, *The Jew in the Proverbs of the People*), about which I would now like to make some historical and comparative comments for purely scholarly and also humane reasons.

Most proverb collections, especially those dealing exclusively with stereotypical proverbs, quite expectedly have sections on antisemitic proverbs, which no doubt exist, just as there are proverbs against Germans, French, Gypsies, Indians, and so on. But while such scholarly collections such as Otto von Reisberg-Düringsfeld's *Internationale Titulaturen* (1863: I, 29–36) and Abraham A. Roback's *A Dictionary of International Slurs* (1944, 185–205) contain alarming proverbs against Jews, they are by no means antisemitic publications! These are scholarly comparative inventories of stereotypical proverbs about many groups, and it can be stated with much relief that many of these invectives are no longer in circulation today. However, there do exist proverb collections dealing only with antisemitic proverbs and proverbial sayings, such as in the racist article "Die Juden in den polnischen Sprichwörtern und sprichwörtlichen Redensarten" (*The Jews in Polish Proverbs and Proverbial Phrases*), written by Josef Sommerfeldt in Kraków in 1942 (not far from Auschwitz), its aim having been "die Grundmauern des Antijudaismus in Europa wieder freizulegen und dem gegenwärtigen Befreiungskampf gegen das Weltjudentum das Bewußtsein einer jahrhundertelangen Tradition zu verleihen" (Sommerfeldt 1942, 314; to re-open the foundations of anti-Judaism in Europe and to give the present liberation struggle against world Jewry the consciousness of a centuries-long tradition). Despite this unfortunate bias, the article with its many examples contains significant linguistic and cultural-historical comments and useful translations of the numerous texts. And yet, this publication shows ways that cultural historians, folklorists, linguists, and philologists placed their scholarly pursuits into the service of National Socialism and its racial

policies. On the other hand, more recent publications, as for example Robert Attal, “Le juif dans le proverbe arabe du Maghreb” (1963); Robert Rothstein, “Jews in Slavic Eyes—The Paremiological Evidence” (1986); Billy Bussell Thompson, “Jews in Hispanic Proverbs” (1987); Anatoly Ivchenko, “Auffassung und Bewertung der Juden in der slawischen Phraseologie (am Beispiel der ost- und westslawischen Sprachen)” (1998; View and Judgment of the Jews in Slavic Phraseology by Way of Examples of East and West-Slavic Languages); and Réka Dranik, “A zsidókkal kapcsolatos sztereotípiák a proverbiumokban (2005; Stereotypes about Jews in Proverbs) are serious scholarly investigations that show how proverbs and proverbial phrases have unfortunately spread European antisemitism through their formulaic language.

More than forty years ago, I published my then fundamental contribution “Proverbs in Nazi Germany: The Promulgation of Anti-Semitism and Stereotypes Through Folklore” (1982), which I had dedicated to my then senior colleague and friend Professor Harry Kahn and his wife Irene Kahn, who in 1939 fled from their home in the Black Forest via New York to Burlington, Vermont. Prof. Kahn worked as a Germanist at the University of Vermont since 1948, where he also set up a program for the study of the Hebrew language in 1952 that still exists today. I am still grateful to him today for bringing me to this university in 1971 as a young assistant professor of German. Out of deep gratitude I later, as the chairperson of the Department of German and Russian, could occasionally make it possible to offer a beginner’s course in Yiddish. Our Hebrew students and my Middle Ages students have always loved this rich language and culture. This is also evident from the great collections of Yiddish proverbs, such as Abraham Moses Tendlaw, *Sprichwörter und Redensarten deutsch-jüdischer Vorzeit* (1860; Proverbs and Proverbial Phrases of Early German-Jewish Times); Ignaz Bernstein, *Jüdische Sprichwörter und Redensarten* (1908; Jewish Proverbs and Proverbial Phrases); Hanan J. Ayalti, *Yiddish Proverbs* (1949); Salcia Landmann, *Jüdische Anekdoten und Sprichwörter. Jiddisch und deutsch* (1965; Jewish Anecdotes and Proverbs. Yiddish and German); Fred Kogos, *1001 Yiddish Proverbs* (1970); and Shirley Kumove’s two collections of *Words Like Arrows: A Treasury of Yiddish Folk Sayings* (1984) and *More Words, More Arrows: A Further Collection of Yiddish Folk*

Sayings (1999). To this can also be added other major collections of the rich repertoire of Jewish proverbs in general, to wit William Alexander Elmslie, *Studies in Life from Jewish Proverbs* (1917); Israel Cohen, *Dictionary of Parallel Proverbs in English, German and Hebrew* (1961); David C. Gross, *Dictionary of 1000 Jewish Proverbs* (1997); and Macy Nulman, *The Encyclopedia of the Sayings of the Jewish People* (1997). And there is, of course, also much scholarship on Yiddish/Jewish proverbs of which I might single out the following representative publications: Dan Ben-Amos, "The Image of the Jew in Yiddish Proverbs" (2013); Galit Hasan-Rokem, *Proverbs in Israeli Folk Narratives: A Structural Semantic Analysis* (1982); A. M. Klein, "The Yiddish Proverb" (1987); Abraham A. Roback, "The Yiddish Proverb—A Study in Folk Psychology" (1918); Haim Schwarzbaum, "Jewish Proverbs and Riddles" (1968); and Beatrice Silverman-Weinreich, "Towards a Structural Analysis of Yiddish Proverbs" (1978).

