1886-1914: Youth and First Journalism

What were the deeper cultural backgrounds of Baschwitz and his work? What was the general atmosphere in the emerging German empire of his youth? What were the distant origins of his family and his family name? How about his social class and upbringing as a typical German Bildungsbürger? What was the precise nature of his Ph.D. dissertation in the early social sciences? Did he have a knack for writing, and why did he choose to become a journalist? How was he affected by the run-up to the First World War?

Wider historical background: ‘German exceptionalism’?

Baschwitz identified closely with Germany, at least until the eve of his flight to the neighbouring Netherlands at the age of 47. He considered himself a patriot throughout those decades, and he was. His liberalism evolved from progressive to more conservative (and then back again). He was a democrat who defended the constitution and the rule of law and was fiercely opposed to civil violence. These values are reflected in all of his books. His final breaking point, when he no longer could identify with Germany, was the coming to power of Hitler and the Nazis.

Ever since those days, historians have discussed the nature of German exceptionalism. How did the country differ from other major European nations? One of the many different proposals was that of Die verspätete Nation, the belated nation, originally put forth by Helmuth Plessner. Like Baschwitz, Plessner also came from the liberal southwest of the country and his father was of Jewish stock, but adhered to the Evangelical-Lutheran church and faith. Young Plessner had also been turned down by the army at the outset of the war for medical reasons, and had later opposed both the radical left and the radical right under the Weimar Republic. After Hitler came to power, Plessner also fled to The Netherlands, only slightly later than Baschwitz. First becoming a ‘private lecturer’ and then a professor, he went on to found the sociology department at Groningen university.1

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1 (b. Wiesbaden 1892- d. Göttingen 1985). Plessner was a pupil of the German sociologist Max Weber and later led the famous ‘Frankfurt School’ for a while. But originally he was a biologist and anthropologist. Dutch phenomenologist Frederik Buytendijk had a similar background, and helped him settle in The Netherlands. Another of Plessner’s classic works was a study on the polar opposite expressions of Lachen und Weinen (Laughing and crying, 1941), which was recommended reading when I started my psychology studies in Nijmegen in 1962.
Upon coming to The Netherlands, Plessner immediately wrote a study about the particularities of German development, which was published in Switzerland in 1935. While its thesis was that Germany was ‘a belated nation’, this only became its title for the Post-War edition – attracting further attention, reprints, and translations only at that point. Critics pointed out that Germany was not so much a belated and incomplete nation or linguistic and cultural community as it was a belated and incomplete state, a belated and incomplete democracy. Let us briefly look at these two statements.\(^2\)

How did Germany differ from the rest of Europe? The states along the Atlantic coast of Europe had all been united, centralized, and relatively strong for a long time, which also allowed them to accumulate additional wealth through colonial trade. This was true of both larger powers like Spain, France, and Britain, and smaller powers like Portugal, Belgium, and The Netherlands. Germany was lagging far behind in this respect.

Central Europe had instead been marked by *Kleinstaaterei* or ‘small statism’. It is true that Germany’s three ‘free’ Hanseatic cities (Hamburg, Bremen, and Lübeck) had profited from long distance trade – albeit initially mostly in the Baltic and the north. But apart from this, the fragmented country had long consisted of four separate kingdoms, five duchies, six grand duchies, and seven principalities.

It took the entire first half of the nineteenth century to gradually unite these fragments, first into a *Zollverein* or ‘customs union’. Then into a loose ‘North German’ confederation under Prussian hegemony, leaving out ‘South German’ Bavaria, the southwest, and Austria. Three brief, successive wars with neighbouring Austria, Denmark, and France later consolidated the borders of the united, modern *Reich* or ‘empire’, which was founded as late as 1871.\(^3\)

At that point, Germany also became a belated and incomplete democracy. The Napoleonic occupation had helped distort and derail the German Enlightenment – the bourgeois social and political revolutions – and replaced them by a romanticised national ideal that was bound to conflict with those of France and Britain, the Atlantic world, or even ‘the West’ in general.

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\(^2\) Contemporary discussions of the entire notion by Arno Widman in the *Berliner Zeitung*, 25 March 2000; and by Heinrich-August Winkler on the website of *Zeitzeichen: Evangelische Kommentare zur Religion und Gesellschaft*.

