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– Manuscript –

## **Lessons learned from German sociology, 1933–45: contexts and content**

Wiebke Keim

This essay deals with a specific historical context for sociology: the period 1933–45 in Germany. It raises questions about the definition and self-definition of the discipline.<sup>1</sup> How far did the given historical, socio-cultural, economic, and legal contexts affect the work of sociologists? Can we speak of sociology as soon as the actors of the period speak of themselves as sociologists? Or otherwise, if we are to avoid historical relativism, what are the general criteria and requirements that allow us to define whether a given academic field, its actors, and activities were sociology or not, independently of the self-definition of those actors? Finally, what have the consequences been of the 1933–45 period for German sociology and for the discipline as such through to the present? If there is little literature within German-language sociology on the history of the discipline between 1933 and 1945, it appears that there is still much less available for an international audience. The essay thus also attempts to familiarize non-German readers with the state of the art. In order to understand the developments between 1933 and 1945, and to evaluate the significance of this historical period for the discipline in Germany and beyond, it is vital to get an impression of the state of affairs before 1933. This paper is thus structured into two periods—prior to 1933 and 1933–1945—and examines the contexts and contents of sociology for each of them. We can assume a dialectical relationship between contexts and contents, where the given socio-historical context strongly affects developments within the discipline, while the latter also has some reflexive repercussions on how society was perceived and how non-academic actors, here especially the political power elites, thought it should and could be organized and administered. The focus will mainly be on the extent to which context affects content.

### **Pre-1933 contexts**

The years from the end of the nineteenth century until the end of the First World War can be considered as the founding phase of German sociology, when proponents of the discipline, such as Max Weber and Georg Simmel, produced their major foundational texts, distinguishing themselves from the French programme as proposed by Emile Durkheim. Karl Marx had offered another programme for socio-historical analysis from which many contemporary sociologists, either implicitly or explicitly, distanced themselves. After the founding phase, German sociology increasingly diversified during the Weimar Republic (1918–33). The multiplicity of perspectives and approaches in the country remains unequalled before and after that period, to the point that the coherence and common core of the discipline were questioned (Lepsius 1981b). The Weimar Republic made important contributions to institutionalizing sociology. The number of scholars who formed part of the sociological community kept growing continuously, resulting in the heterogeneity and multiplicity that characterized the 1920s, with its fragmentation into many circles and milieus. Furthermore, it should be noted that before 1933, the German-language area formed a rather well-integrated scholarly community, beyond Germany, including Austria or the former Habsburg Empire, and Switzerland. Interestingly, the Jewish intellectual community formed an important part in it, especially in the social sciences (König 1971: 123–36).

It is noteworthy for the development of the discipline that the universities founded after the war established the first chairs in sociology. The German Sociological Association (*Deutsche Gesellschaft*

für Soziologie, DGS) began to struggle for the possibility to obtain degrees in sociology from the middle of the 1920s. The discussion became more concrete at the beginning of the 1930s and crystallized in Karl Mannheim's speech at the conference of German university professors of sociology in February 1932 (Mannheim 1932). His speech reflected the problems of that generation of sociologists. Mannheim distanced himself from ideological and historicist currents, which he deemed particularly dangerous in contemporary Germany, and he respected sociology's self-definition as an empirical discipline. He also strengthened the view that the heterogeneity within the discipline was not only a source of chaos and disorder, as many of his colleagues used to complain, but that it hosted an important richness and variety for the sociological endeavour. Finally, he distinguished three sociological orientations: the political-juridical one, the socio-economic one, and the philosophical one. This shows that the exact definition of the field, of its matter and aims, remained unresolved until the end of the Weimar Republic. The consideration and prestige Mannheim had earned through his *Ideology and Utopia* (1929) may indicate that this theoretician could have had considerable impact on the development of the discipline, had he been able to continue after 1933.

Despite the decision of the Prussian Parliament in 1929 that all universities should establish chairs of sociology, the systematic institutionalization of the discipline could not be completed, first because of the economic depression of 1929, then because of the political situation after 1933. After 1928, Lepsius observed a particular vivacity and accelerated development in sociological activities, expressed among other things in the growing number of publications. The generation in their early thirties were beginning to be appointed to chairs, and struggled for a clearer self-definition of the discipline, strengthening at the same time the empirical research on contemporary social structures. Mannheim and Horkheimer, who took over the positions of Carl Grünberg and Franz Oppenheimer at Frankfurt, Theodor Geiger, who had arrived at Braunschweig in 1928, Albert Salomon and Gottfried Salomon (later Salomon-Delatour) formed part of this new generation, who had grown up in the shadow of the war and post-war period, and who now confronted the older generation of scholars from the time of the German Empire. The conjuncture of sociology after 1928 was thus animated by these younger sociologists. They were to be overtaken, in the middle of their intellectual development and production, by the Nazi accession to power a few years later. Apart from Hans Freyer, who became one of the major scholars in sociology under Nazism, all the others emigrated after 1933 (Karl Mannheim, Max Horkheimer, Theodor Geiger, Paul Honigsheim, Albert and Gottfried Salomon; see Wittebur 1991).