Abraham Tendlau's excellent mid-nineteenth century collection contains 1,070 German-Jewish proverbs and proverbial phrases, with each text being augmented by detailed linguistic and cultural annotations. In his introduction, Tendlau explains that for many of the texts it was impossible to determine whether they were of Yiddish or German origin. As long as they were current among German Jews, they were included in the collection. When the Nazi proverb manipulators later used proverbs to prove Aryan supremacy, they quickly forgot the important fact that the same proverbs have been used by the Jewish population for centuries. Yet these same proverbs were used to argue that only the Germans were interested in heredity, hygiene, proper marriage, or the family. Befitting the honesty and integrity of a true scholar, Tendlau included expressions that were not complimentary toward the Jews. He did not share the concern of some of his fellow Jews that "irgend ein Uebelwollender das Buch benutzen möchte, um daraus judenfeindliche Pfeile zu schmieden" (viii; some ill-willed person might use the book in order to fashion antisemitic arrows out of them). There is a tragic irony in this remark when one considers that several decades later the Nazis would indeed use these uncomplimentary proverbs as destructive weapons against the Jews.

The second major collection of Yiddish proverbs with Hebrew translations and German annotations is the one by Ignace Bernstein. It presents 3,993 texts

current primarily among the Ashkenazic Jews of Eastern Europe, with only very short linguistic and occasionally cultural notes. Interestingly enough, the later Nazi proverb collections do not refer to either Tendlauer's or Bernstein's superb books, since they would have shown clearly that purely nationalistic and stereotypical interpretations of proverbs are utterly absurd when one deals with proverbs that are of international currency due to their Greek or Latin, Biblical, and medieval Latin origin. Valuable scholarship was simply ignored by the Nazi propaganda machine when it stood in the way of advancing preconceived theories and prejudiced views.

These two collections notwithstanding, there was considerable antisemitism in German scholarship in the latter part of the nineteenth century. This prejudice prompted Adolph (Aron) Jellinek to compile two monographs on *Der jüdische Stamm in nichtjüdischen Sprichwörtern* (1881–1882; *The Jewish Tribe in Non-Jewish Proverbs*) in which he attempted to explain the negative views of Jews expressed in non-Jewish proverbs from various national cultures. Jellinek was not interested in popularizing antisemitic proverbs but instead asked “wann werden die scharfen, schneidenden, und scheelsüchtigen Verdikte über die Juden zum Abschlusse kommen” (1881, 5; when will the sharp, cutting and jealous verdicts about the Jews come to an end). And he rightfully warned against the danger of national slurs dressed in proverbial form:

So wenig Sprichwörter von Franzosen über Engländer, oder von Deutschen über Franzosen immer der unbedingten Wahrheit entsprechen, ebensowenig dürfen wir die Sprichwörter der Völker über die Juden ohne Unterschied als unerschütterliche Erfahrungssätze gelten lassen. (1881, 7)

Translation: The French proverbs about the English or the German proverbs about the French do not correspond to absolute truths; neither do the proverbs of any people about the Jews represent unshakable reflections of experience.

He then proceeds to interpret and explain a relatively small number of proverbs about Jews in two- to four-page sections, showing that many of them are only true

in limited cases and equally applicable to non-Jewish people. For example, Jellinek cites the Prussian dialect proverb “Fert Gewesene göfft de Jud nüscht” (For lost property the Jew gives nothing) and comments correctly:

Und die Nichtjuden? Geben sie auf gewesenen Besitz? Creditieren sie heute Jemandem eine Summe Geldes, der gestern sein Vermögen verloren hat? Öffnen sie ihre Cassen bereitwillig einem Manne, der früher zu den Reichen gezählt hatte? Gewiß nicht! In ihren Augen hat das Gewesene denselben Wert, wie in denen der Juden, und wenn sie sich in unserem Sprichworte auf den Juden berufen, so ist dieses gleichsam das Feigenblatt, mit welchem sie sich bedecken oder ein Euphemismus für die ganz prosaische Antwort: Ich borge Ihnen nichts, mein Herr; denn sie waren einst vermögend, besitzen aber jetzt gar nichts. (1882, 93)

Translation: And the non-Jews? Do they give anything for lost property? Do they give a sum of money as credit to someone who has lost his fortune yesterday? Will they willingly open their accounts to a man who once upon a time was rich? Certainly not! In their eyes the lost property has the same value as in those of the Jews, and if they refer to Jews in our proverb, then this [the proverb] is actually the fig leaf with which they are covering themselves or a euphemism for the simple prosaic answer: I will not lend you anything, Sir; for although you were once wealthy, you do not own anything now.