\(^3\) From then on, the Prussian king became *Kaiser*, the Prussian chancellor *Reichskanzler*. Prussian ministers, top bureaucrats, and army officers played a privileged role within the Empire until the end of the First World War. Meanwhile, the ‘three class’ voting system for its own state parliament tilted toward the wealthy, the conservatives, and the nationalists.
Both factors were reflected in the policies of Bismarck, the ‘architect’ of the empire, about whom both Baschwitz and Plessner had ambivalent feelings.

Bismarck was a Prussian Junker, or semi-aristocratic landowner, who became the Kanzler or prime minister of both his own state and the empire. He was a national conservative. Both Plessner and Baschwitz admired him as strong leader, Realpolitiker and smart operator, who had succeeded in welding the nation together – giving it a single time zone, unified measures and weights, legislation and oversight, its own central bank and currency, and a coherent transport and postal system.

On the other hand, they also regretted Bismarck’s occasional disdain for the national parliament and civil rights. Such as in his campaigns against political networks that he thought were becoming too strong and too independent, particularly those with significant connections across the border. They were deemed potential Reichsfeinde or enemies of the state. This resulted in a ‘cultural struggle’ against the Roman Catholics, and ‘socialist laws’ against the emerging (international) labour movement. Baschwitz expressed these ambivalent feelings about Bismarck throughout his life’s work.4

Meanwhile, Germany got caught by a Nachholbedarf or ‘urge to catch up’, first with France, and then in many respects with Britain and only in some aspects with the much larger United States on the other side of the ocean. Through an agricultural revolution and a building boom, huge investment in railways and roads, tunnels and bridges, rivers and canals, that connected Germany’s rapidly growing cities and towns, industrial and mining centres. In the course of the 19th century, the new capital of Berlin grew twenty-fold: from only 200,000 to 4 million inhabitants, and was a magnet for migrants from less-developed Eastern Europe.5

In the process, Germans proved disciplined, well organized, and efficient. The new country soon became the front runner of Europe’s ‘second’ industrial revolution centred on optics, chemistry, electricity and more. Germany forged large industrial groups with household names: AEG, BASF, Bayer, Bosch, Hoechst, IG-Farben, Krupp, Siemens, Zeiss. This also translated into an upsurge of trade.6

4 For instance, in his 1920s articles for the Deutsche Allgemeine Zeitung; see the inventory in the unpublished appendix to the masters’ thesis of Ebels-Dolanová, available at the archives with the Baschwitz papers. Or in books like Der Massenwahn (1923) or Du und die Masse (1938); see the very elaborate name and subject registers I have created for them, to be placed on a related website.
5 Stürmer, p. 47.
6 The ‘catch up’ movement has been outlined in early overview studies of modernization, such as American economic historian Walt Rostow’s famous 1960 The Stages of Economic Growth: A
So on the eve of the First World War, Germany’s merchant navy had already expanded to become the third in the world: still far behind Great Britain, but almost equal to the U.S. Its main harbour Hamburg was home to the world’s largest shipping company, the HAPAG. Its Jewish general director, Albert Ballin, built Emigration Halls on the harbour island of Veddel to accommodate the thousands of passengers streaming through every week – including many Jews from Eastern Europe.

Three million Germans had already left before the empire was founded, and another three million had left since, via Hamburg, Bremen, and other major seaports (like Rotterdam and Antwerp). But with the industrial takeoff, these numbers were gradually coming down. Ironically, on the eve of the First World War, Germans had come to form the largest immigrant group in the U.S., most settling in the Midwest.7

Meanwhile, Germany had become highly regarded by leading scholars in philosophy and mathematics, physics and chemistry, and biology and medicine throughout the world. Germans received a large number of the prestigious new Nobel Prizes. Scientists from France, Britain, and the United States flocked to its laboratories and universities – not only in the grand national metropolises of Berlin and Munich, but even in smaller provincial towns like Freiburg, Halle, Heidelberg, Jena, Tübingen.

Youngsters like Kurt Baschwitz thus had every reason to be very proud of their resurgent country.

The liberal southwest

How did Kurt himself fit into this larger picture? His birthplace of Offenburg (literally ‘open borough’) was a small town along a river that flowed from the Black Forest into the Rhine opposite Strasbourg (which was German at the time).8 The place had been settled since Roman times. During the Middle Ages, it had been a ‘free city’, but in Napoleon’s day it was absorbed into the Grand Duchy of Baden.

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7 Fleet: Guillen, p. 78.
8 Both Baschwitz himself (!), his secretaries, and others often garbled Offenburg to Offenbruck, Offenbach, etc.
It was at the small town’s Salmen Inn that the *Offenburger Programm* with thirteen demands for human rights and basic freedoms had been announced in 1847. It was the first democratic proclamation in Germany, later reconfirmed by a People’s Assembly of some 20,000 individuals. These events were closely linked to the epochal Europe-wide wave of revolutions of the next year.