### **Pre-1933 contents, and the formation of Nazi ideology**

German sociology before 1933 was thus spread across a variety of centres and institutions. We need only mention a few important representatives and give a sketchy impression of their thematic and theoretical orientations. Vienna and Berlin, as major centres, represented various approaches. The intellectual scene in Berlin was described by König in his essay "The sociology in Berlin around 1930" (1987) in which he highlighted Werner Sombart, Alfred Vierkandt, Karl Dunkmann, Richard Thurnwald (more for social anthropology) and Götz Brief as major influences. In Vienna, the organicist ideas of Gustav Ratzenhofer and Ludwig Gumplowicz were reanimated and hotly debated in the face of the new political context. Othmar Spann was appointed at Vienna with the support of bourgeois and Catholic political parties, in order to counterbalance leftist currents with his neo-Romanticist ideas. The very heterogeneous Marxist tradition had gained access to German and Austrian universities for the first time after the First World War. However, due to the course taken by the Russian Revolution and the assassination of Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht, Marxism was running short of optimism. The discovery of the early writings of Marx and their publication by the Frankfurt School resulted in a brief revival. But the intellectuals participating in these efforts were among the first to be persecuted at the beginning of the 1930s. Carl Grünberg, who left Vienna for a position at Frankfurt, was the first to establish relations between Austro-Marxism and the Frankfurt School. Another interesting figure related to Austro-Marxism was Otto Neurath, who acted as a bridgehead to the Vienna Circle. The latter, in 1929, published its manifesto 'The Scientific Conception of the World—The Vienna Circle' (Verein Ernst Mach 1929), which resumed their idea of a unified science based on logical empiricism. Another representative of neo-positivism was Karl Popper. Finally, Vienna was the home of a burgeoning empirical social research around the young

Paul Lazarsfeld, Marie Jahoda, and their 'Moriental' study group. Most of those sociologists from Vienna went into exile after 1934 and continued their scholarly activities abroad, mainly in New York.

Frankfurt hosted theoreticians such as Franz Oppenheimer and Carl Grünberg as well as the Institute for Social Research. Frankfurt University gained in importance with the appointment of Karl Mannheim and Max Horkheimer. Cologne was home to Leopold von Wiese, who proved to be instrumental in institutionalizing the discipline, Max Scheler, Helmuth Plessner, and Paul Honigsheim, who represented diverging perspectives. In Heidelberg, Alfred Weber and Emil Lederer were trying to mark a departure from Max Weber, and the younger generation—Edgar Salin, Arnold Bergstraesser, and Karl Mannheim—had little in common either. Finally, there were Ferdinand Tönnies in Kiel, Andreas Walther in Göttingen and later in Hamburg, Johann Plenge in Münster, and Max Graf zu Solms in Marburg. And then there was Hans Freyer, who was to have influence during the Nazi period in Leipzig.

This diversity of approaches also comprised a number of sociologists with close affinities to Nazi ideology. Obviously, Nazism did not unexpectedly emerge from a vacuum in 1933. Adolf Hitler had already become leader of the NSDAP in 1921; two unsuccessful attempts to overthrow the state followed in 1920 and 1923. The ideological support for Nazism started to form long before 1933, and the conservative and right-leaning social sciences made their contributions to it (König 1987: 123–36). The elites in these milieus were characterized by their anti-industrial, anti-capitalist (for which read anti-Jewish capital), anti-socialist, and anti-urban attitudes. They combined their obsolete and insufficient theoretical approaches with what they took for Marx's social philosophy, in order to overcome the problems of their time intellectually. König analyses their contribution to the emergence of Nazi ideology in the following way:

The adoption of Marxism by bourgeois social thinking is the expression of the shock experienced by the German bourgeois world when, under the impression of the second drive of development of the modern industrial system from the beginning of the twentieth century, then under the impression of the war and revolutionary post-war chaos and inflation, fell out of their comfort zone and saw themselves confronted with the completed realities of a new world, lacking the adequate means to dominate it intellectually, eventually with the only exception of Max Weber, who had died, however, in 1920. (König 1987: 243)<sup>ii</sup>

König concludes by remarking that 'the polemic had become universal and total'. He illustrates this with the example of Freyer's 'Sociology as a science of reality' (Freyer 1930), in which the author claims that truth is a question of political voluntarism: 'Real will founds real knowledge'. The right-wing thinkers developed the idea of a 'revolution from the right', aimed simultaneously at socialism and the liberal bourgeoisie. This 'revolution' was meant to put an end to the social problems of the time—urbanization, poverty, capitalism, inflation, the supposed 'domination of Jews in the economy', and so on—and to get back to the life in 'communities', giving its importance back to the '*Volk*' ('the people'). The *Volk* was conceived as the subject of this revolution.

