"THE ONLY SOCIETY THAT I HAVE …": CULTURAL HISTORICAL POSSIBILITIES FOR THE HISTORIOGRAPHY OF JEWISH CONVERSION IN GERMANY'S LONG NINETEENTH-CENTURY

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In a letter to a Jewish friend written in 1826, the eminent German poet, Heinrich Heine, wrote the following about his flight from the religion of his birth:

> I am my own greatest torment.—But I am in such a state of inward commotion that I can think of nothing outside myself. . . . The only society that I have is at my sister's house, and my uncle's, and that of the Syndic Sieveking, and the Candidate Wohlwill. My uncle is very well disposed towards me indeed . . . which is all the more praiseworthy of him as he is surrounded by people who are hostile to me. I am now detested by Christian and Jew alike. I am very sorry that I had myself baptized: I do not see that things have gone any better with me since: on the contrary, I have had nothing but misfortune — Is it not foolish? Scarcely am I baptized than I am decried as a Jew.[1]

Heine's statement provides access to information not always accessible from the past: the inner feelings of a person recently converted from Judaism to Christianity as well as his internalization of other peoples' reactions, both pro and con. He may have initially conceived of his choice to convert as a single moment with a presumed comfortable existence thereafter, but the event eventually became an on-going experience that resulted in "torment" and "inward commotion." It was an individual choice, even if the consequences spilled over into "society," as still afterward he could "think of nothing outside" himself. Rather than seamlessly crossing the boundary from one faith to another, Heine entered a kind of netherworld where he was "detested by Christian and Jew alike," with "the only society" available to him consisting of those sympathetic or "well disposed" toward him. Instead of the emancipatory possibilities Heine may

[1]Heinrich Heine, *Heinrich Heine's Memoirs: From His Works, Letters, and Conversations*, ed. Gustav Karpeles, trans. Gilbert Cannan, 2 vols. (New York: Arno Press, 1973), 1: 172.

have initially envisioned, he subsequently saw that "things" had not gotten "any better" for him after his baptism.

Heine's description exposes several features of the history of Jewish conversion in Germany in the nineteenth-century, such as an individual's motivation to convert, Jewish and non-Jewish reactions to conversion, and the failure to achieve the desired effect of the conversion, whether socially, economically, or perhaps even spiritually. While Heine imagined his baptism as an individual choice, he was also influenced by social and cultural forces around him that shaped how and in what manner he would conceive and execute his decision. The same was true of the remainder of the converts under consideration here—individual conversions were enmeshed in the political and cultural contexts in which they occurred. Heine would keep his Jewish roots close to his heart for the remainder of his "Christian" existence as shown throughout his life and work.[2]

Like other social groups, Jews were impacted by the many changes that characterized nineteenth-century Germany with industrialization being perhaps the most significant. New opportunities for social mobility emerged, particularly for middle class Jews, but the question of Jewish integration into German society continued to loom for both Jews and Germans alike. Some Jews, like Heine, opted for conversion as a means of assimilation, while others sought equality through working within socialist political movements. Toward the end of the century, amid the persistence of anti-Semitism, some Jews abandoned the promise of assimilation and

[2]See continuing correspondence with Moses Moser and other discussions in ibid.; and Heinrich Heine, *Jewish Stories and Hebrew Melodies* (New York: Markus Wiener Publishing, 1987). One biographer notes that "Heine's conversion solved nothing. He remained uncomfortable about his Jewishness, and preferred to say that he was of Jewish ancestry." Ritchie Robertson, "Between Religions," in *Heine* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1988), 85. This biographer notes elsewhere that most converts "were motivated by expedience, not devotion." Ritchie Robertson, *The 'Jewish Question' in German Literature 1749-1939: Emancipation and its Discontents* (Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 1999), 241.

legal emancipation for Zionism, the movement to establish a Jewish homeland led by the Austrian journalist Theodor Herzl.[3]

The following article surveys the historiography of Jewish conversion in Germany from 1789 to 1914, the so-called "long" nineteenth-century, looking specifically at how historians have accounted for the numbers of converts, assessed their motivations, and historicized the lives of the converts after baptism.[4] It will seek to understand the relations of those subjects at the periphery of Jewish historiography to those at the core, as well as how historians have dealt with the shifting relationships among Jews, converts, and non-Jews. This discussion commences with a brief conversation with the wider European Jewish historiographical tradition as it concerns the history of conversion and then proceeds topically and chronologically through nineteenth-century Germany to include conversions of elite Jews in Berlin under late Prussian absolutism (the "Old Regime"), conversions of individuals during the early decades of the nineteenth-century, Christian missionary efforts to convert Jews, interpretations of conversion statistics, and

[3]For a sampling of sources dealing with these issues, see Steve M. Lowenstein, "The Pace of Modernisation of German Jewry in the Nineteenth Century," *Leo Baeck Institute Yearbook* 20 (1976): 41-56; Kurt Grunwald, "Europe's Railways and Jewish Enterprise—German Jews as Pioneers of Railway Promotion," ibid. 12 (1967): 163-209; Jonathan M. Hess, *Germans, Jews and the Claims of Modernity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002); Michael Brenner, Vicki Caron and Uri R. Kaufmann, eds., *Jewish Emancipation Reconsidered: The French and German Models* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003); Helmet Walser Smith, *Protestants, Catholics, and Jews in Germany, 1800-1914* (Oxford, England: Berg, 2001); Robert S. Wistrich, *Socialism and the Jews: The Dilemmas of Assimilation in Germany and Austria-Hungary* (Rutherford, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1982); and Jacques Kornberg, *Theodor Herzl: From Assimilation to Zionism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993).

[4]David Blackbourn, *The Long Nineteenth Century: A History of Germany, 1780-1918* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998) was written in response to the historiographical debate known as the *Sonderweg*, or "special path," of German history, an ever-present controversy that is in some senses relevant here. Supporters claim that modern German history has been structurally different than that of Western Europe, particularly Britain and France, in its lack of constitutional political and bourgeois economic institutional traditions. Due to this "lack," these historians argue, a hyper-nationalism that began with the unification of the German Empire under Otto von Bismarck and the Prussian king Wilhelm I, eventually led to competition with other European states that culminated in the Great War, which in turn spawned Nazism. For an example of a work that argues for this line of thinking, see Hans-Ulrich Wehler, *The German Empire, 1871-1918*, trans. Kim Traynor (Dover, NH: Berg Publishers, 1985). For the text that initially rejected this idea, see David Blackbourn and Geoff Eley, *The Peculiarities of German History: Bourgeois Society and Politics in Nineteenth-Century Germany* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984). The treatment that Jews would receive in Germany society after 1933 seems to validate the *Sonderweg* thesis, but it turns out that the issues surrounding Jewish conversion in comparison to Britain, France, and other European nations during the nineteenth-century were not "peculiar" in themselves, as the present discussion will demonstrate.

the "impulse" to convert during the *Kaiserreich* and in *fin-de-siècle* Germany. This essay will also address secondary histories that are located outside the scope of this study both chronologically and geographically to show how conversion has been conceived in different times and places and how those conceptions have influenced both historians and historical actors.

