In Germany, the thesis that significantly more people identify with antisemitic sentiments than have been detected to date by opinion polls will be presented using a pilot study conducted in the framework of a research program, *Gruppenbezogene Menschenfeindlichkeit* (Group-Focused Enmity), of the Universities of Marburg and Bielefeld.¹ The study employs a combination of qualitative and quantitative social research methods and in-depth psychology to analyze interviews conducted with people pinpointed in an earlier representative survey as harboring latent antisemitic attitudes.

The first part of this paper will outline various forms of antisemitic resentment. This will be followed by a description of changes in the public expression of antisemitism in Germany since the mid-1990s. Here, the key question will center on the extent and the ways in which latent antisemitism is being manifested publicly once again. The next stage will introduce my methodological approach toward research into latent antisemitism as well as the socio-scientific challenge of sounding out deeply-concealed antisemitic structures. Lastly, the findings of the study will be presented and discussed.
Introduction

In research on antisemitism in Germany it is customary to distinguish four sub-dimensions of Judeophobia: 1) religiously-based Christian prejudice against Jews; 2) a biologically construed racial antisemitism; 3) so-called secondary antisemitism (see below), and 4) anti-Zionist antisemitism. The last two forms – secondary antisemitism and anti-Zionist antisemitism – have taken on particular importance since the fall of communism in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe in the early 1990s, German reunification, and especially since 9/11. The public articulation of attitudes that could be classified as religious or racial antisemitism has slowly but continuously declined in the course of postwar German history – which, of course, says nothing about how widespread such opinions really are. Quantitative studies reveal, however, a relatively high incidence of secondary and anti-Zionist antisemitism in political and social discourse.

Antisemitism may be described as “secondary” when it is expressed “not in spite of, but because of Auschwitz.” Secondary antisemitism holds the Jews responsible for the consequences of the Shoah, which it treats as a negative disturbance of German national consciousness. The implication is that Jews have been exploiting the Nazi past in order to profit from it. Remembrance of the Shoah is thus turned into an accusation against the Jews: Germans are required to remember the Shoah not because of their country’s crimes and responsibilities but because they are being forced to by the Jews. Accordingly, they are not allowed to decide on “their” own remembrances; rather these are supposedly imposed upon them “from outside.” This leads, in particular, to the conspiracy-theorizing assumption of “Jewish greed” and to an inversion of the question of guilt. Anti-Zionist antisemitism, on the other hand, uses the State of Israel as a screen on which to project anti-Jewish stereotypes, often by drawing parallels and making comparisons with the policies of Nazi Germany.

Antisemitism is not an individual phenomenon – either from a psychological or a sociological perspective – but is based rather on group-specific processes generating “inside” and “outside” groups, presupposing an ideology of human inequality. Hence, it must be understood as an element of an anti-enlightenment worldview. In contemporary German life, this
element is expressed in the form of physical and mental violence. Drawing on the work of Wilhelm Heitmeyer, the concept of violence employed here includes forms of humiliation, as well as defensive reactions, discrimination and marginalization on the basis of real or ascribed group-belonging and collective identity paradigms. 

**Antisemitism and Latent Communication Potential**

The displacement of the mode of “older” forms of antisemitic attitudes in the German public domain by “newer” ones can be shown both empirically and theoretically. It is important to determine whether the transformation in question consists merely in a change in the manner of expression of antisemitism (and thus, in socio-psychological terms, in a change of the structure of projection), with the fundamental antisemitic attitude remaining unaltered. It is equally imperative to consider the role played by latent communication in this connection.

The first aspect is related to the thesis that antisemitic modes of expression can be modified by external political and social stimuli (such as public debates on antisemitism): that is, the forms of communication can change while the basic convictions remain the same. Thus, for example, as a result of external factors, such as statements of politicians or changes in the global political context, classic antisemitic attitudes (such as “Jews have too much influence/power” or “Jews are in part responsible for their persecution because of their behavior”) become transformed into publicly expressed antisemitism of the anti-Zionist kind. In this case, one might speak of “indirect communication.”