While Jellinek presented objective and humane analyses of seemingly antisemitic proverbs, Sally Simon Tilles counteracted this voice of reason with his deliberate collection of antisemitic quotations and proverbs titled *Der Jude im Citat und im Sprichwort* (1892; *The Jew in Quotations and Proverbs*). The texts are divided into chapters titled “Was ist Antisemitismus,” “Was ist der Jude,” “Wie ist der Jude,” “Was treibt der Jude,” and “Wohin mit den Juden,” (What is antisemitism, What is the Jew, What is the Jew like, What does the Jew do, and Where to go with the Jews.). One antisemitic quotation or proverb follows another, and there are

disheartening statements by Martin Luther, Goethe, Richard Wagner, and others. Interspersed are proverbs like these:

Der Jude hat wohl des Menschen Gestalt,
Doch fehlt ihm des Menschen inn'rer Gehalt. (16)
Even though the Jew has a human body,
he is lacking the inner character of humans.

Judentrug und Judenplag'
Währet bis zum jüngsten Tag. (28)
Jewish deception and Jewish vexation
will last to the Judgment Day.

Der Jude so zum Menschen steht,
Wie ein Wolf, der in der Herde geht. (29)
The Jew corresponds to the human
as the wolf to the flock.

The Jew is characterized as an evil person, a cheater, and an animal. Obviously, such a book did its part in spreading and deepening antisemitic sentiments by demonstrating to German readers that their literary giants as well as their traditional proverbs were of the same opinion.

Such publications formed the basis for the intentional misuse of proverbs to spread racism and antisemitism once the myth of Aryan supremacy became official Nazi policy. Professor Karl Bergmann, a philologist from Darmstadt, took the lead with a number of proverb publications that were intended to instruct people in matters of heredity, proper marriage partners, hygiene, children, and related matters. They were meant to show that there was a long tradition of proverbs that stress mental and physical health, love of country, and, above all, the fight against “alien” (i.e., Jewish) elements. Some of them were published by Bergmann in the Nazi folklore journal *Volk und Rasse* in 1936 under the title “Lebendige

Rassenhygiene im deutschen Sprichwort” (Living Racial Hygiene in the German Proverb), as for example:

Nur die sich gleichen, sollen sich die Hände reichen.

Only those who are similar [i.e., Aryans] should marry.

Art lässt nicht von Art.

Race [i.e., Jews] sticks to race.

(Bergmann 1936a, 296–97)

There are other such misguided articles by Bergmann (1934 and 1936b; see also Schiffer 1940) in which he enlisted proverbs in the service of Nazi propaganda. He interpreted them as authoritative proof of Nazi doctrine and quoted them to spread racial discrimination dressed in easily remembered and recognizable formulaic patterns. In 1939 he went so far as to publish a 439-page proverb collection entitled *Deutsche Ahnenweisheit* (German Ancestral Wisdom) that assembles dozens of proverbs viewed as comments on racial (Aryan) purity (see also Heger 1939). Bergmann called them “Vererbungssprichwörter” (hereditary proverbs), “Arbeitsprichwörter” (work proverbs), “Erziehungssprichwörter” (education and upbringing proverbs), and “Gesundheitssprichwörter” (hygiene proverbs). As expected, there are also antisemitic proverbs:

Ebenso wie die Eule das Licht, verträgt der Jude die Wahrheit nicht.

Just as the owl cannot bear the light so the Jew cannot bear the truth.

Der Juden liebste Farbe ist gelb.

The Jews’ favorite color is yellow [i.e., gold, money].

Der Jude weiss sich zu nähren und andere zu scheren.

The Jew knows how to support himself and how to clip others.

(Bergmann 1939, 338–339)

Unfortunately, Karl Bergmann was not an isolated phenomenon. Two years prior to the publication of his large collection, there appeared a similar book by the medical doctor Julius Schwab with the telling title *Rassenpflege im Sprichwort* (1937; Racial Cultivation in Proverbs). He argued from a medical “scientific” point of view that “in unseren deutschen Sprichwörtern ein reicher Schatz rassenhygienischer Weisheit verborgen ist” (5; a rich treasure of racially hygienic wisdom is concealed in our German proverbs). He was much more explicit in his racism than Bergmann and declared openly: “Die liberalistische These von der Gleichheit alles dessen, was Menschenantlitz trägt, stimmt nicht. Unser Herrgott hat die Menschen nicht als einen einzigen grossen Rassenbrei geschaffen. . . . Gott kennt Unterschiede des Blutes und der Rasse” (6; The liberal thesis of the equality of everything which has a human face is not correct. Our Lord has not created the humans as a single large racial mush. . . . God is aware of differences of blood and race). In the section entitled “Rassengegensätze” (Racial Opposites) with its arguments against intermarriages of Germans and Jews, Schwab reaches truly absurd antisemitic claims:

Die Juden sind ein vorderasiatisch-orientalisches Mischvolk mit negroidem Einschlag und Einschlag von ihren Wirtsvölkern, bei denen sie wie Parasiten seit Jahrhunderten wohnen. Sie bringen uns in dieser Blutzusammensetzung eine unserer nordischen Aufgabe durchaus schädigende Rassenmischung entgegen. Aus dieser Erkenntnis hat der natioansozialistische Staat das Gesetz zum Schutz des deutschen Blutes und der deutschen Ehre geschaffen, das einmal die Mischung mit jüdischem Blut verbietet und weiterhin verhindern will, dass der deutsche Blutanteil im deutschjüdischen Mischlingsblut als Wertreservoir für das jüdische Volk aufgeht. (Schwab 1937, 19–20; for a psychoanalytic interpretation of the comparison of Jews to parasites, see Dundes 1997)

Translation: The Jews are a Near Eastern, Oriental mixed race with Negroid influence and influence from their host peoples with whom they have lived like parasites for centuries. Through this blood composition they bring a damaging racial mixture to our Nordic mission. Recognizing this, the National

Socialist state has created the law for the protection of German blood and German honor which on the one hand forbids the mixture with Jewish blood and which on the other hand wants to prevent the German blood stock from dissipating its value in the German-Jewish blood mixture.

This incredulous tirade by a medical doctor is followed by many German proverbs that are supposed to show how evil, greedy, and criminal Jews are

Trau keinem Juden bei seinem Eid
und keinen Wolf auf grüner Heid.
Don't trust a Jew's oath
or a wolf on the green heath.

Wer einen Juden betrügt, bekommt einen ersten Platz im Himmel.
Whoever betrays a Jew gets a preferred place in heaven.

Wo viele Juden sind, da sind viele Diebe.
Wherever there are many Jews, there are many thieves.
(Schwab 1937, 20–21)

It is difficult to imagine that this ill-willed, prejudiced, and inhumane proverb campaign against the Jews could escalate even further. But it most certainly did with Ernst Hiemer's antisemitic proverb collection *Der Jude im Sprichwort der Völker* (1942) that was intended to discredit, demonize, and destroy Jewish people by way of proverbial invectives against them. On 210 pages Hiemer divided the proverbs and his comments into 25 chapters, the titles of which alone are repugnant: “Die geborenen Verbrecher” (The born criminals), “Ungeziefer der Menschheit” (Vermin of humanity), “Meister der Lüge” (Masters of deception), “Das Diebesgesindel” (Gang of thieves), “Die Erzbetrüger” (The arch deceivers), “Ihr Gott ist das Geld” (Their God is money), “Die Rassenschänder” (The racial defilers), “Menschenmörder von Anfang an” (Human murderers from the very beginning), “Das Teufelsvolk” (The folk of the devil), “Hinaus mit den Juden” (Out

with the Jews), and others in this vein. After listing 1,200 antisemitic slurs with the intent to dehumanize and destroy the Jews, the insatiable Hiemer included the following request at the end of his book: “Jene Leser, die solche antijüdischen Sprichwörter, Redensarten, Sinnsprüche und Reime kennen, die in diesem Buche noch nicht aufgeführt sind, werden gebeten, uns dieselben mitteilen zu wollen” (219, in the reprint 209; Those readers, who know such antisemitic proverbs, proverbial expressions, maxims, and rhymes that are not listed in this book are asked to be kind enough to communicate them to us).

As the title of the book indicates, this is an international proverb campaign against Jews, with one text following another. Hiemer even perverted the international proverb “Vox populi, vox dei” (Boas 1969; Gallacher 1949) to give credibility to his slanderous undertaking: “Volkes Stimme ist Gottes Stimme.’ Seit die Welt besteht, hat die gesunde Meinung gesunder Völker immer das Richtige getroffen und mit prophetischer Sicherheit die Wahrheit gefunden” (1942; 8, in the reprint 6, “The voice of the people, the voice of God.” Since the world has existed, the healthy opinion of healthy peoples has always hit the mark and has found the truth with prophetic certainty). These unfortunate slurs had been formulated by “healthy” (prejudiced!) people, as Hiemer argues, but they certainly did not amass them into a heap of invectives as this book does. It is true that unflattering proverbs exist about various groups of people, but they surely were never meant to be directed against every member of a group. Proverbs are oversimplifications and generalizations; they are not universal truths and certainly not God’s voice (see Mieder 2001). One could compile similar collections against the Germans, French, English, and so on, as can be seen from such lists in Abraham Aaron Roback’s scholarly *Dictionary of International Slurs* (1944) that was published in the United States but two years after Hiemer’s book. This book proves once and for all that one can discredit any group of people through proverbial invectives. But Roback researched these verbal prejudices and stereotypes in order to shed light on their dangers and misconceptions, while Hiemer used antisemitic slurs to deepen the unwarranted hate against the Jews and to deliver them to destruction. Hiemer’s amassment of antisemitic proverbs shows only too clearly the ultimate danger of such pernicious publications.