There were various sources that enabled the emergence of Nazi ideology. Germany had been one of the centres of development in the humanities and humanism throughout the nineteenth century. Lukács presents a detailed account of what he calls the 'irrationalist' tradition of thought in German philosophy, underlying, according to the author, most of its humanist and social science ideas, as the 'most significant reactionary response to the great problems of the last one and a half centuries' (Lukács 1962: 9). He finds in it 'Germany's path to Hitler in the domain of philosophy' (Lukács 1962: 10). By irrationalist thinking, he means romanticism, the depreciation of critical reason, the apotheosis of intuition, of culture as opposed to civilization, the rejection of social and historical progress, anti-socialism, and the creation of myths. These are found, for instance, in the broad range of approaches bracketed in the overarching tendency that he is content to call *Lebensphilosophie* (philosophy of life). If this irrationalism appeared all over Europe, its heartland was Germany. Another important figure of thought present in German social thought that was relevant for the emergence of Nazi ideology was that of society as an organism. The metaphor of the '*Volkskörper*' (the idealized corpus or body of the *Volk*) was useful in order to overcome all sorts of social conflicts—except for racial divides, of which more anon.

Furthermore, Nazi ideology could build on a long tradition of anti-Semitism. What characterized anti-Semitism as opposed to other social antagonisms was the minority status of Jews in European society. Not only did Jews represent a permanently present and visible challenge to Christianity, a continuous 'alter ego of the Christian church', co-defining Christian identity, since Christianity originated in its opposition to Judaism (Bauman 1994: 52), they also represented a problem of being 'strangers' within the social order. While social segregation seemed to be a 'natural' aspect of medieval society, it became a practical, social, and political problem with modernity and growing Jewish emancipation. Simultaneously, the ancient figure of the Jew as the arch deviant led to reinterpretations of the Jew as the capitalist and socialist incarnate in the same personality, that is, as the responsible for the most important problems in history and society. Until the middle of the nineteenth century, anti-Semitism combined with an antimodernist attitude, a critique of social change towards modernization. Once it became obvious that social change was irreversible, and there was no return to petty-bourgeois, conservative, romantic community life, anti-Semitism became an element of many socialist theories as well. Society needed to overcome capitalism and to emancipate itself from the Jews (Bauman 1994: 62). There had to be a new way of defining, rationally explaining, politically legitimizing, administrating, and controlling the Jewish 'others', a way that was adapted to modern society. There had to be a construction of natural difference between those Jews who became increasingly invisible and merged with the rest of the population, who could freely choose who to marry and which profession to pursue. Modern anti-Semitism was thus a product of the homogenizing tendencies of modern nation-states, where the problem was not high levels of segregation, but precisely the loss of dividing lines. The solution to this dilemma was to transform cultural, historical, and religious anti-Semitism into an issue of race. Thus, any attempt at assimilation, integration, and education on part of the arch deviant could be declared an endeavour in vain. This is what Arendt meant by her statement that Judaism was replaced by being Jewish—religious deviance became existential. 'Jews have been able to escape from Judaism into conversion; from Jewishness there was no escape' (Arendt 1963: 87).

Finally, anti-Semitism, combined with right-wing anti-socialism and anti-capitalism, was a means of projecting the widespread social fear of the Jews and gaining mass support at times of economic crisis. The trick was to separate the 'good sides' of capitalism, '*schaffendes Kapital*' (national, purely German, creative, industrial, and agrarian capital), from its bad side, '*raffendes Kapital*' (international, Jewish, exploitive, trade, and financial capital). The chief Nazi ideologist Alfred Rosenberg declared that socialist or Marxist anti-capitalism worked in favour of the Jews; instead, the question was one of ownership of capital by race (Rosenberg [1931] 1934: 581–2). Feder in his 'Der Deutsche Staat auf nationaler und sozialer Grundlage' theorized this critique of (Jewish) financial capital. It served as a main reference for Hitler's *Mein Kampf*, making Feder the leading ideologist for the Nazi critique of capitalism (Feder 1933: 7 ff.).

So far, our enumeration of historical sources of social ideas is as incomplete as attempts by existing history of the sociology to understand the emergence of Nazi ideology (König 1987, esp. 230–57; Lepsius 1981b; Rammstedt 1986). It is useful here to bring insights from recent post-colonial approaches and from transnational intellectual history to the discipline. As a special issue on 'Decolonizing German theory' shows, the impact of colonialism on social thinking in Germany has been an important but generally neglected factor in the history of the discipline (see Steinmetz 2006; Keim forthcoming 2013). For instance, Weber is described here as 'an imperialist, a racist, and a Social Darwinist nationalist, and these political positions fundamentally shaped his social-scientific work' (Zimmerman 2006: 53; see also Dussel 1993). These influences can be traced back in various fields of social thought and in the diverse works by central representatives of the German social sciences and humanities.