In order for this hypothesis to be confirmed, there would have to be a correlation between classical antisemitism, on the one hand, and secondary, or anti-Zionist antisemitism, on the other. Such a relationship has, in fact, been demonstrated empirically through a simultaneous factor analysis by Aribert Heyder, Julia Iser, and Peter Schmidt. This is of key significance since in their survey approximately 20 percent of respondents in the German population agreed with classic antisemitic claims (e.g., that Jews
have too much influence in Germany, or Jews are partly to blame for their persecution due to their own behavior), while concurrence with anti-Zionist arguments was much higher: for example, 44.4 percent of Germans agreed with the statement, “Because of Israel’s policies, I can certainly understand why one would have something against Jews,” while 68.3 percent believed that Israel was implementing a Vernichtungskrieg (war of extermination) against the Palestinians, thereby projecting an unequivocally National Socialist face onto Israeli policies. In addition, 51.2 percent of Germans felt that Israel’s policies toward the Palestinians were “in principle” barely different from antisemitic Nazi policies. Heyder, Iser and Schmidt were able – primarily through a purely statistical process – to show plainly that anti-Zionist antisemitism serves as an indirect conduit for classic antisemitism.

The second aspect, the role played by latent communication, is related to the social dimension of the problem. The notion of “latent communication” was coined by Werner Bergmann and Rainer Erb. The underlying idea is that while pressure exerted by political and social elites leads to antisemitic attitudes not being publicly expressed, they remain, nonetheless, present in latent form: attitudes are articulated – if at all – only in private communication or on semi-public occasions (such as during regular drinking rounds in the neighborhood bar). According to this theory, state repression of antisemitic attitudes and the taboo on their expression thereby led to antisemitic attitudes being largely expelled from the public discourse and to antisemitic resentments – inasmuch as they cannot be communicated – being reduced. When, however, new forms of articulation of antisemitism serve as a detour for indirectly expressing old antisemitic antipathies, this brings about a transformation in terms of latent communication potential: for example, antisemitic stereotypes presented in the guise of criticism of Israel or of globalization carry no stigma in Germany and thus can be publicly expressed. Indeed, one can count on their receiving approbation across the entire political spectrum. As a result, the taboo on antisemitic expression could be rapidly removed, leading to a dramatic normalization of antisemitism in Germany.

The empirical connection between classical (religious/racial) and the new (secondary/anti-Zionist) antisemitism has been demonstrated beyond a doubt; moreover, all opinion studies on antisemitic attitudes in Germany
since the establishment of the Federal Republic (FRG) show that 15–20 percent of the population can be classified as antisemitic. In light of these findings, it is important to clarify the question of whether the potential for antisemitism in the FRG has changed and if so, whether as a result of the removal of real or imagined taboos the portion of the population with antisemitic attitudes has not in fact increased. The difficulties involved in trying to address this question in the framework of quantitative opinion surveys are obvious: regardless of their real convictions, members of a sample population assume that the expression of antisemitic attitudes is at least partially forbidden. Consequently, imagining that they form part of a small minority, they will reject or only hesitantly agree to statements that they regard as antisemitic or socially unacceptable.

Bergmann and Erb have tried to surmount this problem by using surveys in which respondents are asked about their level of unease with respect to the subject of antisemitism and their readiness to speak frankly. It seems to me that this approach fails to overcome the fundamental difficulty with quantitative studies of antisemitism: namely, the need to continually assess latent communication potential with respect to antisemitism (for example, asking respondents, as Bergmann and Erb did, whether they felt inhibited when discussing the subject) and thus, in the last analysis, having simply to address the themes “Jews” or “antisemitism” directly. The drawback of standardized research into latent antisemitism lies in the fact that the interview questions contain specific statements which clearly and openly speak to the subject at hand: in order to fathom the depths, one would have to ask about feelings that the respondents experience when discussing the subject of Jews. The matter is thereby tackled directly, thus ruling out the possibility of discovering the underlying dimension of antisemitism.

