

# 1 INTRODUCTION

## The Need for This Book

Hostility toward Jews has manifested itself over many centuries not only through physical violence and social discrimination but also through language that stigmatizes and defames its objects. Verbal antisemitism is a form of mental violence that uses language as a weapon to express discriminatory and insulting attitudes and distort reality. Such language creates and maintains images of the Jew as the enemy, passing such negative images and ancient stereotypes from generation to generation. Language plays a unique role in preserving and transmitting antisemitic resentments: linguistic utterances activate or construct specific concepts of Jews as alien, odd, and evil beings, thereby evoking negative feelings. Language functions to preserve knowledge over the course of history, maintaining collectively established concepts, and in this way many Judeophobic ideas have been kept alive over the centuries. Among the demonizing characterizations applied to Jews are *monsters*, *devils*, and *fiends*. According to this usage, Jews are *greedy usurers*, *devious conspirators*, and *vengeful exploiters*, epithets that discredit Jews' morality. Describing them as *alien*, *arrogant*, *obstinate*, and *different* discriminates against them as a minority. Judaism is associated with attributes such as *atavistic*, *brutal*, *strange*, and *heretical* with respect to Christianity—the *one true faith*—and thereby delegitimized as a religion. Repeated exposure to such clichés and stock phrases results in the construction of partially conscious, partially unconscious mental representations that can solidify into permanent attitudes, belief systems, and even worldviews. Often, however, those who appropriate these long-standing usages have no awareness of their lineage or their potential to exclude and degrade those to whom they are applied. Yet in both the past and the present, negative attitudes toward Jews and images of them as the enemy are by no means found only on the margins of society; they occur frequently among mainstream individuals who are educated, comfortably situated economically, and not politically radical.<sup>1</sup> In this connection, many fail to notice or recognize how dangerous it is to use such formulations, es-

pecially those that unthinkingly express and reproduce age-old patterns of hostility toward Jews.

It is therefore an important concern of this book to raise awareness of the power and the violence that can emanate from language, especially when used in a particular way. Drawing on a wealth of empirical examples, we will show that current linguistic usage still incorporates the entire range of traditional anti-Jewish stereotypes and emotional resentments—despite all the education Germans have received since the Holocaust—and that antisemitic notions are not exclusively the province of extremists on the far right and left. Educated people in Germany also produce utterances with content hostile toward Jews—sometimes intentionally, sometimes unconsciously. One can identify different types of verbal antisemitism: in a communicative sense Judeophobia can be explicit—in other words, overt—or implicit, meaning indirect and recognizable from the conclusions that can be drawn and from knowledge of the context. Up to now the specific features of current Judeophobic usage have been inadequately analyzed and described.<sup>2</sup> Especially prominent among the inadequately known and investigated phenomena are the implicit forms of verbal antisemitism that can be heard or read increasingly in public discourse. Such forms can be detected contextually by means of implicatures: the word *Jew(s)* need not occur in an utterance for it to count as antisemitic. Hostility toward Jews can find expression in many different ways—through allusions, paraphrases, or a combination of specific arguments.

This book treats the various verbal manifestations of contemporary hostility toward Jews, and the underlying conceptions of Jews and Judaism, using the tools of historical discourse analysis and of linguistics and cognitive science.

An analysis of the specific lexical, semantic, syntactic, and argumentative-conceptual traits of antisemitic language thus provides the basis not only for a better understanding of the stereotypes and the emotionally colored prejudices such language expresses, but also for a comprehensive picture of the cultural, social, cognitive, and affective phenomenon of hostility toward Jews.<sup>3</sup> Because debates—some of them fierce and highly emotional—continue to flare up in German society over whether a given oral or written expression deserves to be categorized as antisemitic, it is also critically important to achieve clarity and to establish unambiguous criteria for classification that will make it possible to resolve the question when it arises. In addition to describing the specific ways in which current hostility toward Jews finds verbal

expression, this book therefore also aims to establish indicators drawn from the methodology of textual analysis that will address the question “When is a linguistic utterance antisemitic?”<sup>4</sup>

The empirical basis for our study is the analysis of an extensive corpus; while primarily qualitative, this analysis also allows us to include certain quantitative elements when they help us present a more comprehensive picture of modern manifestations of antisemitism in verbal utterances.<sup>5</sup> The study rests on the analysis of more than fourteen thousand communications received by the Central Council of Jews in Germany (sent between 2002 and 2009) and the Israeli Embassy in Berlin (sent between 2004 and 2012). These communications offer insight into the authors’ attitudes, thoughts, and feelings, and thereby into the forms in which hostility toward Jews manifests itself in the twenty-first century.<sup>6</sup> We augmented the analysis of this corpus of e-mails, faxes, and letters by examining representative examples of the language found in the mass media, for example in letters to the editor and newspaper articles, on posters, and in blog posts. These data, sampled at random, demonstrate that the stereotypes and arguments we have identified, far from being confined to the specific genres of the e-mail and the letter, turn out to be typical of a broad spectrum of public communication. Thus we are in a position to use a representative study to show how hostility toward Jews manifests itself in current language usage,<sup>7</sup> and to discuss the extent to which the interaction of cognitive categorization and emotional reactions can be discerned on various structural levels of these patterns. We can thereby capture not only the verbal characteristics of antisemitic usage but also the conceptual frameworks within which that usage operates. It is particularly important to render these frameworks visible, because only by bringing them to light can we identify hostility toward Jews as a distinctive mental and affective phenomenon. In the future, modern research on antisemitism must respond more attentively to this requirement and produce more qualitative discourse analyses.