Yet Hiemer's book was well received in a Germany poisoned by antisemitic slander on all fronts. As Jews were expelled, deported, and sent to their deaths in concentration camps, Horst Seemann wrote the following review on July 1, 1943, in *Die Judenfrage in Politik, Recht, Kultur und Wirtschaft* (The Jewish Question in Politics, Law, Culture, and Economics):

Hiemer hat mit dieser umfangreichen und mühevollen Sammlung von mehr als 1200 antijüdischen Sprichwörtern, Redensarten, Sinnsprüchen und Reimen ein wahres Volksbuch geschaffen; denn in ihm spricht der Volksmund, der zu allen Zeiten in seiner Natürlichkeit und Einfachheit viel Wahres und Richtiges, gestützt auf eine reiche Erfahrung, ausgesprochen hat. Ein Blick in die Sammlung zeigt, daß gerade das einfache Volk, das mit jüdischer Niedertracht und Verworfenheit schon immer in engste Berührung kam, mit untrüglichen Instinkt und klarem Blick die Judenfrage nicht als eine Religionsfrage, sondern als eine Frage von weitreichendster Bedeutung erkannt hat. . . .

So ist das Buch nicht nur ein fesselndes Lesebuch, sondern leistet auch als Nachschlagewerk vorzügliche Dienste. Ob man wahllos darin blättert oder einen einzelnen Abschnitt nachschlägt—immer ist es die jüdische Niedertracht und das jüdische Verbrechen, die uns im lebendigen Sprichwort begegnen. . . .

“Volkes Stimme ist Gottes Stimme.” Was die Völker schon immer gefühlt und erkannt haben, daraus ziehen wir im heutigen Kampf gegen das Judentum die einzig mögliche Konsequenz: “Raus mit den Juden, rein mit dem Glück!” (Seemann 1943, 224)

Translation: With this extensive and laborious collection of more than 1,200 anti-Jewish proverbs, sayings, and rhymes Hiemer has made a true book for the folk; for in it the people's voice is speaking, which at all times has pronounced in all naturalness and simplicity much that is right and true, based on rich experience. A look into the collection shows that particularly the simple folk, which always came into closest contact with Jewish maliciousness and depravity, has recognized with unmistakable instinct and clear vision

that the Jewish question is not a question of religion, but rather a question of the most wide-ranging significance. . . .

Thus this book is not only fascinating to read, but also provides outstanding service as a reference work. Whether one purposelessly pages through it or looks at a single section—it is always Jewish depravity and Jewish criminality that we encounter in the living proverb. . . .

“The voice of the people is the voice of God.” What the peoples have always felt and recognized, out of this we draw in today’s battle against Judaism the only possible conclusion: “Out with the Jews, in with Happiness!”

And on August 28, 1943, Heinrich Walter proceeded in a similarly vicious vein in *Die Presse*, once again providing an example of how the manipulated hatred of Jews was fueled by the Nazified press:

Wer heute verantwortlich in der deutschen Presse arbeitet, wird es nicht mehr nötig haben, den Juden mit allen seinen rassebedingten Charaktereigenschaften kennenzulernen. Diese Kenntnis dem Leser in immer neuer Form zu vermitteln, ist aber reizvoll und notwendig. Unterlagen dafür liefert in geradezu unerschöpflicher Fülle das vorliegende Buch von Ernst Hiemer. . . . Hier findet jeder, was er sucht. Vor allem aber findet er darin bestätigt, daß der Jude seit vielen Jahrhunderten der Fluch der Völker gewesen ist und daß diese Erkenntnis ihren eindeutigen Niederschlag in den Stimmen aller jener Völker gefunden hat. (Walter 1943, no page)

Translation: Whoever is working today responsibly in the German press will no longer find it necessary to get to know the Jew with all his racially determined characteristics. It is, however, tempting and necessary to transmit this knowledge to the reader in ever-new form. The present book by Ernst Hiemer supplies material for this in virtually limitless fullness. . . . Here everyone will find what he is seeking. Above all, he will find confirmed there that the Jew has been the curse of the peoples for many centuries and that this knowledge has found its clear expression in the voices of all those peoples.

A few examples of Hiemer’s despicable methods must follow here to show how this abuse of proverbs played its part in the annihilation of the Jewish population in Germany. By also quoting proverbs from other countries, Hiemer was able to increase his effectiveness, since the German readers might well have become convinced that the whole world looked down on Jews. Take, for example, just the section on “Ungeziefer der Menschheit” (Vermin of humanity) that he introduces with this statement: “Der Jude ist seelisch völlig verderbt und fühlt sich daher auch körperlich nur im Pfuhle wohl. So ist denn der Jude für die nicht jüdische Welt die Verkörperung des Ungeziefers in Menschengestalt geworden” (34, in the reprint 31; The Jew is spiritually completely corrupt and therefore he feels physically well only in the cesspool. Thus the Jew has become the embodiment of vermin in human shape for the non-Jewish world). And this is followed by dozens of proverbs that link Jews with lower animals:

Juden im Haus
Sind schlimmer als Wanze und Laus. (Mitteldeutschland)
Jews in the house
are worse than bedbug and louse. (Middle Germany)

Juden sind schlimmer als Filzläuse. (Schwaben)
Jews are worse than lice. (Swabia)

Een Jood en een luis is de pest in je huis. (Niederlande)
A Jew and a louse is the plague in every house. (Netherlands)

Jud, Jud, du Natternbrut! (Franken)
Jew, Jew, you brood of vipers! (Franconia)
(Hiemer 1942, 34–36, in the reprint 31–33; for analysis of the comparison of
Jews and lice and vermin, see Sarasohn 2021, 104–27)

And in the chapter entitled “Hinaus mit den Juden” (Out with the Jews) Hiemer quotes numerous proverbs to back up the expulsion of the Jews because they are

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“geborene Verbrecher” (born criminals): “Erst wenn sie aus dem Volkskörper ausgeschieden werden, sind die Nichtjuden vor weiterem Schaden durch jüdische Lügner, Betrüger, Wucherer, Meineidige, Rassenschänder und Mörder bewahrt” (164, in the reprint 161; only when they [the Jews] are eliminated from the populace are the non-Jews safe from further damage by Jewish liars, deceivers, usurers, perjurers, racial defilers, and murderers). A few horrible examples from Hiemer’s book are

Solange Juden auf dieser Welt,
solange ist kein Frieden. (Sudetenland)
As long as there are Jews on this earth,
there will be no peace. (Sudetenland)

Gäb’s kein Judengeschmeiß,
Wär’ die Welt ein Paradeis! (Oberdonau)
If there were no Jewish scum,
The world would be a paradise! (Upper Danube)

Die Juden gehören nicht in unsere Zeit. (Sudetenland)
The Jews don’t belong in our time. (Sudetenland)

Schlag drauf, es ist ein Jud’! (Westmark)
Beat on him, it is a Jew! (Westmark)

Bei Juden und Läusen hilft nur eine Radikalkur. (Süddeutschland)
In the case of Jews and lice, only a radical cure helps. (Southern Germany)

Schneidet ihm die Häse ab,
Dem verdammten Judenpack. (Sachsen)
Cut the throats
of the damned Jewish pack. (Saxony)

Jud' spei Blut,
Spei's in eine Ecken,
Morgen sollst verrecken. (Oberfranken)
Spit blood, Jew,
Spit it in a corner,
Tomorrow you shall croak. (Upper Franconia)

Erst wenn der letzte Jude ist verschwunden,
Hat das Volk seine Erlösung gefunden. (Deutschland)
Only when the last Jew has disappeared,
Will the folk find its salvation. (Germany)
(Hiemer 1942, 164–168, in the reprint 161–165)

It must be pointed out that not a single one of these dreadful texts is registered in Karl Friedrich Wilhelm Wander's five-volume *Deutsches Sprichwörter-Lexikon* (1867–1880). This liberal German folklorist cites many proverbs and proverbial phrases about Jews, but he adds explanatory notes in order to put these slurs into proper historical perspective and to warn the reader of the danger of such generalizations. For example, as a conscientious and objective scholar, Wander felt obliged to include the proverb “Ein Jüd steckt so voll Abgötterey und Zauberey als neun Kühe Haare haben” (A Jew is so full of idolatry and sorcery as nine cows have hairs), but he added the following explanatory comment:

Aus den finsternen Jahrhunderten mit ihren Judenverfolgungen. In unsern Tagen ist es kaum begreiflich, mit welchem Fanatismus die Juden einst verfolgt worden sind und in welcher Weise man sie geschmäht hat. Selbstredend hat dieser Judenhaß auch in den Sprichwörtern seinen Ausdruck gefunden, und ich werde keine derselben unterdrücken, denn die Schmähungen, die sie enthalten, fallen auf die zurück, die sie ausgesprochen haben, und auf das Zeitalter, in dem ein fanatisches Pfaffentum [auch Martin Luther war ein schlimmer Antisemit] den blinden Glauben an die Stelle der humanen

Grundsätze des Weisen aus Nazereth gesetzt hatte, der selbst ein Jude war.
(Wander 1867–1888: II, 1034, no. 29)

Translation: From the dark ages with its persecution of the Jews. In our day it is hardly comprehensible with what kind of fanaticism the Jews were once persecuted and in what way they have been insulted. Obviously this hatred of the Jews has also found its expression in the proverbs, and I shall not suppress any of them, for the insults contained in them fall back on those who have voiced them and on the age in which a fanatic clericalism [Martin Luther also was a bad anti-Semite] mobilized blind belief in place of the humane principles of the sage from Nazareth who himself was a Jew.