The structural obstacles to providing a precise quantitative assessment of latent antisemitism are, in my opinion, far less daunting in the case of qualitative investigations, which allow a more subjective approach to respondents. A qualitative investigation offers the possibility of assessing resentments and prejudices without having to address explicitly the respondent’s attitudes to antisemitism or to Jews. The matter can be brought up gradually in the framework of discussion. By using a qualitative method, the phenomenon of latent communication potential can thus be decoded in
its central relation to the unconscious. 
Antisemitism is expressed largely via communicative detours, while antisemitic thought is characterized by patterns of projection and displacement. Thus, a qualitative investigation that confronts these problems would appear to be more accurate in providing answers to questions relating to the presence of contemporary communicative barriers as well as to current antisemitic potential in Germany.

The guiding hypothesis here is that in recent times there has been an increase in readiness to express antisemitic attitudes in Germany and that this erosion of communicative barriers is connected to the removal of taboos against secondary, anti-Zionist antisemitism (that is, to the possibility of openly expressing antisemitism via the socially acceptable communicative detour of anti-Zionism). Furthermore, it is suggested that discursive displacements in the societal treatment of the theme of perpetrators and victims have played a major role in undermining the taboo on antisemitism. In this connection, the projective inversion of the roles of perpetrator and victim in the new discourse on German victimhood (the Allied bombardment of Germany, the theme of expulsion) should be mentioned. A second is represented by the “europeanization” or “universalization” of Holocaust remembrance, in the sense that a supposedly historically significant relevance is attached symbolically to numerous non-German groups of perpetrators. This multiplication of other perpetrator groups results in a certain leveling of the import of the German mass murder of European Jews during the Nazi period.

**Method**

An attempt was made to develop a research model through a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods. The point of departure was a representative survey conducted in 2005, in which respondents were asked questions relating both to antisemitism and, more generally, to the empirically-determined syndrome of “group-focused enmity” (Gruppenbezogene Menschenfeindlichkeit [GMF]) survey. The representative data provided in the survey was collected via telephone
interviews conducted by trained interviewers of the Infratest Social Research Institute in Munich (tns-Infratest). Altogether 2,000 persons, ranging in age from 16 to 94, were interviewed. Men represented 43.6 percent of the subjects and women, 56.5 percent; 74.8 percent of the respondents came from west Germany and 25.2 percent from east Germany.¹⁹

Using the integrated concept of successive quantitative and qualitative empirical research described by Christian Seipel and Peter Rieker,²⁰ antisemitic attitudes were investigated in the framework of a qualitative study drawn from a sub-sample of the 2005 GMF quantitative survey. The basic method was to present a comprehensive list of standardized questions to which respondents, reflecting a representative sample of Germany, would express their agreement or disagreement in various degrees: completely and utterly agree, mainly agree, mainly disagree, completely disagree, or no reply. This questionnaire addressed numerous resentments, all centered on an ideology of difference: besides racism and antisemitism, it related (among other things) to sexual and social otherness (such as homosexuals, the homeless, and the disabled), manifestations of sexism, and attitudes toward the privileged establishment. From this quantitative, representative survey, a smaller, equally representative (according to the criteria of empirical social research) sub-sample was selected, in order to conduct qualitative interviews with these respondents. These interviews, however, were not intended to examine explicit agreement with antisemitic resentments: on the contrary, the topics of antisemitism and Jewry were not directly addressed at all so that the latent structures of their sentiments might be sounded out.

To this end, in-depth interviews seemed to be the most appropriate (albeit, demanding) method, since they permit unexpressed motifs – whether purposely hidden or unconsciously repressed – to be discovered. Although very time-consuming, in-depth interviews bring to verbal expression not only conscious thoughts but unconscious feelings, including those that are not evident to the interviewer beforehand or that are not regarded as forming part of the relevant context and thus lie outside the spectrum of assumed categories of response. Thus, the deep psychological appeal of antisemitism for the antisemite can be revealed.