What I hope to point out in this discussion is multifold. First, Jewish historiography must include converts because of the importance of conversion as an act offering the promise of social, political, and/or economic improvement that confronted Jews at varying moments throughout the nineteenth-century. Although the present discussion focuses on Germany, similar historical phenomena operated on a European-wide scale. Next, conversion did not mean the end of a person's affiliation with Jewish identity, ethnicity, or community either by the actions and ideas of the converted individual or by the social contexts in which he or she operated. Lastly, conversion, although perhaps initially conceived as a choice that went hand in hand with emancipation, guaranteed little for the converted in terms of social, political, or economic advancement or equality. At the same time, these considerations also point to the need for a wider and more malleable understanding of the boundaries surrounding the Jewish community in order to more adequately contend with those at the fringe, who are still germane to Jewish history despite their distance from the community.

The central shift in the historiography of conversion has been the attempt to depoliticize the places of converts in Jewish histories. Nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Jewish historians treated the question of conversion, but only as a problem that the faith community had to overcome rather than as a historical phenomenon to be analyzed. Isaac Deutscher was the first to identify the lack of attention paid to converts in the historiography, but he offered no suggestions about the best means of remedying this predicament. Deutscher's observation came at a time

when histories in general were opening more widely to include underrepresented groups, such as women, racial and ethnic minorities, and the working classes. Deborah Hertz emerged from this shift toward social history by addressing two underrepresented groups simultaneously: converts and women.

While social historians such as Hertz sought to capture the conversion experience, others employed quantitative analysis in order to portray the frequency of conversion across time and connected it to parallel processes, such as the proliferation of anti-Semitism. These approaches provide an excellent start, but further work can and should build on the previous work using additional methods. This discussion will begin by further analyzing the existing historiographical approaches to conversion summarized above and will conclude by suggesting other possibilities for the field. Beginning with descriptions of the various extant approaches to conversion, this article will also point toward areas where engagement with the wider questions of culture might advance the ways historians have conceived of the issue. Though less attempted to date, I suggest that cultural history offers the most promising approach because of its potential to attend to the construction, maintenance, and operation of categories such as "Jewish," "convert," and even "Christian."

Conversion and Historical Boundaries

In his introduction to a collected volume of works on the history of those at the periphery of Jewish historiography, entitled *The Margins of Jewish History*, editor Marc Lee Raphael writes that "anyone who works in the field of modern Jewish history must constantly wonder what's in and what's out, who's in and who's out, and whether it makes any difference."[5] Such an attitude

[5]Marc Lee Raphael, "Introduction," in *The Margins of Jewish History*, ed. Marc Lee Raphael (Williamsburg, VA: Department of Religion, The College of William and Mary, 2000), i.

has frequently prevailed in historical writings about modern European Jews, but those counted as "in" have changed over time. In an article from the same volume, Todd M. Endelman points out how until recently historians have largely ignored the "flight from Jewishness," although he also notes that some individuals could not simply be ignored despite their "flight." These individuals, though considered "out," continue to pose problems for historians seeking to understand their relation to Jewishness. Endelman ascribes the dismissal of the vast majority of "ex-Jews" to the precedent set by nineteenth-century Jewish scholars, in particular historians and social scientists, who saw conversion as a reflection of the "degeneration" of the Jewish community as a whole.[6] One approach to the historical question of conversion that has persisted is to reject it outright, but this has done little to clear up the question of "who's in and who's out" and how historians might begin to determine the boundary between them.

A cultural historical approach might investigate the notion of a boundary between Jews and converts, as well as possible boundaries between converts and Christians and Jews and Christians. This method could raise questions about the nature of these boundaries, whether solid or permeable, fixed or negotiated, constant across time or changing, and if they changed, what factors underlay and impelled such reconfigurations. Did these different boundaries operate similarly, contradictorily, or do they mutually reinforce one another? How were boundaries written about and remembered, legalized or prohibited, contested or digested? These kinds of questions demonstrate how cultural history holds the potential to widen the avenues where historians may explore conversion in nineteenth-century Germany.

In the introduction to a work he co-edited with Steven J. Zipperstein, *Assimilation and Community: The Jews in Nineteenth-Century Europe*, Jonathan Frankel points out that nineteenth-century Jewish historians were keenly aware of the forces of Jewish "national

[6]Todd M. Endelman, "Welcoming Ex-Jews Into the Jewish Historiographical Fold," in ibid., 15 and 16.

disintegration," of which Jewish scholars believed conversion was but one example, demonstrating that in the rhetoric of the day, Jewish historians saw "community" as synonymous with "nation." Other perceived potential threats included, but were not limited to, the *Haskalah* (Enlightenment), emancipation, and liberal reforms. Analyzing genres other than history, such as literature, theology, or philosophy, for discussions of conversion is another means by which historians could illustrate how converts navigated through both Jewish and German culture. As Frankel goes on to suggest, however, the earlier tradition of Jewish historiography concerning conversion has yielded to a contemporary one that seeks "multiplicity" in the Jewish past. Focusing on those at the "margins of Jewish history," though not specifically mentioned, falls into precisely the new kind of thinking he identifies.[7]

In an essay based on a lecture he first delivered in 1958, Isaac Deutscher, historian of the Soviet Union and biographer of both Stalin and Trotsky, suggested that "non-Jewish Jews" also be included in the study of the Jewish past. Anticipating Endelman, Deutscher was referring to figures such as Spinoza, Heine, Marx, Rosa Luxemburg (the only female included in Deutscher's list and the only person whose first name is included), as well as Trotsky and Freud, who, despite their dissociation from Judaism and sometimes ambivalent or even unsympathetic relationship with the Jewish community, could not be ignored due to their broad historical significance. In support of these and other figures' direct inclusion in Jewish history, Deutscher points out that

[7]Jonathan Frankel, "Assimilation and the Jews in Nineteenth Century Europe: Towards a New Historiography?" in *Assimilation and Community: The Jews in Nineteenth Century Europe*, eds. Jonathan Frankel and Steven J. Zipperstein (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 5 and 16. The *Haskalah* is parallel to, but not quite synonymous with, the European intellectual movement known as the Enlightenment of the eighteenth-century. The period of the *Haskalah* succeeded the Enlightenment, spanning roughly from the 1770s to the 1880s. Its proponents encouraged Jews to assimilate into European societies in addition to studying Jewish history and Biblical Hebrew among other activities. One the *Haskalah*'s foremost leaders was Moses Mendelssohn who translated the first five books of the Hebrew Bible into German (his grandson, Felix, the famous German composer, [was] converted at the age of 10). See Shmuel Feiner, *The Jewish Enlightenment*, trans. Chaya Naor (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004); Shmuel Feiner, *Haskalah and History: The Emergence of a Modern Jewish Historical Consciousness*, trans. Chaya Naor (Oxford, England: Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2002); and Michael A. Meyer and Michael Brenner, eds., *German-Jewish History in Modern Times*, 4 vols. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996-1998).