As elsewhere in the European metropole, the subject and self of German humanism emerged simultaneously as the colonial 'other':

Already in the late eighteenth century, the German humanities (or *Geisteswissenschaften*) had been engaged with, and informed by, imperialism. ... Humanist notions of the self were both defined and profoundly threatened by the existence of humans whom Europeans regarded as inferior. A number of scholars have recently shown how this notion of a European self was

worked out in the colonies or that the 'self' of humanism and the 'other' of imperialism were twin births. For all its provincialism, German humanism was, from the very beginning, a global discourse that made sense of the colonial encounter by defining a Europe self-unaffected by it. (Zimmerman 2001: 2–3)

The German humanities' proponents—Herder, Kant, and Hegel—had explicitly dismissed the majority of humans as objects of study because of their supposed lack of history, literacy, and overall culture (Zimmerman 2001: 39).

This was the very time when anthropology was emerging as a new discipline, challenging the humanities' position in academic institutions and in social thought. The conditions for its emergence were, on the one hand, the realities of imperialism—anthropology could apply natural science models to the study of human beings only after colonial expansion gave access to the necessary 'raw materials', not only travel accounts, but skulls and other human remains, to be brought back to the metropole and studied comparatively. On the other hand, the strong standpoint and increasing importance of the natural sciences, under which anthropology placed its study of humans, as opposed to the humanities, played their part. The legitimizing claim was that the new discipline would answer the requirements of the modern era; that is, natural science offered knowledge of all human peoples, not focused exclusively on European societies and their history. Thus, in Germany, as opposed to other European countries where anthropology was founded at much the same time, its role was above all an anti-humanist one (Zimmerman 2001: 3).

There are at least two other major sources of influence that combined in Nazi ideology: race thinking and Social Darwinism. They both had long traditions of their own, in which colonialism played an important role. From the 1890s onwards, nationalism in Germany was increasingly dominated by ethnic categories: race thinking permeated nationalist ideas. For a long time, this reformulation of nationalist self-representation with race thinking has been interpreted as an effect of growing anti-Semitism. However, Conrad (2008: 94–5) shows that thinking in terms of race as well as related political measures had predominated in the colonies before that date. For instance, the idea of the 'nigger' as the most inferior race, 'born for slave labour', following Chamberlain and Gobineau, scientifically legitimized colonial exploitation and racial segregation measures. According to Lukács, while Nietzsche was a 'prophet' of an abstract, poetic, and mythical imperialism, Chamberlain continued this line of thought, but made it practical. In degrading the colonized to sub-humans, he had justified German imperialist politics (Lukács 1962: 605 ff.).

The step to combine race thinking with different shades of Social Darwinist thinking was a short one. In order to understand the links between former race thinking, Social Darwinism, and Nazism, Chamberlain is a key figure, a philosophical 'classic' of Nazism (Lukács 1962: 17) who combined race theory with Social Darwinist elements. In 1927, Rosenberg had written a whole book about Chamberlain, who was a friend of the Kaiser and who had met Hitler in 1923—and who had been awarded the Iron Cross for his writings in favour of the First World War.

The field of eugenics (or, in German, '*Rassenhygiene*', 'racial hygiene') bordered that of anthropology as a scientific discipline and achieved fusions with Social Darwinism. Eugenics was a crucial influence in Nazi ideology, one which dated back to about 1880 and had grown stronger with the approach of the First World War, and was an international current of social thought, with representatives in Europe and North America, as well as Latin America, Asia, and Australia (Schmuhl 2011: 25 ff.). The concern of eugenics was to intentionally improve given 'races' by 'breeding' those with favourable physical and phenotypical characteristics while preventing 'degenerate' individuals from reproducing.

Eugenics in Germany had reached broad recognition by the First World War and continued to grow throughout the Weimar years. Initially planned to be associated with sociology, from the 1920s onwards eugenics was established in all German universities as a subdiscipline of medicine, and was later linked to psychiatry (Schmuhl 2011: 26 ff.). The difference between the Nazis' use of race thinking and earlier periods is that eugenics and racial policy were declared the basis of the '*biopolitische Entwicklungsdiktatur*' ('bio-political dictatorship of development', Schmuhl 2011), supposed to inform all other fields of politics. Nazism was to be more consequent than any other

regime in applying racial and eugenic ideas to all populations under its rule: the breeding of the German 'race' was declared the top responsibility of the Nazi state (Rosenberg [1931] 1934: 575; see Kundrus 2003: 111).

Finally, Nazi ideology coined the conceptual pairing of '*Blut und Boden*' ('blood and soil') in a unique fusion of racial and territorial concepts that took centre stage in the preparation and realization of the Second World War. However, it built on imperialist territorial ideas that had been developed within a colonial context.

To conclude, Nazi ideology was

heterogeneous and highly self-contradictory in logic and in empirical referents, but the elements of which it was composed had almost all been thoroughly legitimated in the course of their political employment during the previous two or three generations. (Smith 1986: 234)

Various strands of social thought represented in sociology and its neighbouring disciplines, or the humanities and social sciences more broadly, had contributed to its formation. It was going to be instrumental in shaping the context of sociological practice in the ensuing period.