The sub-sample taken from the 2005 GMF survey constitutes an
interconnected, selective, and stratified model. The interconnectivity results from the combination of survey data and in-depth interviews described above; the selectivity, from the question in the survey that asked respondents about their willingness to participate in a supplementary study; and the stratification, from a conscious selection made by reference to the degree of approbation of antisemitism displayed. The scope of the sub-sample was thus a function of a combination of selectivity and stratification: the potential interview subjects were those who agreed to a supplementary interview and at the same time displayed an average to strong tendency toward secondary antisemitism. The pertinent items in the 2005 GMF survey were as follows: “Many Jews try to exploit the memory of the Third Reich for their own benefit,” and “I get angry over the fact that Germans today are still held accountable for the crimes against the Jews.”

Respondents displaying an average to high tendency toward secondary antisemitism were consciously selected because it was assumed that the expected effects of latent antisemitism would be most pronounced during the in-depth interviews with members of this group. Gaining access to the unconscious affective structures of respondents, and consequently, to the latent dimension of the assembled textual material, was a prerequisite in the attempt to stratify the sample in such a way as to question a precise group of antisemites: namely, among those in whom affective self-control was relatively highly developed and who were most likely to imagine the existence of a taboo on the expression of antisemitic attitudes.

From the sub-sample thus obtained, 19 persons were selected at random. The sub-sample was kept small because the interview strategy was very time-consuming and analytically intensive. Nonetheless, this group is representative of the entire opinion poll, and thereby for all of Germany. The respondents hailed from all parts of the country, and covered a broad spectrum of age groups and educational levels, with both genders being equally represented; the urban/rural balance was maintained by random selection. However, although the results may be statistically representative, they are naturally of limited application due to the relatively small size of the interview sample, and should therefore be viewed simply as tendencies.

Interviews with seven of the 19 figured finally in the evaluation of the sub-sample material. Only seven were selected because in six cases they
could not be held due to conflicts in scheduling, while in another six they were not included due to the brevity of their duration. By their own account, all the persons in this sample – as well as both their parents – possessed German citizenship. All the meetings were conducted according to the same model by the same (trained) interviewer. Since they were all held the week after the Catholic Church’s 2005 World Youth Day, this event, as well the first appearance of Joseph Ratzinger in Germany as Pope Benedict XVI, provided the context, or the “cover story,” for the conversations.

Each of the interviews began with a question on the attitude of the respondent to faith and religion, and this theme was then further developed with one or several follow-up questions on World Youth Day. In most cases, the respondent was asked if there was anything that happened during World Youth Day that had made a particular impression on him or her. From this point on, the conduct of the interview was improvised. The interviewer, however, tried to follow two principles: first, to keep interventions to a minimum, and if they were necessary, above all (and in contrast to narrative interview strategies), to induce the respondents to justify their remarks (for example, by asking “why?”); and, second, to adopt as far as possible the respondents’ own vocabulary. Thus, for example, if a respondent referred to “Hitler’s time,” this concept – which by personalizing and individualizing National Socialism represents a kind of defensive rationalization – was taken up in the continuation of the interview. In this way, the interviewer avoided altering the semantic structure of the respondent’s discourse.

**Findings and Discussion**

The first notable finding of the pilot study was that independently of all demographic factors such as gender, age, level of education and life circumstances (all of which were systematically surveyed), all the respondents, without being asked, eventually mentioned the Jews. Thus, for example, they referred to alleged particularities of the Jewish faith, to the behavior of Jews in Germany or to international politics and also – which is especially surprising given the theme in question – to sweeping verbal attacks against Israel. In light of the radicalism of antisemitic resentments
expressed in the interviews, it is particularly noteworthy that respondents who considered themselves to be firmly anchored in the Christian faith also made the most clearly negative statements. Moreover, while the antisemitism of members of the Protestant or Catholic churches was noticeably high, respondents who identified themselves as atheists or who attached no great significance to their Christian faith expressed only comparatively weak resentments.