"the Jewish heretic who transcends Jewry belongs to a Jewish tradition."[8] As a historian of the Soviet Union, Deutscher was aware of the prominent position of Jews within the Bolshevik Party as well as non-Party Jews under Soviet rule as something disconnected from traditional Judaism.[9] It is therefore not surprising that he would call for a re-examination of "Jewish tradition."

Although his essay is not the most insightful piece of writing on Jewish conversion, Deutscher does succeed in bringing two terms into play that are worth further consideration: the "non-Jewish Jew" and the "Jewish heretic."[10] The former label seems to best describe social and historical situations, whereas the latter seems more appropriate with regard to religious practice and observance. The two can be related, of course, but historians should distinguish and explain these terms in proper context in order to understand individuals as well as social and cultural perceptions by both Jews and non-Jews. Addressing this complex set of simultaneous and dynamic reactions could further illustrate the nature of the multiple boundaries that have surrounded the Jewish community historically and historiographically.

Frankel's call for "multiplicity" continues into the twenty-first century as Paula Hyman, a historian of French Jews, suggested in an article also published in 2002. Hyman emphasizes including the category of gender in a plural understanding of Jewish identities, but when she writes that "Jews constructed a variety of identities in the modern period," her claim could also include converts as part of those identities. She notes further that the "master narrative" of

[8]Isaac Deutscher, "The non-Jewish Jew" in *The Non-Jewish Jew and Other Essays*, ed. Tamara Deutscher (London: Oxford University Press, 1968), 26.

[9]Judith Deutsch Kornblatt examines Jews who converted to Russian Orthodox Christianity in the late Soviet era as a "path of reconnection to Jewry and, although in a decidedly nontraditional manner, with Judaism." *Doubly Chosen: Jewish Identity, the Soviet Intelligentsia, and the Russian Orthodox Church* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 2004), 143.

[10]David Biale uses the word "heretic" to examine Jesus, Shabbtai Zvi, and Elisha ben Abuya as people who were Jews at one time and therefore should be included to a certain extent in the discussion of the Jewish past. "Names No Longer Blotted Out: Ambivalent Recuperations of Heretics in Modern Jewish Culture," in *Margins of Jewish History*, ed. Raphael, 1-13.

Jewish historiography "reflected the experience of Jewish men."[11] The gendered historiographical divide to which Hyman refers mirrors Deutscher's above inclusion of Rosa Luxemburg's first name among his list of "non-Jewish Jews," which perhaps reflects an audience unschooled in the history of European socialism, or one unprepared to accept women as subjects of historical study.

Gender and the Fleeting Romance of Conversion

Deborah Hertz proceeds the farthest in terms of gendering the historiography of Jewish conversion in nineteenth-century Germany. Her book, *Jewish High Society in Old Regime Berlin,* explores the lives of twenty Jewish women who lived during the late-eighteenth-century. Arguing that conversion was "a kind of emancipation" for these women, Hertz notes that Jewish women comprised sixty percent of recorded converts for the period 1770-1880.[12] David Sorkin, in his book *The Transformation of German Jewry, 1780-1840,* portrays the steps undertaken from 1780-1871 toward Jewish legal emancipation in Germany as a process that operated parallel to assimilation. During the *Haskalah,* many Jewish intellectuals argued that the achievement of equal rights was a precondition for the "regeneration" of the Jewish community, and that emancipation could and must also be accomplished through *Bildung* (a German term meaning social cultivation and refinement, education, and self-improvement). What resulted, according to Sorkin, was a new "German-Jewish" subculture dialectically formed from a synthesis of earlier traditions in both German and Jewish culture.[13] Jewish and German cultures

[11]Paula E. Hyman, "Gender and the Shaping of Modern Jewish Identities," *Jewish Social Studies* 8 (nos. 2/3, Winter 2002): 153 and 154.

[12]Deborah Hertz, *Jewish High Society in Old Regime Berlin* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1988), 248.

[13]David Sorkin, *The Transformation of German Jewry, 1780-1840* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 5 and 7.

were clearly linked during the nineteenth-century, so cultural history would seem like an effective methodology when inquiring into a phenomenon, such as conversion, that also involved direct connections between the two cultures.

Gender, too, is a promising area for cultural investigation, since both Jewish and German cultures negotiated male and female categories in similar ways over the course of the nineteenth-century. As Hertz points out in regard to conversion, elite Jewish women had greater access to emancipation through conversion and marriage to noble non-Jewish men, at least during the initial decades of the Long Nineteenth-Century. Hertz's highly revealing study depicts women's conversion as a revolution stemming from the Berlin *Haskalah* elite of "salon" culture that had much Christian-Jewish interaction during the last quarter of the eighteenth-century. Conversion at that time was, she concludes, a "seductive act,"[14] although it is less clear in her discussion how the elements of salon culture directly related to conversion. Rahel Levin was one of the women who converted under the Old Regime, yet she did so in order to marry the German nobleman Karl August Varnhagen von Ense not out of "sensual passion," but rather due to "literary cooperation and personal devotion," demonstrating the complex motivations often underlying conversion.[15]

However, conversion did not always directly translate to emancipation and was certainly no guarantee of social acceptance. Elsewhere, for example, Hertz discusses four men's conversions

[14]Hertz, *Jewish High Society*, 249. A condensed and abridged version of chapters 6 and 7 of her book, which directly concern Jewish women's conversion, appears as Deborah Hertz, "Emancipation through Intermarriage in Old Berlin," in *Jewish Women in Historical Perspective*, ed. Judith Baskin (Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press, 1991), 182-201.

[15]Hertz, *Jewish High Society*, 212. Hertz's study adds another dimension to the central idea of a volume edited by Pierre Birnbaum and Ira Katznelson—that conversion was potentially a "path" to emancipation. Although their book is devoted to Jews' relations to particular states on a more collective than individual level, their introduction still revolves around discussion of the "quite thoroughly assimilated" German Jewish author, Alfred Döblin, who himself later converted to Catholicism. Pierre Birnbaum and Ira Katznelson, "Emancipation and the Liberal Offer," in *Paths of Emancipation: Jews, States, and Citizenship*, eds. Pierre Birnbaum and Ira Katznelson (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995), 3.

in the teens and twenties, framing her narrative around the 1819 anti-Semitic *Hep! Hep!* riots. In contrast to the earlier period when conversion was "seductive," she positions these conversions in decades when trying circumstances and general desperation also impelled conversion. These were the decades of reaction against the ideas of the French Revolution, among them Jewish emancipation, which Napoleon's Grand Army had implemented and enforced throughout occupied Europe. In the initial throes of monarchical restoration and post-war industrialization, Jews frequently became objects of blame for various social and economic dislocations. Monarchs also quashed civil liberties, including, in many instances, the legal equality of Jews.[16] Despite certain political, economic, and social differences between the post-war period of reaction and the Old Regime, the motivations at the base of conversion still rested on the premise that a convert could achieve both emancipation and assimilation.