Offenburg had traditionally had some leather and textile workshops, then becoming an early railway junction. The population thus doubled during the last quarter of the nineteenth century, from 6,600 to 13,670 inhabitants. During Baschwitz’s youth, the wells, early swimming pools, and the rivers with their large rafts, formed favourite playgrounds for the town’s children.

It already had one primary school for boys and one for girls. The latter is today named after Anne Frank, in the publication of whose famous diary Baschwitz later played a key role. Offenburg also had a Pro-gymnasium (the first classes of a grammar school), which was later extended to a full curriculum. But Kurt Baschwitz went to Frankfurt am Main to complete his grammar school, and then for a final year to Bruchsal near Karlsruhe.

**The Baschwitz family name and roots**

In later life, after he had finally become a university professor, Kurt Baschwitz once had a coffee break conversation with his all-new team in Amsterdam. He tried to explain the probable origins of his strange-sounding patronym by saying that all around Berlin, there were localities with names ending in -witz, which was said to be related to the Latin -vicus, for ‘village’ or town.

Whereupon one of his female assistants blurted out: ‘Oh yes, professor, you are also a – witz!’ (German for ‘joke’). She was probably not aware that he had been taunted as ‘a joke’ in school, but had later also occasionally adopted the proud nickname ‘Basch-Witze’ (Basch-joke).9

Upon closer inspection, Baschwitz’s casual reference to the origins of his surname may be psychologically interesting – and may even be read as a Freudian lapse. Family roots around the capital would make them Prussian natives: citizens of the elite state that had led Germany’s unification. But in fact localities close to Berlin were not the only places with names ending in -witz. Most are much further to the East. People originating there were

9 Related by his assistant and later ‘mass psychology’ successor Marten Brouwer, in a collection of vignettes for the 50th anniversary of the faculty. In Goudsblom et al., p. 31. Compare the nickname signature of a 1921 poem, reproduced in Ebels-Dolanová, opposite p. 50.
mostly immigrants belonging to the Jewish minority, and were disparagingly labelled *Ostjuden* during Baschwitz’s own younger days. After the war and his integration into The Netherlands, this link had apparently slipped his mind.10

A few years after this coffee conversation, a relation apparently sent him a few pages with an article from a German magazine for book traders. It said the Baschwitz name (which other branches had also spelled Baswitz) probably derived from the village of Baszowicze, which today lists 400 inhabitants. It lies in a county named after the larger town of Kielce, which today lists almost 200,000 inhabitants. That county in turn belongs to the *Voivodeship* (formerly a governorate, today a province) named after the Swietokrzyskie, or Holy Cross Mountains – the northern part of the southern ‘lesser Poland’. The major city of Krakow is located at a hundred kilometres or so.11

This information does not point to just a trivial, distant geographic origin, however, but rather to a highly salient cultural background. As this is largely unfamiliar to present-day western readers, it merits some extra elaboration. Swietokrzyskie province belonged to a large area stretching from today’s southeastern Poland to the west of today’s Belarus and Ukraine (long Russian). Over the centuries, this had gradually become the ‘Jewish heartland’ par excellence.12

In the year of Columbus’s discovery of America, Spain’s Catholic monarchs threw the Jews out of the former *Al Andalus*, or Arab Spain. Many Jews migrated to Constantinople (earlier Byzantium, later Istanbul), and from there to the Black Sea and Odessa, or further up the rivers. But while persecutions persisted – also in Germanic lands, most ended up much further to the Northwest – in a large area in the centre of Europe, which even came to be described by some as a *Paradisus Iudaecorum* (Jewish paradise). For a long time this area had a relatively tolerant regime, with only occasional eruptions of violence.

When the Baschwitz family name probably came into being, the larger part of this area belonged to the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, which lasted for more than two centuries. Toward its end in 1764, it harboured 750,000 Jews: a clear majority of the estimated worldwide population of 1.2 million at the time. Jews made up between a quarter and a third of some of

10 Ebels-Dolanová (p. 93) found several passages where Baschwitz himself seemed to slight *Ostjuden*, in the context of the mid-1920s corruption affairs surrounding Jewish businessmen. For more about such ambivalences, see the web-exhibit on ‘East-European Jews in the German-Jewish imagination’ from the Ludwig Rosenberger Library of Judaica, University of Chicago.
11 Brilling.
12 See the map on Jewish population densities in the area around 1764, reproduced with the English Wikipedia article below.
the larger towns and cities, although others were relegated to small villages or shtetls (remember the related story, film and musical *Fiddler on the roof*).