The second major finding was that in many cases respondents could not point exactly to the basis of their rejection of Jewry or the State of Israel. It was more often a question of vague feelings than actual knowledge. One of the respondents formulated the matter as follows: “Well, thinking, that is sometimes also just a feeling. I can’t find any solid basis either” [ID 9, p. 14]. Given the background of psychoanalytical research into antisemitism, the emotional structure of antisemitism expressed by the respondents is not surprising. Nonetheless, one might have expected that the affective rejection would be linked to some cognitive knowledge. The present study did not show this to be the case. The respondents employed catchwords and stereotypes, on which for the most part they were unable to elaborate and for which they are unable to provide a political or historical context. They counted on the unconscious agreement of their interlocutors. If they were asked, for example, what exactly there was to criticize about Israeli policy, most of the respondents tried to deflect the question, change the subject or avoid answering by asking questions themselves.

Third, it was obvious in all the interviews that the respondents were ignorant about their past: that is, about their personal family histories as well as their past as Germans with respect to National Socialism. In this connection, a remarkable lack of empathy vis-à-vis the victims of National Socialism was evident in their responses. Thus, for example, one of the respondents suggested inviting “people who lived through the Hitler period” to talk to school classes, since there would “surely be an exciting story [to be told] about those times in every family.” In addition, the respondent suggested that apart from members of the generation of perpetrators, perhaps “sometimes” a Jewish family might be invited to talk about how “their parents went to the gas chamber… or that they were in a concentration camp and recount how hard it was to survive there” [ID 13, p. 14–15].
The passage shows how remarkably limited the respondent’s factual knowledge of National Socialism was. In this connection, it is notable that respondents frequently brought up the subject themselves, as if they wanted to get something off their chests but were unable to say what exactly it was. To employ Christian metaphors, they seemed to want to confess their past and receive absolution for their misdeeds although they had not been alive during the Nazi era. We can thus speak of a type of antisemitic angst in relation to a personal (imagined) past: a past to which they felt connected but which they did not confront, much less work through, rather simply attempted to repress and forget. The same desire to avoid engaging with a particular topic and to deny its importance can also be observed in the contemporary relations of antisemitism and right-wing extremism. For example, one woman interviewed reported that she was living “outside”; she had heard nothing about the increasing strength of right-wing extremist movements in recent years. Asked where she lived, she responded “Köpenick” – a district of Berlin, the capital of the Federal Republic of Germany. In short, we can speak of a symbolic repetition of National Socialism – via defensive inhibitions against remembering the past and projections of guilt – since similar motifs are used in the German debate over remembrance: for example, the claim that the majority of Germans did not know about the Shoah because the mass extermination was happening outside the public sphere. The argument that one “knew nothing of all that” is widespread in Germany. When the emergence of extreme right movements today goes unnoticed once again, the assertion that one lives “outside” (and therefore could not know about it) is, on the one hand, farcical, especially considering a home address in Berlin, and on the other, a symbolic reiteration of old strategies of self-justification.

As for the emotional aspect of the behavior of the respondents, it is remarkable how frequently their narrations were characterized by the sudden eruption of defensive and evasive reactions. Again and again, the logical-semantic structure of a respondent’s discourse would become destructured through apparently nonsensical remonstrations and interruptions: latent resentments, as it were, breaking through to the surface. A long passage from the interview material serves to illustrate what is meant here:

Yes, I wish that...that other countries would not always say: “Oh yeah,
the evil Germans’... that a line would be drawn under it. But also that we Germans must think that, after all, it’s history... And on the other hand, I wish, for example – you were just speaking about it – that a child, that the way in which Herr Ratzinger as a child, [the way in which] Cardinal Ratzinger was depicted as a child in an English paper [the British media alluded to Ratzinger’s past in the Hitler youth – author’s note], that these people would also remember what, for example, England did in India. That France would... and recall for once what was done by the French themselves in France during wartime. There is no collaboration in France – strangely enough. There are only the evil Germans who invaded France. What America did in Vietnam. And the spiral goes on and on. As a result, I’m in fact a little bit sick of all of it. Why does one always say: “Yes, but the Germans, the historical responsibility”? For example, with respect to Israel. Everyone knows that Israel does not always treat other people [well]... the Palestinians, other minorities, the lower classes. And everyone has a burden to bear in some way. History has grown out of it, it’s taken over... but always only in order to say: “Yeah, the Germans, but.” Now there’s the Möllemann issue. He made that leaflet and said, so that’s... And then Herr Spiegel comes along [Paul Spiegel former president of the Central Council of Jews in Germany who criticized FDP politician Jürgen Möllemann for publishing an antisemitic leaflet. – author’s note], and he says, “That’s unacceptable.” It’s top-heavy how we’re tied to Israel because of our history. In fact, I found that really way overdone. And now the circle closes. I just don’t know anymore. [ID 6, p. 13]