Hertz recounts the relatively well-known biographies of four individuals during this era. The composer Felix Mendelssohn was baptized as a child by his parents, who themselves converted later, although in his adult life Mendelssohn "tried to integrate his Jewish origins and his Christian affiliation." The physician David Ferdinand Koreff converted for personal advancement, but "died at sixty-four, lonely and poor," having lost his professorship and left Berlin for Paris altogether. Julius Jolson converted and became Friedrich Julius Stahl, the infamous arch-conservative who argued that "unconverted Jews should not be allowed to hold government posts." Edward Gans, the philosopher whom Hegel considered his most promising student, resisted conversion and fought the restriction on Jews holding professorships in the law courts, but eventually lost the case. He ultimately converted in 1825, the same year as his friend

[16]Rainer Koch, *Deutsche Geschichte, 1815-1848: Restauration oder Vormärz?* (Stuttgart: W. Kahlhammer, 1985); and Thomas Nipperdey, *Deutsche Geschichte, 1800-1866: Bürgerwelt und starker Staat* (Munich: C.H. Beck, 1983).

Heinrich Heine, and gained the university post he wished for, but eventually died at the age of forty-one, apparently from "obesity and high blood pressure."[17]

Borrowing both phrases from Endelman, Hertz claims that these "ex-Jews" engaged in "radical assimilation."[18] Yet, the term "ex-Jews" does not adequately account for those who converted but continued to be perceived and perceive themselves as Jews. Likewise, "radical assimilation" seems to suggest an accomplished project, whereas the stories that Hertz relates show that assimilation in many cases rarely made converted Jews "similar" enough to be counted and treated as though they were "true" German Christians. Furthermore, not all converts necessarily cared about assimilation. Many chose to convert not because of a "radical" conviction, but rather out of individual interests and/or career prospects, which, granted, still may reflect some sort of assimilation. Nevertheless, the phrase gives the impression that converts overtly (and radically) intended to assimilate. "Radical assimilation" covers the historical situation for some of the conversions, but leaves out the subtleties behind others.

One term cannot adequately describe the totality of conversion experiences that encompassed numerous motivations and outcomes. Historians would be better served by choosing terms

[17]Deborah Hertz, "Why Did the Christian Gentleman Assault the *Jüdischer Elegant*?: Four Conversion Stories from Berlin, 1816-1825," *Leo Baeck Institute Yearbook* 40 (1995): 94, 99, 100, and 103; and William Sharp, *Life of Heinrich Heine* (London: Walter Scott, 1888), 50. Jeffrey S. Sposato, *The Price of Assimilation: Felix Mendelssohn and the Nineteenth-Century Anti-Semitic Tradtion* (Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 2006) 4 and 5 provides the definitive statement on the converted German composer, Felix Mendelssohn, in regard to his relations to his Jewish ancestry and identifies two particular trends that made this definition necessary: one, the nineteenth-century tradition of anti-Semitism, which "saw Mendelssohn's Jewish heritage as a badge of shame," and two, the post-World War II effort to more strongly and directly connect the composer to his Jewish ancestry, resulting in an inversion of the first trend in which "Mendelssohn's mark of shame was refashioned as a badge of honor." Scholarly as well as political struggles over the identity of particular converts thus continue into the present.

[18]Hertz, "Four Conversion Stories," 105 and 106. Endelman is a scholar of modern Anglo-Jewish history, but his work also has to do with conversion in England as well as other European countries, the latter to be discussed further below. For the former, see particularly his *Radical Assimilation in English Jewish History 1656-1945* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1990). In this book, Endelman points out that it is impossible to measure conversion in England statistically because of the state's lack of intervention in such personal data. He resorts to the use of "non-quantitative sources," such as memoirs, correspondence, sermons, newspapers, genealogical tables, family histories, church records, missionary reports, and novels, noting that the "drift and defection" away from Judaism was "gradual, multi-generational," and a general "process of Jewish disaffiliation." Ibid., 5 and 6.

appropriate to the particular cases they are describing, all the while keeping in mind whose perspective they are relaying, whether the converted, the Jewish community, or the non-Jewish community. For example, the converted person may refer to himself or herself as "Christian" or perhaps "Jewish-Christian." A member of the Jewish community, although itself by no means uniform in opinion, might refer to the convert, besides "Christian" or "Jewish-Christian," as "Jewish heretic" or "Jewish apostate," depending on his or her opinion of the convert. A member of the non-Jewish community—like the Jewish community also not monolithic and in fact perhaps even less cohesive in certain respects—might choose any of the above terms, or simply revert to the term "Jewish," as many in the past in fact did.

Pre-Nineteenth-Century Conversion

Having reviewed many of the historical circumstances and historiographical approaches surrounding Jewish conversion in nineteenth-century Germany, we will now turn momentarily to non-Jews prior to the nineteenth-century who sought to convert Jews in accord with Christian beliefs and at times in a spirit of philanthropy. The history of Christian missionary work among Jews may go back as far as Saul/Paul of Tarsus, himself a convert. In his introduction to a volume of collected articles, *Jewish Apostasy in the Modern World*, Endelman discusses the efforts of Christian missions to Jews in the Medieval and Early Modern periods, suggesting that Christians directed their efforts toward "the poor . . . and those [Jews] who ran afoul of community."[19] Forced conversions of Jews began in Castile in 1391 and continued through the *reconquista*, culminating in 1492 when the remaining unconverted Jews were either forced to convert or be expelled. Most immigrated to Portugal, but others chose North Africa, Italy, and

[19]Todd M. Endelman, "Introduction," in *Jewish Apostasy in the Modern World*, ed. Todd M. Endelman (New York: Holmes & Meier, 1987), 5.

the Ottoman Empire, as Steven Nadler shows in a recent biography of Baruch Spinoza, the rationalist philosopher who eventually settled in Holland in the seventeenth-century. The *conversos*, as the converts were dubbed in Spain, were then actively prosecuted during the Inquisition in both Spain and Portugal under the suspicion of being "crypto-Jewish," or practicing Judaism in secret while continuing to live under the guise of Christianity.[20] Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi notes that the converts were also known as "New Christians" in his study of "Marranism," the term for practicing "clandestine Judaism."[21]

While these events must be seen as the products of particular conditions in Christian communities geographically and chronologically apart from nineteenth-century Germany, they still help to suggest some useful parallels to the individual experiences and cultural contexts of modern Jewish conversion. Two examples immediately come to mind. First, non-Jews remained suspicious of converted Jews, despite or because of their status as "New Christians," and even persecuted them on this basis. Second, the Iberian example demonstrates the possibility that converted Jews still held positive feelings for their original faith and may have even practiced it at times in secret. The inconspicuous in history is often times difficult to evidence, but in reference to converts in early modern Spain, Yerushalmi still argues that "some marranos kept their Jewish feelings locked in their hearts," while "others appear to have met together for regular liturgical services."[22]

[20]Steven Nadler, *Spinoza: A Life* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 2 and 4.