## **Contexts, 1933–1945**

The years 1933 to 1945 represent a particularly difficult chapter in the history of sociology. In the first place, it seems necessary to distinguish two very different strains of development, namely the sociology that stayed on under Nazi rule on the one hand, and the sociology in exile on the other. To argue that exiled sociology was part of German sociology seems to require less explanation than the fact of naming the discipline as it developed under Nazism sociology.

Many books on the history of sociology remain unclear about the tendencies in those years, often declaring that German sociology came to complete standstill in 1933 (see Jonas 1976; Klages 1969; Lepenies 1981). Klingemann (1981: 273) remarks on the difficulty in dealing with the history of the discipline in the period, and the fact that representatives of all sociological orientations seem to be convinced that those twelve years have no relevance for sociology. At the same time, this period is the object of a vivid and often bitter debate among the (very few) interested scholars, and the extraction of generally accepted facts remains difficult. Here we must fall back on the seminal book by Rammstedt (1986), who offers a general presentation of sociology under Nazism. According to him, two positions have emerged in the discussion thus far. First, there is the thesis of the interruption of sociology between 1933 and 1945: the Nazis, hostile towards liberal, Marxist, and Jewish intellectuals, had put an end to sociology in 1933, and it only re-emerged after 1945. Second, there is the thesis of the incompatibility of sociology with any sort of fascist, 'engaged' right-wing scholarly activity, often combined with the first thesis. Paulsen (1988) adds a third thesis: the lack of influence and the absence of consequences of the sociology practised under Nazism for developments after 1945. This thesis represents a certain contradiction of the first two, and was particularly influential in early post-war discussions. The following will put all three assumptions into question. The difficulties in grasping the history of the discipline between 1933 and 1945 embodied by these three theses leads to its isolation, the underestimation of its importance, and even claims of its non-existence. The considerable lack of information on this period can thus be explained by the fact that many historians of sociology still believe in one of these three theses. For instance, national meetings of sociologists in the post-war period largely ignored the topic, which has remained under researched until today.<sup>iii</sup>

The particular difficulty in dealing with German sociology between 1933 and 1945 that I would like to problematize is the question of whether we can talk meaningfully about sociology given the scholarly activities so named during the period. This is a matter of content. It is first necessary to establish the contextual framework. It is noteworthy that the people, institutions, and books of the time were named 'sociological'; in other words, the self-definition of at least parts of the scholarly community diverged consistently from today's understanding of the discipline.<sup>iv</sup> Setting aside current views for a moment, what was it that was then considered sociology? Answering this question will not only help us to understand this chapter in the history of the discipline, but will also inject some much-needed caution into any discussion of the transformations a scholarly discipline may undergo in a given historical context.

Rammstedt refutes the thesis of the general discrimination and persecution of all sociologists by the Nazi regime:

A general rejection of sociology through the NSDAP or National Socialist ideology did certainly not happen. Rather, a career of the word 'sociology' can be traced as a consequence of the propagated 'völkisch' aspects of Nazi ideology; it went hand in hand with a popularization of the sociological perspective and its integration into the National Socialist *Weltanschauung*, as the latter was transformed into dominant knowledge. (Rammstedt 1986: 146)

Hitler himself, by the way, would not have hesitated to become a sociology professor. In order to be able to stand for the presidential elections, he needed to obtain German citizenship, and one of the solutions proposed in 1932 was to appoint him to the chair of 'Organic social theory and politics' at Braunschweig Technical University (Deuerlein 1968: 374). Certain sociology programmes had readily integrated the Nazis' ideology well before they came to power in 1933. What actually happened in the post-1933 context was a systematic exclusion of any approaches that were critical of the regime or did not correspond to its basic premises, and an ever more complete monopoly on those currents that supported the regime and were supported by it. However, this hegemonic status was not only a result of the politics of the Nazi regime, which banned and persecuted the currents it disliked. There was also a connection between official policy and the internal policies of the academic field. The perspectives that were close to the regime offered support and services, and were rewarded for doing so. Finally, sociology was unified more and more by its own means, and those means included the policies of the DGS.

A fact that is often underestimated is the degree of institutionalization and professionalization during the period under review:

Without any doubt, sociology was practised in Germany under National Socialism. In 1944/45 there were more chairs than in 1932/33; the number of university-based as well as extra-university sociological institutes grew rapidly; a professional field for sociologists outside academia became a reality for the first time. ... In 1933/34 many sociologists had to leave Germany. But in 1935, more scholars in Germany defined themselves as sociologists than ever before. (Rammstedt 1986: 164 ff.)

An important element in this institutionalization, professionalization, and scholarly networking was the DGS.<sup>9</sup> From the moment when Freyer started to show an interest, the DGS proceeded to internal political alignment ('*Gleichschaltung*') and refused membership to 'deviant' sociologists. The conference at Jena in 1934 was a meeting almost exclusively of those representatives who were close to Nazism. After this meeting, the DGS dissolved under circumstances that are still unclear and controversial.