The questions that come to the fore in textual analysis of the corpus bear on the verbal characteristics of antisemitic usage as well as the underlying intellectual structures within which categorization and evaluation take place. We address the following questions: Which (traditional) anti-Jewish stereotypes are reflected explicitly or implicitly in the texts themselves, and in what (new) conceptual combinations do they occur? What emotional attitudes underlie the verbalization of attitudes hostile toward Jews? What strategies of argu-

mentation are employed to articulate and justify antisemitic contents? What modalities and structures in the texts serve to portray and express attitudes hostile toward Jews? Which of these forms of expression automatically convey antisemitism through their semantic features alone, independent of context, and which, on the other hand, lend themselves to an anti-Jewish reading only in context and when analyzed from a cultural standpoint?

All of our analyses proceed on the assumption that linguistic utterances provide insight into the cognitive and affective activity of those who produce them. Accordingly, the texts offer a picture of their authors' mental structures, attitudes, and feelings. This book employs an interdisciplinary approach to analysis: we combine historiological reflection and linguistic textual analysis in order to capture the phenomenon of hostility toward Jews as comprehensively and as precisely as possible, in all its varied forms. Up to now such an approach has not been employed in research on antisemitism, despite its having been put forward as a desideratum a number of times. Historical, sociological, or philologically oriented treatments of hostility toward Jews usually lack detailed analysis of texts. Furthermore, many important aspects do not undergo sufficiently precise explication. Instead one often finds only very general and vague statements about antisemitic utterances, and many phenomena do not receive adequate explanation, with terms such as *code*, *cliché*, and *stereotype* (often used almost interchangeably) applied without clear definitions or distinctions. Concepts such as "latent," "manifest," "implicit," "explicit," "direct," "indirect," and the like are usually used imprecisely outside of linguistics, which contributes to confusion and lack of clarity. On the other hand, purely linguistic investigations of verbal antisemitism often limit themselves to descriptive catalogs of stylistic or rhetorical, lexical, and syntactic features, without taking into consideration their dependence on contextual factors, their long-term and deep-seated cultural embeddedness and cognitive connections, or their relevance to communicative and manipulative mechanisms. A further complicating factor is the use of highly specific technical jargon, which makes it difficult for nonlinguists to understand detailed linguistic analyses and renders them inaccessible or off-putting. In this book we aspire to maintain the precision necessary for scholarly analysis of the textual material, offering clear explanations and accurate use of technical terminology, while formulating these explanations as accessibly and clearly as possible. All the relevant theoretical and scholarly aspects are explored with

reference to concrete examples from the corpus. We are convinced that the wealth of authentic examples makes it possible to give the reader a particularly vivid impression of the modalities and import of language expressing hostility toward Jews. The meta-observations incorporating historical and cognitive perspectives are intended to bring into clear focus the phenomenon of modern hostility toward Jews in its sociocultural, cognitive, and emotional contexts.

After a brief discussion of the relevance and function of language when it comes to establishing and transmitting beliefs and attitudes hostile toward Jews, we will draw on historical texts to establish the extent to which certain mental stereotypes have persisted in cultural memory and have been repeated in communicative practice and language with remarkable consistency. In this connection we will examine the genesis of the hatred to which Jews have been subjected over many centuries. After characterizing the forms in which this hostility found expression in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, knowledge of which is essential to any recognition of antisemitism as a phenomenon that rears its head repeatedly, we will concentrate on current verbal instances of antisemitic thinking from the first decade of the twenty-first century in Germany. It should be noted that, contrary to common assumptions, the Holocaust by no means constitutes a break with inherent prejudices and hatred directed toward Jews; after 1945 no truly probing self-critical reflection or processing of the recent past with respect to all societal structures took place of the sort that the recent caesura in civilization would have called for.

Accordingly, most of the conceptual patterns that characterize two millennia of hostility toward Jews reappear, sometimes in traditional, sometimes in new forms of expression. In this connection we will also show that to this day many components (words, phrases, metaphors) of the Nazis' ideologically colored terminology continue to crop up. Modern stereotypes, arguments, and strategies, as well as the linguistic forms they take, will be described and explained in context. We will also show the extent to which anti-Israel sentiment has become the dominant form of contemporary verbal antisemitism, such that references to the Jewish state function as proxies for a general hatred of Jews. A brief comparative study of verbally antisemitic texts in other European countries follows, calling attention to the significant conceptual commonalities to be found in hostile attitudes toward Jews elsewhere in Europe. In German discourse this hostility appears to be invested with a greater intensity, occasioned by the Nazi past, of guilt, shame, denial of memory and

responsibility, and compassion fatigue. For that reason, we will also explore the emotional dimension of modern antipathy to Jews and show what sentiments (interacting with stereotyped thinking) shape the affective and irrational basis of hostility toward Jews. This hostility rests primarily on a deep-seated resentment, endemic to Western culture, that turns out to be highly resistant to facts, education, and argumentation. That makes it all the more important not merely to describe the diverse forms of repression, denial, and reinterpretation in modern antisemitic discourse but also to create widespread critical awareness of its existence and prevalence and thereby to develop possibilities for combating it.