[21]Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi, *From Spanish Court to Italian Ghetto: Isaac Cardoso: A Study in Seventeenth Century Marranism and Jewish Apologetics* (Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press, 1981; originally published 1971), 22.

[22]Ibid., 38. Sander L. Gilman also discusses the Jews of the early modern Iberian peninsula in his book, *Jewish Self-Hatred: Anti-Semitism and the Hidden Language of the Jews* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986), see especially chapter 2, "The Drive for Conversion," 22-67. Yet, his phrase "self-hatred," used in part to describe conversion, rejects the actual complex dynamics that Yerushalmi suggests about fourteenth-, fifteenth-, and sixteenth-century Spain and Portugal, and other historians demonstrate in the case of nineteenth century Germany. "Self-hatred," therefore, may only be a relatively minor factor in understanding the history of conversion in early modern and modern Europe.

Following up on the ideas of non-Jews' various suspicions about converts, other questions come to mind: were non-Jews' suspicions of converts different from non-Jews' suspicions of Jews or had the act of conversion reconfigured their suspicions in certain ways? Which other groups faced suspicion in early modern Europe—Muslims, heretics, or later, Protestants (from Catholics) or Catholics (from Protestants)? How did these suspicions relate to or perhaps reinforce one another? Did other converts, i.e. heretics or Muslims, also practice their original faith in secret? What were interactions like between converted Jews and converted Muslims or others? Did they associate with or reject each other? Did converts voluntarily undergo baptism or did Christians actively encourage conversion? What were the respective roles of the church and the state in converting Jews (or others)? How did converts practice Christianity? Did it include elements of their "former" religion? How did children and grandchildren of converts fare in the new context of Christian-dominated Spain? Did they continue to adhere to Christianity or return to Judaism (or Islam)? Did they remain in Spain or emigrate? What were their lives like if they remained, or where did they go if they left? It is via a cultural approach that historians will more fully integrate answers to these kinds of questions into a wider and more comprehensive narrative of conversion.

Missionaries and Conversion

The Reformation was a turning point in the efforts of Christian missions to Jews in that there was now more than one Christian denomination seeking to bring Jews into its church. Yet in the case of Germany, Christopher M. Clark suggests that for some two-hundred years following Martin Luther's death in 1546, "little was done by the Protestants to evangelize the Jews."[23]

[23]Christopher M. Clark, *The Politics of Conversion: Missionary Protestantism and the Jews in Prussia 1728-1941* (Oxford, England: Clarendon Press, 1995), 1.

Clark writes that the Institutum Judaicum was established in Halle in 1728 to compensate for this absence. The institute paralleled "orphanages, poor-houses, factories, and schools," all for the purposes of "recuperation and productivization of socially marginal groups," although it was eventually dissolved later in the century.[24] Discussing the motivations and consequences of conversion, Clark echoes Endelman's concept of "radical assimilation":

> Poverty was the gravest and most visible obstacle to the integration of converts as new Christians. Individuals who converted effectively sacrificed the network of social and financial supports which they had enjoyed within the Jewish community. The transition was difficult for those who, as Jews, had exercised offices which did not translate into the occupational vocabulary of Christian society.[25]

Missionary efforts would be resuscitated in the nineteenth-century with the encouragement of the Prussian state. King Frederick William III, for example, offered royal recompense for converting Jews, even though there was eventual opposition from Protestant conservatives.[26] Yet, conservatives themselves were not beyond suggesting conversion as a solution to the Jewish Question. Clark discusses Friedrich Julius Stahl, for example, one of the four Jewish converts described by Hertz. Stahl was also director of the Berlin mission to the Jews and a conservative who in 1847 composed a book entitled *Der christliche Staat* ("The Christian State") in which he argued against Jewish emancipation if it failed to include conversion.[27] Sorkin describes the conservative Friedrich Rühs (1781-1820), a Berlin professor of History who had earlier argued that "the true answer to the Jewish question was conversion."[28] Missions continued all the while

[24]Ibid., 2.

[25]Ibid., 57. Statistics in general paint an inconsistent picture of conversion in nineteenth century Germany and hence distinguishing between the numbers of converts to Catholic versus Protestant Christianity is unstable. One might presume, however, that Jews converted to the form of Christianity that was most predominant where they happened to be at the time of conversion, although there were clear exceptions, one may also presume Christian denomination followed a north-south divide in nineteenth century Germany generally, with Protestants in the north and Catholics in the south, for the most part.

[26]Ibid., 99-100.

[27]Ibid., 170.

[28]Sorkin, *The Transformation of German Jewry*, 37.

and, for the most part it seems, largely unsuccessfully if we judge their success on the basis of the number of converts they baptized.[29]

Despite the mixed success of missionaries, philanthropists established a "colony" at Düsselthal in 1822-1823 for destitute Jews with the explicit intention of converting them as a necessary prerequisite to curing them. In an article by Erik Lindner, the author discusses the colony as well as the intention to develop a similar institution in New York State. The effort was spearheaded by the German noble Graf Adelberdt von der Recke-Volmerstein (1791-1878), who was involved in the mission to the Jews in addition to other philanthropic endeavors.[30] These philanthropic efforts lead to further questions relative to Jews, non-Jews, culture, and conversion. For example, in what other kinds of philanthropic labors did those who established the colony at Düsselthal participate? How was conversion conceived of as a cure? What other measures besides conversion sought to affect a cure? Was the cure also related to Jews' destitute state? How did the philanthropists think about the relation of poverty to Judaism? Were they considered to be two distinct kinds of destitution, one economic, the other spiritual? Did Jews who converted go on to lead comfortable lives? How did these non-Jewish philanthropic efforts compare to Jewish philanthropy? Did Jewish philanthropists require strict adherence to Judaism in order to cure the destitute Jews they assisted? Why was it necessary to establish a colony in order to achieve the desired outcome?

In recent considerations of the relations between Jews and colonialism, the ideas surrounding conversion cast light on another possible area of inquiry: the study of Orientalism. Recent debates over the nature and historical practice of Orientalism include Jews in Europe as peoples conceived of as Oriental. As Ivan Davidson Kalmar and Derek J. Penslar point out in the

[29]Clark, *The Politics of Conversion*, 249.

[30]Erik Lindner, "'Zum Heil Israels': Graf von der Recke-Volmerstein and his Missionary Colony at Düsselthal, 1822-1828," *Leo Baeck Institute Yearbook* 41 (1996): 143-150.

introduction to their collection of essays, *Orientalism and the Jews*, "imperialist rhetoric continued to be accompanied by Christian rhetoric, and the talk of waking up the dormant East through Western intervention was often accompanied by the proselytizing discourse of missionary societies eager to bring true religion to the ignorant oriental Muslims and Jews."[31] Conversion, hence, may have acted as one of the many justifications for colonialism. Conversion for the Jews' "own good" was a view that could be applied to Jews "at home" or Jews in foreign lands; at the same time, it ran concurrent to discourses regarding the conversion of other non-Christian peoples. For example, the desire to convert (or "cure") Jews does not seem distant from the wish in Germany to convert Southwest Africans or Chinese later in the nineteenth-century.[32] An examination of the "culture(s) of conversion" therefore may reveal parallels in numerous domestic and international arenas, including, as had been discussed here, missions, philanthropy, and colonialism.