Quite apart from the strengthening of those elements close to Nazism, sociology faced the exclusion of divergent thinkers and, importantly, Jewish academics, who represented a significant part of the scholarly community. Second to the burning of books by the Church in the Middle Ages, the Fascist biblioclasm is one of the most notorious in history (Rafetseder 1983; Körte & Ortlieb 2007). It suited the Nazis and their aim of ideological homogenization that anti-democratic, reactionary, and nationalist-racist thought was firmly anchored in the German universities. In March 1933, a well-organized 'action against the non-German spirit' (*Aktion wider den undeutschen Geist*) set out to persecute and silence Jewish, Marxist, and pacifist authors. It culminated on 10 May 1933, when in the Opernplatz in Berlin and a variety of other German cities, students, professors, and Nazi agents, in an orchestrated and ritualized manner, burned tens of thousands of books of literature, science, and the humanities (Schoeps & Treß 2008; Bracher 1974). Among the most prominent philosophers and social scientists who fell victim to the book-burnings were Walter Benjamin, Ernst Bloch, Sigmund Freud, Georg Lukács, Rosa Luxemburg, and Karl Marx. Repression and censorship led most of the established sociological periodicals to cease publication, including *Kölner Vierteljahreshefte für Sozialwissenschaften/Soziologie* (1921–34) and (*Sociologicus*) *Zeitschrift für Völkerpsychologie und Soziologie* (1934), while *Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung* moved to Paris in 1933.

Research on the exodus of German intellectuals and scholars started only in the 1970s, and an evaluation of the real loss to the German universities remains difficult. Wittebur (1991) in his



systematic study counts 141 exiled sociologists, or about one-third of the total scholarly community. Most of them had to leave the country as a consequence of the 'Law on the reinstatement of officialdom' (*Gesetz zur Wiederherstellung des Berufsbeamtentums*) of 7 April 1933, when they had to abandon their academic posts and were forced or decided to emigrate. This law targeted politically 'problematic' persons (mainly Marxists, left-wing liberals, and pacifists), who were the first to leave Germany. Later, the 'Special Laws' (*Sondergesetze*) forced Jews to leave Germany, regardless of their politics.

Apart from this international flight, so-called 'internal emigration' should be mentioned, an expression often used to hide or justify adaptation to the new regime. Among those in 'internal exile', however, were two important representatives of the discipline: Tönnies, one of the few professors who protested against anti-Semitic violence at the universities; and Alfred Weber, who, while university chancellor of Heidelberg in 1933, had intervened when students hoisted the Nazi flag over the university. The two of them lost their jobs and were forced to retire prematurely. Under the Nazis, it was nearly impossible for them to publish their works.

The intellectual and personal loss was enormous. During the 1930s, repression wiped out sociological institutes or even whole universities, as was the case with the Institute of Social Research at Frankfurt, which emigrated wholesale and reformed in New York. Cologne and Heidelberg lost half of their staff; Hamburg and Jena suffered huge losses too. Berlin and Leipzig, however, were hardly touched. The age of the exiles shows that it was mainly the young generation who fled the regime and thus did not contribute to the further development of the discipline (with the exception of those who returned after 1945, of course). The majority of the exiles were at the very beginning of their academic careers when they left Germany. The older ones often hesitated longer and found it much more difficult to leave, even after they had lost their positions. When it came to choice of destination, the first wave of academic refugees made for Germany's neighbours. It was only when it dawned on them that the Nazi regime was to remain in power for the foreseeable future that they began to favour more distant countries. In absolute numbers, the countries that took in the most refugee social scientists were, in decreasing order, the US, the UK, France, Switzerland, the Netherlands, and Turkey.<sup>vi</sup> The effects of context after 1933 were thus to cut much of the former diversity in approach, to those currents that were close to Nazi ideology or were at least regarded as harmless, whereas massive persecution awaited all the other thematic and theoretical currents and the people who embodied them.

## Contents, 1933–1945

While the variety of approaches persisted in exiled sociology, where the new context encouraged perspectives that went beyond ethnocentrism and German provincialism (König 1971: 103–21), in Germany the context led to a contraction of the discipline and a thematic and theoretical alignment with Nazi ideology:

If we look at emigration not according to its loss of potential of the staff, but according to its consequences for the scientific character of the sociology remaining in Germany, we can observe a systematic effect: the exclusion of certain scholarly traditions in sociology. The political intervention caused a selection of historical orientations in favour of historicism, holism, idealism, voluntarism, and Social Darwinism and to the disadvantage of an analysis of social change, of methodological individualism, of materialism, structuralism, and socialization theory. The first have a long tradition in German humanities and were influenced by Romanticism and idealism, to which Social Darwinism was later added. Nazism did not create these orientations wholesale, but it allowed their victory over the forces taking shape against these traditions from the end of the nineteenth century. (Lepsius 1981b: 17–18)