But a renewed fanatical and blind belief in Adolf Hitler and sick antisemitism brought forth publications by people such as Ernst Hiemer, who, as far as one can tell, apparently even went so far as inventing antisemitic “proverbs” to support the Nazi drive to exterminate the Jews in the 1940s. Many of his texts such as “Erst wenn der letzte Jude ist verschwunden, / Hat das Volk seine Erlösung gefunden” (Only when the last Jew has disappeared, / Will the folk find its salvation) are, in fact, invented Nazi slogans of the “Endlösung” (final solution) dressed in the formulaic and rhymed pattern of proverb structures. They are reminders of the perversion of thought and language of which Nazi propaganda was capable when it came to manipulating aggression and hate.

In his foreword Hiemer writes with anti-Jewish bias of how he tried to find as many texts as possible for his prejudiced collection, with his zealous effort being supported by Nazified teachers:

Es gibt heute kaum ein Volk auf der Erde, das sich nicht in seinen Sprichwörtern mit den Juden auseinandergesetzt hätte. Trotzdem sind in den Bibliotheken selten Bücher zu finden, die in überzeugender Art antijüdische Volksworte für die Nachwelt gesammelt und erhalten haben. Auch dafür hatte der Jude gesorgt, daß das Wissen des Volkes der Vergessenheit

anheimfiel. Der Verfasser dieses Buches hatte es daher nicht leicht. Er mußte sich an Hunderte von Mitarbeitern in allen Ländern, vor allem an Schulräte, Lehrer und Erzieher, an Heimatforscher, Bürgermeister, Bauernführer und so weiter wenden, um in den Besitz des vorliegenden Materials zu kommen. (8, in the reprint 5–6)

Translation: There is hardly a nation on earth today that would not have dealt with the Jews in its proverbs. Nevertheless, there are seldom books to be found in the libraries that have convincingly collected and preserved anti-Jewish folk words [proverbs] for posterity. The Jew had taken care that the knowledge of the people was forgotten. The author of this book had thus no easy task. He had to turn to hundreds of co-workers in all countries, especially school administrators, teachers and educators, local historians, mayors, peasant leaders, and so on, to gain possession of the provided material.

In the passage Hiemer wants to prove himself to be a diligent field researcher, who does not even refer to the already mentioned collections of Yiddish proverbs. He also does not seem to know the two revealing books by Adolph (Aaron) Jellinek and Sally Simon Tilles, or he suppressed them in order to make his book appear to be especially noteworthy. Be that as it may, it is hard to imagine that Hiemer did not know the latter, especially as a precursor to his shameful collection.

For these comments, I took the trouble to examine the 1,200 or so antisemitic texts in Hiemer's collection. Only 72 references or a mere six percent can be found in Karl Friedrich Wilhelm Wander's *Deutsches Sprichwörter-Lexikon*. Under the keyword “Jude” (Jew) he lists 143 texts (Wander 1867–1880: II, 1031–1040, nos. 1–143), and where appropriate, he adds comments to warn against their antisemitic tendencies. This lexicon with its 250,000 texts contains additional antisemitic texts in which “Jew” is not the major keyword. But all of these materials are presented in a scholarly fashion. Hiemer was well aware of this standard dictionary, as can be seen from the following two proverbs for which he cites the comments made by Wander:

Bei den Juden ist es besser, ein Schwein als
ein Mensch zu sein.

Diesen Ausspruch soll, wie Macrobius erzählt, der römische Kaiser Augustus getan haben, als ihm der Kindermord des Herodes berichtet worden war.

(197, in the reprint 195; Wander 1867–1880: II, 1031, no. 1; see Shachar 1974)

Among Jews it is better to be a pig
than a human being.

As Macrobius tells us, the Roman Emperor Augustus is said to have uttered this when he was told about Herod's murder of children.

Bei Juden, Bettlern und Spielern
bringt man sein Geld allezeit für voll an.

Weil sie nichts nachfordern können, wenn sie auch angeblich zu wenig oder unrechtes Geld erhalten hätten. Das Sprichwort bezieht sich namentlich auf Spielschulden.

(198, in the reprint 196; Wander 1867–1880: II, 1031, no. 2)

With Jews, beggars, and players
you always supply your money in full.

Because they cannot ask for anything more even if they allegedly received too little or illegitimate money. The proverb refers in particular to gambling debts.

But no matter where Hiemer gathered his hateful material, his book contains texts that do not indicate any proverbial character. They lack in form, style, structure, and metaphor, so that they could hardly have been in oral circulation. Perhaps some informants have come up with such atypical statements, or, and that is more likely, Ernst Hiemer has invented them proverb-like in his antisemitic obsession. Here are just a few absurd examples that I cite with reluctance:

Der Jude ist nach Art und Wesen
Der Menschheit Abschaum stets gewesen.

(40, in the reprint 37)

The Jew has by type and character
always been the scum of humanity.

Die Juden bekehren?—Es ist zum Lachen!

Wer will aus Wölfen Lämmer machen?

(101, in the reprint 96)

Convert the Jews?

The Jews convert? It's laughing matter!

Who wants to turn wolves into lambs?

Der Jude verfolgt jede höhere Rasse

Mit Mordgier aus grimmigem Hasse.