Statistics and Conversion

Reflecting the expansion of surveillance apparatuses by most modern nation-states in the nineteenth-century, the German states kept meticulous statistics on their subjects' vital information. With regard to statistics on the numbers of Jewish conversions, controversy has surrounded their meaning since they were first compiled and interpreted. Nineteenth-century Jewish historians and social scientists' analyses of conversion rates were generally alarmist and often concluded that high rates implied a threat to the existence of the Jewish community. Hertz

[31]Ivan Davidson Kalmar and Derek J. Penslar, "Orientalism and the Jews: An Introduction," in *Orientalism and the Jews*, eds. Ivan Davidson Kalmar and Derek J. Penslar (Lebanon, NH: University Press, 2004), xxiii.

[32]See, for example, Nils Ole Oermann, *Mission, Church, and State Relations in South-West Africa under German Rule 1884-1915* (Stuttgart, Germany: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1999); and Horst Gründer, *Christliche Mission und deutscher Imperialismus: eine politische Geschichte ihrer Beziehungen während der deutschen Kolonialzeit (1884-1914) unter besonderer Berücksichtigung Afrikas und Chinas* (Paderborn, Germany: Schöningh, 1982).

has written an article partially centered on the theory of Felix Theilhaber, who in 1911 saw conversion as "racial suicide" in his book *Der Untergang der deutschen Juden: Eine volkswirtschaftliche Studie* ("The Disappearance of German Jewry: An Economic Study").[33] Mitchell B. Hart also discusses the interpretation of numbers in regard to the German Jewish community. He argues that the statistics were intimately connected with political projects, such as Zionism, which employed statistics in support of the creation of a Jewish state.[34] Hertz eventually disputes the numbers of earlier historians using the *Judenkartei*, which had not been compiled at the time that Heinrich Graetz, Nathan Samter, Simon Dubnow, and Felix Theilhaber composed their works.[35]

Heinrich Graetz, *Geschichte der Juden* ("History of the Jews") does not offer conversion statistics per se, but nevertheless provides much discussion of converts throughout the course of Jewish history. The index, for example, contains subject headings for "Apostasy" ("to Christianity," "to Islam," and "to paganism"), "Conversion" ("the, of the Jews to Christianity," and "the forced, of Jews to Christianity"), "Conversions" ("forced, of Jews to Christianity," "forced, of Jews to Islam," "forced, of Jews to Magianism," "to Judaism," and "to Paganism")

[33]Hertz, "Theilhaber's 'Racial Suicide' or Scholem's 'Flight of the Avant-Garde'? Interpreting Conversion Rates in Nineteenth-Century Berlin," in *Margins of Jewish History*, ed. Raphael, 42. John M. Efron also discusses Theilhaber in his book *Defenders of the Race: Jewish Doctors and Race Science in Fin-de- Siècle Europe* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1994), 141-153.

[34]Mitchell B. Hart, *Social Science and the Politics of Modern Jewish Identity* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2000).

[35]Hertz, "Theilhaber's 'Racial Suicide' or Scholem's 'Flight of the Avant-Garde'?," 44-45 and 49. Much of Hertz's work relies on the *Judenkartei* ("Jewish cards"), a source produced during the National Socialist period when the state investigated Germans' racial ancestries for evidence of Jewish blood. She perhaps relies on this source too readily and uncritically, but the research devoted to its compilation was clearly meticulous and exhaustive. She writes in a later article that her use of the records for Jewish history in the present helps begin to rehabilitate them from their previously notorious purposes. Ibid., 41.

George C. Browder writes that "throughout the early years, Gestapo headquarters or the commander of the political police frequently called on the field posts to compile special files, such as the Judenkartei. This usually signaled intensified Gestapo attention to such a group and defined them for the detectives as 'proper subjects.'" *Hitler's Enforcers: The Gestapo and the SS Security Service in the Nazi Revolution* (Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 1996), 72. It is not necessarily irresponsible to use the *Judenkartei* to write Jewish history for the sake of rehabilitation, but it would also be prudent to investigate the authors, production, and former usages of the *Judenkartei* to as great an extent as possible to help understand their specific applications under National Socialism.

"Converts" ("forced, to Christianity," and "forced, to Judaism") in addition to "Apostate," "Apostates," and a "list" of apostates that includes Heine and Levin (both discussed above).[36] Theilhaber's study contains a section examining "*Judentaufen*" ("Jewish baptisms") where he provides statistics on Berlin baptisms for three-year periods from 1873-1908, although he does not directly cite the source for his numbers.[37] Clearly, the means by which scholars use statistics to narrate the history of Jewish conversion has changed over time; nonetheless, Jewish baptism was a frequently studied topic in the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century with or without "transparent" statistical support.

Contemporary statistical assessments, while demonstrating the continuity of statistics as an explanatory tool, see Jewish conversion in a somewhat less dramatic fashion. Peter Honigmann argues in an article that also uses the *Judenkartei* as well as the *Austrittkartei* ("secession cards") for beyond the nineteenth-century, that "the conversion and secession movement among the Jewish population does not simply follow the gradual progress of assimilation, but is characterized by undulations reflecting various political pressures."[38] Statistics here point out that conversion does not run parallel to assimilation, suggesting further complexity surrounding the question of motivation to convert. The *Austrittkartei* reflect the numbers of persons who seceded, or formally broke away from the Jewish community. This adds another dimension to the question of conversion as it indicates that intention to be baptized was not the only reason

[36]Heinrich Graetz, *Geschichte der Juden von den ältesten Zeiten bis auf die Gegenwart: aus den Quellen neu bearbeitet* (Leipzig, Germany: O. Leiner, 1853-1876). The above quotations derive from the English version of this work, *History of the Jews*, ed. and trans. Bella Löwy, 6 vols. (Philadelphia, PA: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1891-1898), 6: 174-175 & 239-240. In a chapter devoted to two such "apostates," Graetz writes, "Why should not Börne and Heine have a page in Jewish history? Not only did Jewish blood flow in their veins, but they were imbued with the Jewish spirit." Ibid., 5: 536.

[37]Felix Theilhaber, *Der Untergang der deutschen Juden: Eine volkswirtschaftliche Studie* (Munich, Germany: Ernst Reinhardt Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1911), 94. For further analysis of Jewish baptisms, see also Nathan Samter, *Judentaufen im XIX. Jahrhundert* (Berlin: Poppelauer, 1906), Werner Sombart, Matthias Erzberger, Friedrich Naumann, et al., *Judentaufen* (Munich, Germany: G. Müller, 1912), and the earliest example, although carried out in an Austrian context is Gerson Wolf, *Judentaufen in Österreich* (Vienna, Austria: Herzfeld & Bauer, 1863).