Many Jews were artisans. One prominent trade was engraving. Some of the very earliest printing houses were Jewish. Science and philosophy flourished among them. One study by Gershon Hundert spoke of the appearance of ‘a virtual galaxy of sparkling intellectual figures’. On the one hand, they participated in secular universities and various precursors of the Enlightenment. On the other, there was a major religious revival concerning orthodox Hasidism: around piety, mysticism, and the *Kabbala*.

Toward the end of the eighteenth century, however, Catherine the Great started meddling in this area. Thereafter the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth was overrun by invasions from its more powerful neighbours of Russia, Prussia, and Austria, leading to three successive partitions. A large part of the Jewish heartland was brought under the control of the czars, leading to new experiences with the anti-Semitism and pogroms that were common throughout Russia.

Many of the best Jewish craftsmen had meanwhile begun to move abroad. Among them was a noteworthy printing dynasty by the name of Baschwitz – which proved to be Kurt’s immediate forefathers. For risk of persecution, they often had mobile presses, which they successively took to major capitals elsewhere, like Berlin and Prague.

**A book-printer dynasty**

One of the earliest notable family members was Zwi Hirsch ben Meier Baschwitz, abbreviated as Hirschel Meier, who was born in the early 1700s in Lithuanian Brzecz. He later migrated to Germany. With his son Meir, he formed one of four prominent Jewish book-printer families in Frankfurt an der Oder in the state of Brandenburg – which was, indeed, next to Prussia. They benefited from special protection because of the university there.

Another clipping from a Jewish newspaper refers to a much older obituary of one the best known of the Baschwitz book-printers: Baruch Meyer.¹⁴

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¹³ ‘History of the Jews in Poland’, Wikipedia. ‘Paradise’: The article tries to rehabilitate the attitude of Poland with regard to the Jews. It even claims that some broke down the label Polonia into three Hebrew words: Po-lan-ya for Here-dwells-God. Or Polin into two: Po-lin for ‘Here’ and ‘you should dwell’.

¹⁴ *Jüdische Zeitung für Mittelsachsen Chemnitz u. a.*, Jhrg. 6, Nr. 6, p. 1, 20 March 1936. It referred back to an elaborate obituary of a century earlier in *Didaskalia – Blätter für Geist, Gemüth und Publizität*, Nr. 289, 18 Oct. 1836, p. 2. In view of his experiences with Anti-Semitism, Baschwitz
At the time of the French revolution, ‘he travelled to Holland where he had many relatives’, it said, and married there. But thereafter, he fled the French invasion and transferred to the Jewish community of Rödelheim in the state of Hessen, next to Frankfurt am Main. During the Middle Ages, the Habsburg king had granted the Viscount of Rödelheim the privilege of letting half a dozen Jews settle there for trade. In the course of the 18th century, this community quickly grew from some 40 to 240 people. It had a synagogue, with its own rabbi and lead singer, as well as a school.\textsuperscript{15}

Just before 1800, the famous scholar Wolf Heidenheim began an ‘oriental and occidental’ book-printing business there, for prayer books and more, and accepted Baruch Baschwitz as his associate. Their business flourished, and was favoured by the local nobleman. After this business split up, Baruch also printed financial papers and even lottery tickets. Today, Rödelheim has discreetly kept the clippings and copies on these Jewish roots in a special separate file, apart from his other personal papers, which was recently added to the archives.

\textsuperscript{15} See the website http://www.alemannia-judaica.de/roedelheim_synagoge.htm.
become part of the *Mitte West* area of Frankfurt am Main, which even has a square named after Baruch Baschwitz in front of the suburban train station.

So, by that time, Baschwitz had already become a well-known Jewish name. Just before the founding of the empire, a Baschwitz was even president of the Jewish congregation in the Prussian capital of Berlin. Baruch and his wife Clara had many children. The third of those was Samuel (1813-1884), who also followed him into the book-printing and book-selling business.

Samuel and his wife Hannicke (1813-1872) again had many children, the second of which was Joseph (1847-1918), Kurt’s father. He was apparently sickly and not very successful; he is variously listed as a book printer, a beer brewer, and later as an insurance salesman. Kurt mentioned his father less often and more vaguely than his much younger mother and sister, and apparently took over as head of the family early on.