Furthermore:

Whatever social-scientific potential remained in Germany and Austria, it was unilaterally limited to the heritage of German idealism, at a transformation from sociological structural analysis towards a politically indifferent anthropology or a politically relevant biology, at a description of selective processes of population development, migrations, settlement patterns, and so on. (Lepsius 1981a: 462)

As outlined in the present essay, the direction which sociology was to take throughout the 1930s and 1940s was evident long before. Nevertheless, 1933 was a crucial moment in terms of a radically change in context. Many sociologists, like the majority of German scholars and professors, welcomed the change of government and Hitler's accession to power; the remainder fled. Many saw these events as indications of the change they had wished for, and that spoke directly to 'the essence' of the German people. They called this change '*Volkwerdung*'. The fact that so many professors signed the 'Avowal of German university professors to Adolf Hitler and the National Socialist State' (Nationalsozialistischer Lehrerbund/Sachsen 1933) proves the acceptance of Nazi ideology by many scholars.<sup>vii</sup>

The argument for positioning sociology close to the Nazi regime and its ideology was that sociology as a discipline of social realities had to change if reality changed. Accordingly, those sociologists struggled with theory-building and systematizations in order to give their discipline a new face. Their vision renounced any critical reflection on the 'knowledge of the National Socialist movement' and subordinated itself without complications. Karl Heinz Pfeffer, one of those thinkers who contributed to its formulation, can be cited as an example for this line of thought:

The present German sociology has nothing in common with this past 'sociology'. It even avoids bearing its name and hides in the garb of other sciences. It has different aims, different means, different conditions than former 'sociology'. It finds its tasks, its motivation, its moral attitude, and its intellectual foundations in the renewal of the German people through the National Socialist movement. It cannot be its task to criticize the fundamental knowledge of the National Socialist movement ... It can only absorb these fundamental insights, it can only subordinate itself to them. Then it will immediately deduce from them the right way to rigorous work, which alone gives it a right of existence in popular life. (Pfeffer 1939a: introduction)

With the hegemony of those currents close to Nazism came the rejection of approaches coming from abroad, especially from Germany's Western neighbours, which were often associated with 'Jewish' thinking and by their mere existence represented a threat to the homogenized German sociology:

The science of 'sociology' has been discredited in Germany because in the past, its name has often covered either 'inessential thinking' (*Geistreichelei*) or the influx of Western thinking hostile to the *Volk*. It has often succumbed to the combative doctrines of the Western nations that, in the name of an empirical science, claimed the universality of Western European social experience and institutions and thus became a weapon of England, France, and America. It often lent its name to Jewish thinking, which aimed at leading the German people to dismiss its *völkisch* necessities. (Pfeffer 1939a)

The idea of sociology as a 'weapon of Western European alienation of the German *Volk*' or that 'the Jews found a welcome weapon' in sociology is a recurrent feature in Pfeffer's texts (1939a: 426; see also 1939b). Consequently, in order to fit sociology into the new context and ideological orientation, any sociologists referring to unacceptable approaches needed to be eliminated from the scholarly community. Rammstedt concedes, however, that these homogenizing measures aimed at the field of theory in the first instance, while in empirical research the methodological basics were often borrowed elsewhere, for instance from the American literature.

One of the main theoreticians of Nazi period, Freyer, himself distinguished two phases in the development of sociology under Nazism, namely a phase of 'practical sociology' until 1936, and thereafter a phase of 'applied sociology' (Freyer 1935; see also Freyer 1930, 1931). On the theoretical level, the two periods were characterized by specific explanations for the reasons and modalities of the '*Volkwerdung*'. Directly after the Nazis came to power, which was thought an unequivocal sign of the 'awakening of Germany', historical events were explained using models from German historical philosophy. After 1936, bio-racial explanations, combined with a mythological discourse, became more dominant.

The so-called 'practical sociology' aimed at strengthening the 'emergence of the nation' and at influencing the process of '*Volkwerdung*'. After the supposed end of bourgeois-capitalist society, these sociologists saw it as their duty to contribute to the unification of the 'people'. The fact that sociology put itself at the service of the transformation of 'society' into '*Volk*' was presumably an

instance of German exceptionalism or particularity. ‘Applied sociology’ after 1936 came forward to take over the role of a technique and to submit to its instrumentalization through Nazi ideology and practice. According to Rammstedt, ‘After 1936, sociology became a “weapon of the regime” and was instrumentalized by the fascist *Weltanschauung*’. It thus finally gave up any distance from Nazi ideology, aimed at being used for the ‘structuring of the people’ and the identification of ‘inner and external enemies’—the question of ‘enemies’, having been acute right from the beginning, redoubled with the outbreak of the war—and combined with the development of techniques designed to maintain social order (Rammstedt 1986: 165). In its endeavour to serve the Nazi regime in practice, it increasingly gave up any sort of theoretical work and favoured empirical research. The results of such research, in key fields such as the sociology of security or military sociology, were to be of immediate value to the regime.