[38]Peter Honigmann, "Jewish Conversions: A Measure of Assimilation? A Discussion of the Berlin Secession Statistics of 1770-1941," *Leo Baeck Institute Yearbook* 34 (1989): 24.

that people seceded. For example, the leading Orthodox Rabbi Dr. Esriel (Esra) Munk seceded with his congregation in 1900, while the actress Helene Weigel, later the wife of Bertolt Brecht, seceded in 1928. Neither would convert to Christianity.[39]

In a recent demographic study of German Jews over the nineteenth- and twentieth-centuries, one writer focused on *Mischehen* ("mixed marriages"), *Austritte* ("secessions"), and *Taufen* ("baptisms") as particular categories in the study.[40] Hence, the legacy of statistical recording of Jewish conversions persists into the present, albeit with perhaps less ominous implications; although as Hart shows in his introduction, some sense of anxiety continues at least through 1991.[41] Questions again arise relative to Jewish conversion, in this instance involving statistics and culture. Did other statistics, aside from those describing the numbers of converts, also lead to fears about the future of the Jewish community? Did others, beyond Jewish social scientists, employ conversion statistics, and if so, who, and to what end? What sources did nineteenth-century statisticians use?

The *Fin-de-Siècle* and Conversion

Conversion continues to appear as a salient feature of Jewish life in Germany under the *Kaiserreich* and at the time of the *fin-de-siècle* ("end of the [nineteenth] century"), an era historians have characterized as one of heightened self-consciousness.[42] Whether statistically

[39]Ibid., 9, caption to Figure I, "Secession Register Cards of the Berlin Jewish Community."

[40]Usiel O. Schmelz, "Die Demographische Entwicklung der Juden in Deutschland von der Mitte des 19. Jahrhunderts bis 1933," *Bulletin des Leo Baeck Instituts* 83 (1989): 39-41.

[41]Hart, *Social Science and the Politics of Modern Jewish Identity*, 1-2. Susan A. Glenn points out that contemporary uses of statistics surrounding discussions of Jewish identity have not only been employed by scholars, but also by neo-Nazis. "In the Blood? Consent, Descent, and the Ironies of Jewish Identity," *Jewish Social Studies* 8 (nos. 2/3, Winter/Spring 2002): 141.

[42]For recent discussions that use various approaches in their examination of the *fin-de-siècle* era across the European and American landscape, see the following examples: Aron Rodrigue, "Totems, Taboos, and Jews: Salomon Reinach and the Politics of Scholarship in Fin-de-Siecle France," *Jewish Social Studies* 10 (no. 2, Winter 2004): 1-18; Evyatar Friesel, "Zionism and the Fin-de-Siecle," *American Jewish History* 90 (no. 4, December

significant or not, the possibility of conversion always lingered internally and externally, for both individuals and the community as a whole. Endelman claims that anti-Semitism was the central impetus to Jewish conversion in the *Kaiserreich*, and that "German Jews were more pessimistic about their future and thus more willing to take radical measures to solve their Jewish problem."[43] He is again conceiving of conversion as "radical," yet refusing to distinguish between the types of motivations, choices, and anticipated outcomes among German Jews after 1871.

Regardless of the seemingly ambiguous relationship between conversion and anti-Semitism, Alan Levenson shows that a "conversionary impulse" lurked around almost every turn in Imperial Germany. As for causality, however, Levenson notes that "all assessments of apostasy which neatly distinguish between 'push' and 'pull' factors, in other words, what pushed apostates to leave Judaism and what pulled them toward Christianity, underrate the complex seductiveness of leaving the Jewish fold in the German *Kulturbereich* ['range of culture']."[44] Levenson thus underscores the variety of motivations behind conversion, although why such a variety of attractive choices might have been particularly true during the *fin-de-siècle* remains elusive in Levenson's article. Further engagement with the implications of the German *Kulturbereich* likely would reveal more of the context surrounding conversion in the now unified German empire.

Mary Gluck's article on the question of "visibility" in *fin-de-siècle* Budapest holds interesting possibilities for the cultural place of converts in the late-nineteenth-century public

2002): 483-486; Robert Blobaum, "The Politics of Antisemitism in Fin-de-Siecle Warsaw," *Journal of Modern History* 73 (no. 2, June 2001): 275-306; and Yaacov Shavit, "The 'Glorious Century' or the 'Cursed Century': Fin-de-Siecle Europe and the Emergence of Modern Jewish Nationalism," *Journal of Contemporary History* 26 (nos. 3-4, September 1991): 553-574.

[43]Endelman, "Welcoming Ex-Jews," 20.

[44]Alan Levenson, "The Conversionary Impulse in Fin de Siecle Germany," *Leo Baeck Institute Yearbook* 40 (1995): 120.

sphere, even if she too leaves the particular import of the period largely undefined and unexplored. Gluck depicts the Budapest Jewish community as so thoroughly assimilated that it ceased to be visible in terms of difference from non-Jewish Budapest. An "invisible Jewish Budapest," she argues

> needs to be seen as an alternate conception of self and culture that constituted a subversive subtext to the liberal ideology of Jewish emancipation. This counter-discourse questioned the political promise of emancipation and, ironically, deflated celebrations of Jewish acculturation. Yet what made this project so paradoxical is the fact that, even while stressing Jewish difference, it refused to provide a foundational definition of Jewishness. Jewish Budapest was "invisible" precisely because it did not, could not, and would not envision Jewishness as a distinct religious, ethnic, or national identity. It implied a destabilized or fragmented self, which was no longer unambiguously aligned with social institutions or political citizenship.[45]

This could also be a description of conversion, which may serve as a potential "subversive subtext" to emancipation because it also "questioned the political promise" offered to Jews who did not convert. A convert was possibly becoming "invisible," which threatened both the Jewish liberal version of emancipation and the racial anti-Semitic view of Jewishness alike.

Comparing Imperial Germany with late Victorian and Edwardian England, Endelman concludes "conversion in Germany was a response to the failure of emancipation and the resurgence of ideological and social antisemitism after 1870."[46] Marion Kaplan includes conversion as one possibility for the Imperial German Jewish community and concurs with Endelman that the primary motive behind its occurrence was anti-Semitism. She also helps clarify the continuing relations between converts and Jews when she claims that "most Jews disdained conversion" and that "even secular families that evinced no close connection to the Jewish religion saw conversion as a form of dishonor and desertion."[47] Whether or not we can accept the monocausal explanations of Endelman and Kaplan for conversion during the Imperial

[45]Mary Gluck, "The Budapest Flâneur: Urban Modernity, Popular Culture, and the 'Jewish Question' in Fin-de-Siècle Hungary," *Jewish Social Studies* 10 (no. 3, Spring 2004): 4.

[46]Todd M. Endelman, "The Social and Political Context of Conversion in Germany and England, 1870-1914," in *Jewish Apostasy*, ed. Endelman, 102.