The single most important finding of the study, however, is that current statistics on the extent of antisemitism in Germany must be considered relatively. As noted, until now quantitative public opinion research has maintained that 15–20 percent of the German population are antisemitic. Since the total population is about 82.5 million, this represents between 12.4 and 16.5 million antisemites: or some 62 to 82.3 antisemites for every one of the roughly 200,000 Jews living in Germany. Although exact percentages cannot be established, the findings of the study presented here show that the 15–20 percent range is set too low and that constant repetition of these figures – however shocking they may appear – contributes more to preserving a false sense of security than to elucidating the actual conditions that obtain: for according to the criteria employed in quantitative public opinion research, only a fraction of the persons surveyed in the present
study would be classified as antisemites, since some of the items relevant to their classification as such were not significantly present. This is also due to empirical methodology: in order to be placed in a particular category within the bounds of a quantitative study (opinion poll), the respondent must agree definitely not only with one question but also consistently with several questions from the same thematic group. As a rule, opinion polls always present multiple questions from the same thematic complex, and only after concurring with several questions on the same topic will the respondent be given a final classification. In concrete terms, this means that the respondents of (qualitative) interviews would not necessarily be classified as antisemites according to the guidelines of the standardized (quantitative) opinion polls, because sometimes they only agreed with questions that corresponded to secondary antisemitism. For example, a person could agree with the standardized statement “I get angry over the fact that Germans are still held accountable today for the crimes against the Jews,” but reject all other statements pertaining to antisemitism such as “Jews have too much influence in Germany,” or “The Jews are partly to blame for their persecution due to their own behavior.” According to quantitative criteria, this person would not be classified as antisemitic. Based on personal, non-standardized interviews, this apparently fictitious person, who is actually a real-life respondent, must nonetheless be described as very likely having pronounced, albeit latent, antisemitic resentments.

What this concrete example shows is that latent antisemitism is difficult to analyze through opinion polls, which present only simplistic questions. Moreover, one can say with certainty that latent antisemitism in Germany is more prevalent than quantitative studies have hitherto suggested. While the methodological tools of qualitative social science cannot establish just how widespread latent antisemitism is, the process of methodological triangulation allowed us at least to make clear the necessity of applying an integrated strategy to the problem of antisemitism. Indeed, such an approach is urgently required.
Notes

1. The study presented here is based on the author’s research work as a postdoctoral member of the research program *Gruppenbezogene Menschenfeindlichkeit* (“Group-Focused Enmity”) of the Universities of Marburg and Bielefeld. The program is funded by the German Research Foundation (DFG). This pilot study is a component of the author’s *habilitation* (qualifying postdoctoral thesis) in political science (in progress), entitled: “On the Political Theory of Antisemitism: An empirical-theoretical attempt to integrate socioscientific analytical strategies and methods.” The overall aim of the study is to assess the structures (sub-structure of the discursive edifice), contexts (discursive connections), and dynamics (displacements of sense) of antisemitism. Particular emphasis will be given to political psychology, whereby attention will be focused, above all, on collective patterns of identification and projection.


6. Henryk M. Broder, *Der Ewige Antisemit. Über Sinn und Funktion eines beständig
Gefühls (Frankfurt-a-M., 1986), 11.


16. See the overview of quantitative studies on antisemitism in Salzborn and Schwietring, “Antizivilisatorische Affektmobilisierung.”