(135, in the reprint 130)

The Jew pursues every higher race
with murderous greed of grim hate.

Wer seinen Narren am Juden gefressen

Dem ward Vernunft knapp zugemessen.

(146, in the reprint 142)

Whoever dotes on a Jew

has been supplied with little sense.

Es gibt nur einen anständigen Juden:

Einen toten.

(163, in the reprint 160)

There is only one decent Jew:

A dead one.

The last text is somewhat reminiscent of the horrific proverbial stereotype against Native Americans: “The only good Indian is a dead Indian.” It originated around 1860, has unfortunately been translated into other languages, and is current in a

number of equally upsetting variants referring to African Americans, Germans, and Jews (Mieder 1993).

When one reads such texts, one wonders how Ernst Hiemer on April 30, 1946, during the trial of his former boss, the editor of the propagandistic *Der Stürmer*, Julius Streicher (executed in 1946), could in good conscience testify against him (Klee 2007, 246). After all, he was a hate-filled antisemite whose writings contributed to the Holocaust. It cannot be denied that proverbs took part in the persecution of the Jews up to the gas chambers in concentration camps. Proverbs such as “Jedem das Seine” and “Arbeit macht frei” were part of the gates at Buchenwald, Auschwitz, and elsewhere, and Jews were forced to inscribe such proverbs as “Ehrlich währt am längsten” (Honesty is the best policy) on the cross beams of their inhumane barracks (see Brückner 1998; Brunssen 2010; Doerr 2000; Kühnrich 2002; Riedel 2006). In this regard, I would like to point out an emotional personal experience. The Auschwitz survivor and renowned Germanist Professor Ruth Klüger (1931–2020) from the University of California at Irvine has described her ordeal in her acclaimed book *weiter leben. Eine Jugend* (1992) that appeared in English translation as *Still Alive: A Holocaust Girlhood Remembered* (2001). I had invited her to the University of Vermont for a reading from her book on April 26, 1993. After introducing her, she thanked me warmly and pointed out with a smile that she unfortunately had no love for proverbs. And later she read the following paragraph, which, of course, I had already marked in my copy of her book that she kindly signed for me:

Jeder kennt heute den Spruch “Arbeit macht frei” als Motto einer mörderischen Ironie. Es gab noch andere derartige Sprichwörter auf den Querbalken unserer Baracke [in Auschwitz]. REDEN IST SILBER, SCHWEIGEN IST GOLD war eines. Noch besser war LEBEN UND LEBEN LASSEN. Ein früherer Transport, den es nicht mehr gab, hatte diese Sprüche anfertigen müssen. Ich startete sie täglich an, angewidert von ihrem absoluten Wahrheitsanspruch, den diese Wirklichkeit als totale Lüge bloßstellte. Mir sind deutsche Sprichwörter seither ein Greuel, ich kann keines hören, ohne es mir auf dem Querbalken einer KZ-Baracke vorzustellen und es sofort mit einer abwertenden

Bemerkung zu entkräften. Mit derartigen scheinbaren Zynismen hab ich schon manche fromme Seele irritiert, der solche lebensspendenden Weisheiten nicht im Vernichtungslager kund geworden sind. (Klüger 1992, 119; capitalization in original)

Klüger’s English version: Today everyone recognizes the phrase over the gate of Auschwitz—“*Arbeit macht frei*,” “Labor liberates”—as the ultimate motto of a murderous irony. There were other proverbs written in large capital letters on the cross beams of our barracks. I used to stare in cold desperation at the nonsensical “SPEECH IS SILVER, SILENCE IS GOLD” and in utter disbelief at “LIVE AND LET LIVE.” An earlier transport, which had been wiped out, had had the task of decorating our living quarters. I looked at these pearls of wisdom every day, revolted by their absolute claim to truth, which, in the face of the reality in which they were inscribed, exposed them as absolute lies. German proverbs nauseate me; I can’t hear any of them without seeing its cynical application in the death factory. Some pious soul will quote one of these gems, and right away I make a derogatory remark, which I am sure is offensive to those who don’t associate such life-enhancing maxims with willful extermination. (Kluger 2001, 101)

Ruth Klüger did not irritate me but touched me deeply, and we had a lot to talk about after the impressive event at a dinner with colleagues. But this experience has made it clear to me once and for all that proverbs are not harmless folk wisdom. This is also something I always explain to my students when we deal with stereotypical proverbs. We spend more than an hour dealing with the misuse of proverbs during the Nazi era, and every time I have difficulty in not being overcome by tearful emotion. But my young students understand this, and some come to their old professor of German and folklore to exchange some compassionate words. They know that I try everything to fight antisemitic and other stereotypical proverbs. If I judge my young people correctly, I think that they will not be influenced by hate-filled proverbs—a good and hopeful sign for future humanity. And, of course, I also introduce them to the golden rule: “Do unto others as you

would have them do unto you” (Matthew 7:12) as a fundamental guidepost for an engaged, responsible, and empathetic life.

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