

Letter from the Editor

Few “turns” in the historiography of the past half century have been as contentious as the linguistic one, not least because of the heady challenges it poses to the “traditional” study and writing of history. It would be a stretch to suggest that the linguistic turn is a central focus of this issue of *Central European History*. Three of the articles nevertheless evoke in different ways the degree to which historians have become especially attuned to the importance and nuance of language—even if two of the pieces, which deal with the period prior to World War I, pass muster just as well as fine specimens of what some may simply consider to be “old-fashioned” intellectual history.

In any event, Marc Volovici’s **“Leo Pinsker’s *Autoemancipation!* and the Emergence of German as a Language of Jewish Nationalism”** examines a linguistic turn of a different sort. Taking a fresh look at a German-language pamphlet published in 1882 by a then relatively obscure Russian Jewish doctor now considered to be a pioneer of Zionism, the article focuses on the possible reasons and consequences of Pinsker’s decision to write in German, arguing, as the title suggests, that this played a major *transnational* role in making German a “central language” of the Jewish nationalist cause. Placing the pamphlet in the context of mid-nineteenth-century radical politics and debate about emancipation—with arresting comparisons to the contemporary work of Karl Marx and Mikhail Bakunin—Volovici forcefully demonstrates that the pamphlet marked an end to the exclusive use of German by those who embraced a strictly assimilationist project, thus making Pinsker’s choice a “critical juncture in Jewish language politics.”

Sacha Davis’s **“Competitive Civilizing Missions: Hungarian Germans, Modernization, and Ethnographic Descriptions of the *Zigeuner* before World War I”** focuses on contemporary writings about another persecuted minority—the so-called *Zigeuner*—as a way in which to map out a range of late nineteenth-century responses to increasing modernization and Magyarization pressures in the Habsburg lands. To that end, the article examines the work of three leading Hungarian–German scholars, making the “wonderful point,” in the words of one anonymous reviewer, that, although they had not performed much or even any recent fieldwork themselves (not unlike some senior scholars still active today, one might add), they still wrote “confidently ... about people and places they had not experienced first hand.” The German nationalist Johann Schicker, the Hungarian nationalist Anton Herrmann, and Heinrich Wlislöcki, a foe of all nationalist modernizing efforts, all used the *Zigeuner* as a backdrop or even archetype of sorts for articulating their differing views on nationalist modernization efforts. Paying close attention to language and tropes, Davis draws attention to an arresting paradox: whereas most contemporaries tended to view mobility in a positive light, seeing it as a key component of modernity, many considered it to be a sign of *backwardness* when it came to the vagrant lifestyle of the “wandering” *Zigeuner*. The article concludes with a thoughtful discussion of the way in which that perennially persecuted group “discursively functioned as the last symbol of German mastery,” thus laying the groundwork for further discrimination and, “ultimately, for the *Porajmos* (Romani Holocaust).”

The two other articles in this issue of *CEH* focus on the post-1945 period in East and West Germany. Richard Millington's "**‘Crime Has No Chance’: The Discourse of Everyday Criminality in the East German Press, 1961–1989**" pays close attention to the discursive ways in which the *Neue Berliner Illustrierte (NBI)*, one of the GDR's most popular weekly magazines, wrote about "really existing crime" following the construction of the Berlin Wall. In so doing, the article sheds light on the nitty-gritty dynamics of everyday press censorship in the GDR. At the same time, it shows how the leaders of a largely unloved regime endeavored to shape popular perceptions about the extent and nature of crime in East Germany—largely by distorting facts and figures about everyday criminal occurrences. This was part and parcel of ongoing efforts to secure popular legitimacy and instill "socialist values" that, they claimed, would supposedly eradicate any "felonious" vestiges of pre-1945 bourgeois society. The credibility of claims about such vestiges—a common excuse for a maddening array of continuing deficiencies in the GDR—must have grown increasingly thin by the 1980s, no doubt fueling the dogged discontent that finally brought down the SED regime.

Anna von der Goltz's "**Other '68ers in West Berlin: Christian Democratic Students and the Cold War City**" focuses its attention on developments during this period on—literally—the other side of the Wall, namely, in West Berlin. Relying on a variety of archival sources and oral history interviews, the article offers a major reevaluation of reigning narratives about West Germany's "long 1968" (my term) by focusing on the members of a group that has received little attention in the scholarly literature: conservative Christian Democratic students living at the time in the self-styled "capital" of the West German student movement. By looking at these "other '68ers," von der Goltz complicates the dominant narrative of this era in the Cold War city par excellence—i.e., as a clash between leftist youths, on the one hand, and a conservative establishment, on the other—by drawing attention to the variety of voices within the student movement, including youthful conservative ones that also collided with the establishment. This calls into question facile characterizations of the West German baby-boomer generation (in fact, of *any* generation) as a monolith. These conservative '68ers deserve attention as well because of the prominent role many would later play in West German politics and in unified Germany; as von der Goltz shows, their experiences at the time would have a formative effect on their later political activities. To my mind, the article makes an equally important point, however. It is well known that those on the political left referred to the lessons of the Nazi past to explain their own political sensibilities and outlook. What is often overlooked is the ways in which that very same past, coupled with the prosaic present just on the other side of the Berlin Wall, shaped the "anti-authoritarian" sensibilities and outlook of their counterparts on the right—in very different but equally plausible ways.

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