[47]Marion Kaplan, "Redefining Judaism in Imperial Germany: Practices, Mentalities, and Community," *Jewish Social Studies* 9 (no. 1, Fall 2002): 18.

period in Germany, thinking back to earlier periods in the century suggests that other motivations may have been at work simultaneously.

There is yet another "kind" of Jew that needs to be included in the present discussion. This is the "secular" Jew, to whom Kaplan refers above. While this group was not formally converting to a religion other than Judaism, perhaps we may still see secularization as something akin to conversion. The cosmology has been converted, even if the religious, national, and/or ethnic identity remains intact. Here we return to several of the "non-Jewish" Jews, initially mentioned by Deutscher, who did not all convert to a different faith, although they may have subscribed to new "secular" ideological systems (such as Marxism, Bolshevism, or Freudianism). Yerushalmi's study of Freud's continuing affinity for Judaism, titled *Freud's Moses: Judaism Terminable and Interminable*, provides some insight in this regard. His term, the "Psychological Jew," used to describe Freud and others, suggests that despite secularization, certain individuals still retained psychological residues of Jewish culture.[48] A cultural history of conversion would necessarily accommodate the multiplicity of nineteenth-century conversions, including those to Christianity, secular belief, or even other religions and ideologies. The strand of anti-Semitism could be juxtaposed to other motivations and hence reveal more about why individuals converted.

Conclusion—Conversion, Culture, and Comparison

The presence of converts and the possibility of conversion were two realities that presented themselves to members of the Jewish community in Germany during the nineteenth-century. The question of conversion has been, and should continue to be, treated in historical accounts of

[48]Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi, *Freud's Moses: Judaism Terminable and Interminable* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1991), 10.

Jews in modern Germany. I have suggested here that a cultural approach may yield a richer perspective across time and place. Conversion need not be seen, as it has to a great extent in previous work, "in terms of loss,"— the words Paula Hyman uses to describe the "master narrative of modern Jewish identity"— but rather as a reality that has been confronted culturally, much like anti-Semitism and failed promises of social, political, and economic emancipation.[49] Conversion took place as the result of a variety of pragmatic and personal choices, ranging from improvement of social and/or economic prospects to shifts in individual faith. The relations between converts and the Jewish community were ambivalent in general throughout the nineteenth-century, which has affected the historical treatment of conversion. Initial attempts to dislocate the phenomenon from Jewish historiography have only recently given way to shifts toward acknowledgement of the "multiplicity" of Jewish identity.

Further work on conversion needs to be done, and a cultural methodology is one of the most promising, yet one of the least represented thus far. Cultural investigations should include, whenever possible, reference to overseas conversion attempts and incidences of conversion in Empires like the Romanov and Ottoman.[50] How many Jews, for example, converted to Islam (or Christianity?) in the Ottoman Empire or to Eastern Orthodox Christianity in Russia and Eastern Europe? Also, how many Jews converted to Catholicism as opposed to Protestantism in Europe, the United States, or elsewhere? Other approaches might include national comparisons and comparisons across time. Only sensitivity to the sometimes permeable boundaries of modern Jewish communities and identities will yield answers to these questions.

Historians who take a larger statistical view of conversion have most often directly associated it with moments of anti-Semitism, suggesting that the reason high numbers converted

[49]Hyman, "Gender and the Shaping of Jewish Identities," 153.

was to escape the torments of such personal and institutional discrimination. Yet if we look also at one of the most argued-for causes of anti-Semitism—economic downturn—then it may present conversion in a different light.[51] Economic slump is just as viable a cause of conversion as anti-Semitism is reputed to be, because if the economic opportunities on the whole are limited, then conversion might be seen as a way to increase one's viability and essentiality in the workplace. Historians who reside solely in the larger statistical realm should therefore connect their perspectives with more case studies of individuals in order to further buttress their arguments for anti-Semitism as a primary cause, or they should at least be able to explain more directly the effects of economic depression on the decision to conversion. Likewise, historians who emphasize individual studies should seek to investigate more areas that statistics cannot reach, such as family, community, and non-Jewish receptions of conversion, like those articulated by Heine at the outset of this article. Cultural history could embrace conversion, statistics, anti-Semitism, and economic depression simultaneously.

Yet a fundamental problem for historicizing conversion remains: to whose history do converts in nineteenth-century Germany "belong"—Jewish German history, Christian German history, Jewish-Christian German history, all three, or a different group altogether? There is no distinct subfield devoted to Jewish-Christian German history, nor is one likely to emerge. Perhaps it will have to be integrated into one of the other two. The other two, however, still seem reluctant to take in converts with the respective arguments that they are no longer real Jews or could never be real Christians and hence fall outside of the scope of study. The continuing fears surrounding the diminishing population of Jewish communities in the post-Holocaust world also may negatively impact the will to historicize what still may be perceived as a threat to those

[51]See Derek J. Penslar, *Shylock's Children: Economics and Jewish Identity in Modern Europe* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2001) for a discussion of the discourses surrounding anti-Semitism and European Jews' economic identities.

communities by both Jewish and German historians alike. Regardless of territorial disputes between fields, another direction that this literature might turn is toward the question of religious practice. For example, how did the changing practices of Judaism and Christianity affect the will to convert? A more contemporary approach might also be able to ask about persons who converted to Judaism or returned to the faith after years of non-practice. Why did they convert or return and how were they received afterward?

However the future historiography of Jewish conversion proceeds, whether taken up by Jewish, German, or other historians, it will continue to hinge on the questions surrounding motivation, reception, emancipation, and assimilation. Historians will be more successful if they attend to the subtleties of the perspectives they attempt to speak for. Terminologies — such as those implied by names like ex-Jews, non-Jewish Jews, heretics (apostates, psychological Jews, etc.) — can help focus our vision of the history of Jewish conversion, but they can also obscure the complexity of this past. Thus, the terms historians employ to describe Jewish conversion must be flexible and conditional in order to account for the shifting landscape of history and identity.[52] Cultural history can link both Jewish and German histories at the same time that it seeks to explore terminology in general. In addition to "convert," "Jewish" is a related term which historians might linguistically deconstruct in order to further explore how cultures constructed, maintained, discussed, and contested such categories.

[52]Jewish converts, it seems, offer little direct help with terminology. The converts Rahel Levin, Heinrich Heine, and Hugo Bettauer are silent in their writings in referring to themselves as converts. Ellen Key, *Rahel Varnhagen: A Portrait*, trans. Arthur G. Chater (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1913); Rahel Varnhagen, *Gesammelte Werke*, eds. Konrad Feilchenfeldt, Uwe Schweickert, and Rahel E. Steiner (Munich: Matthes & Seitz Verlag, 1983); Heine, *Heine's Memoirs*; and Murray G. Hall, *Der Fall Bettauer* (Vienna: Löcker, 1978). There is, of course, a clear and obvious difference between describing these figures as "Jews," rather than as "Jews who converted to Christianity." Yet again, it is cultural history that might best contend with the silences surrounding conversions.