Certainly, these discourses, concepts, and theories were incompatible with what is today regarded as sociology. Concepts referring to the realities of the ‘*Reich*’, such as the mythical, essentialized and racially defined ‘*Volk*’, the ‘*Volkwerdung*’ (‘becoming the *Volk*’), notions of ‘race’ and ‘racial hygiene’—none are the least acceptable today. The assumption that the victory of Nazism would correspond to the realization of the German essence, expressed in the spirit of its people, could not be conceived today. In the same vein, on the pragmatic level, the discourses on the political mission at the service of Nazism inherent in sociological theory seem to be obsolete (see, for example, Freyer, cited in Rammstedt 1986: 85). Thus, from today’s standpoint, these discourses are not sociological.

## **Conclusion: consequences after 1945**

In this essay, I have raised the question of the effects of context on content. It appears that under the historical conditions of Nazism, the self-definition of sociology diverged greatly from today’s criteria, and the requirements of activities and approaches necessary to be accepted as sociology. This results in a paradoxical situation, where, on the one hand, it might be necessary to consider approaches that appear today to be highly erroneous as sociological in order to follow the history of our discipline in contexts as extreme as Nazi Germany, and where, on the other hand, we have to ask if there are generalizable scientific requirements of the discipline, independent of given historical, or social and cultural, specificities, and what these would be.

It also raises the issue of the means at the disposal of the (international) scholarly community to deal with developments such as those in Germany during this period. It would require further research to find out how the work by so-called sociologists who had close affinities to Nazism was received internationally. Since fascism was a European or even broader international phenomenon, there is no reason to believe it was generally condemned. There was not, as in the case of Apartheid South Africa, an international academic boycott (see Haricombe 1992; Keim 2008: 195 ff.).

Finally, it raises doubts about the consequences for sociology after 1945. The importance of returning exiles for the reconstruction of German sociology after the end of the Second World War has been acknowledged. However, a detailed study of the fate of those sociologists who had collaborated with the Nazi regime and who had favoured submission to and instrumentalization by Nazi ideology and practice, many of whom remained in their posts after 1945, is still notable by its absence. The post-colonial perspective has generated important insights into continuities and entanglements between colonialism and life and thought in the metropolises, and thus helped to revise fundamental assumptions regarding our discipline. A post-fascist sociology of a similar type still needs to be defined.

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<sup>i</sup> This article takes ideas initially formulated in Keim 2007 and sharpens them up with arguments to be presented in Keim forthcoming, reformulating the key questions and lessons to reflect the scope of this anthology. I would like to thank José Jiménez for his support in editing this paper for publication.

<sup>ii</sup> All translations from the German are my own.

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<sup>iii</sup> The ad hoc group on ‘The place of National Socialism in German sociology’, held during the last DGS Congress in Bochum in 2012, confirms this, and was an important step towards engaging in a broader debate about this period of German sociology.

<sup>iv</sup> In order to capture sociology under the National Socialists, Rammstedt (1986) relies on the following sources: sociological institutions; the self-definition as ‘sociologist’ in *Kürschners Gelehrten-Kalender* (‘Kürschner’s Calendar of Scholars’, an equivalent to ‘Who’s Who’) for the years 1931, 1935, 1940–1, and 1950; and a complete bibliography of publications between 1933 and 1945.

<sup>v</sup> On the history of the German Sociological Association after 1933 and again after 1945, see the discussion between König and Schelsky in Wittebur 1991; König 1971: 103–21; see also Adorno 1980.

<sup>vi</sup> The conditions under which the exiles were received varied considerably, and are too intricate an issue to be discussed at length here. The attitude towards emigrated intellectuals was not the same everywhere, so the possibility of finding an academic post also varied. What certainly characterized the situation in the majority of host countries was the dominance of a political attitude that was far from anti-fascist. At times when it may have seemed that the whole world was enthused about the Olympic Games in Berlin and when the international community was holding to a policy of détente towards Hitler’s Germany, refugees represented an ambiguous and bothersome element for the uncritical. In addition, they were received with widespread resentment and prejudice—fear of competition in the job market, fear for social privileges, fear of political annoyances. Turkey was an exception, as it was in need of an academic elite, and the migrant scholars from the West suited the framework of the Kemalist reforms, especially its aim to build up a modern university system, very well. The US, due to its status as an ‘immigrant country’, also presented interesting possibilities for an academic career.

<sup>vii</sup> The document was signed among others by Andreas Walther, Gerhard Mackenroth, Johann Wilhelm Mannhardt, Max Graf zu Solms, Max Rumpf, Karl C. Thalheim, Hans Freyer, Arnold Gehlen, Theodor Litt, Otto Friedrich Bollnow, Joachim Ritter, Hans-Georg Gadamer, and Martin Heidegger.