After the first of two bankruptcies, Joseph was reportedly saved by the family of his wife Hedwig Bikard (1866-1943), who came from an originally Jewish family of beer brewers. They married in Offenburg, in 1885, and their eldest son Kurt was born the next year.

**Jewish assimilation and resurgent anti-Semitism**

Joseph was reportedly not really a practicing Jew. His wife and her family had already converted earlier to Evangelical Lutheranism. Young Kurt was educated in the Christian faith – although at the appropriate point in his life, his father reportedly took him through the moves of a Jewish Bar Mitzwah, in a playful way.

But when he came of age, Kurt also had himself officially baptized as Evangelical Lutheran. His children apparently were *never even aware* that he was considered ethnically Jewish until he felt forced to flee Hitler and the Nazis in 1933. So the Baschwitzes were fully assimilated, and saw themselves as mainstream Germans, although one of his reviewers later hinted at his probable roots as an *Ostjude* or ‘Eastern Jew’.17

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16 Details from the Geni.com genealogical database, which has many Jewish family names.

17 So Kurt’s daughters told Ebels-Dolanová (p. 21-26) and Anschlag (p. 38-39), during interviews for their masters’ theses. More details in English on this entire book-printer dynasty are in the *Jewish encyclopaedia*, ed. 1902, p. 566-567.
There were of course plenty of paradoxes in the assimilation of so many Jews. Martin Luther himself had gradually become a notorious anti-Semite. Jews were prominent in small trades and money lending of his day, and were sometimes stereotyped as profiteers and usurers. Think of Shakespeare’s notorious Shylock figure in *The merchant of Venice*.

A later associate of Baschwitz told a favoured Yiddish joke about such assimilations. ‘Before he began his service, a preacher in Germany said: “Wer hier Jude ist, bitte ich das Haus zu verlassen.” [I beg whoever is a Jew, to leave this House of God]. He repeated this twice, but no one moved. Then, upon the third time, Christ descended from the cross and left the Church’.18

After the disappearance of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, a large part of the Jewish heartland fell to Russia, which thereby had the largest Judaic population of any country at that point in time. Anti-Semitism, however, was also virulent among Russian Orthodox Christians. As emancipation took hold in Western countries like Britain, France, and The Netherlands, there was a slow but persistent trickle of Jews westwards.

Since Medieval times, dominant Christians had often excluded the Jewish minority from the possession of agricultural land and farming, from guilds and traditional crafts. Many therefore chose new and more ‘modern’ professions, among them book-printing and book-selling. Constant migration led to networks that facilitated trade and banking. On top of that, Judaism had always favoured learning. Discrimination now led to a further emphasis on intellectual and artistic skills, which could not be destroyed or taken away if one were forced to flee again. All of this contributed to an occupational ‘footprint’ that differed somewhat from the mainstream.

Estimates are that after Napoleonic times there were slightly over a quarter million Jews in the territory that was to become Germany; on the eve of the First World War a century later, that number had reached 600,000. It remained more or less 1 percent of the population as the relatively low Jewish birth rate was compensated by a steady influx from elsewhere. (For comparison, at that time Russia had an estimated 5.2 million Jews, Austria-Hungary had 2.2 million, and the U.S. had 1.8 million, while Britain only had 0.2 million and France had 0.1 million).19 Many German Jews flocked to the bigger trading centres in Germany such as Hamburg and Frankfurt am Main.

Under the Empire, the Jewish population of the new national capital Berlin grew from 40,000 to 140,000. A relatively large number of Jewish

18 Cohen, p. 80.
19 Williams, p. 429.
children (including girls) went to grammar school, university, and even entered into the teaching staff there – particularly within the medical faculty. One overview says: ‘In 1907, 6 percent of doctors, 15 percent of lawyers, and 8 percent of journalists [in Berlin] were Jewish’.20

Most Jews assimilated, and many became prominent in new approaches to the sciences, the arts and entertainment, in secular thought in general, and in political life – mostly on the left or ‘progressive’ side of the spectrum. Jewish visibility in certain positions, and not in others, meant that, in turn, they were painted as vehicles of not only modernity but also decadence by self-styled defenders of the supposedly ‘organic’ native society.

Bismarck was associated with a Jewish banker and favoured equal rights. But at the same time, the imperial court had Adolf Stoecker as a preacher, whose highly vocal anti-Semitism found an outlet in the Christian Social Party, which later came to blend with national conservatism.

Baschwitz’s grammar school and student years also coincided with widely publicized outpourings of anti-Semitism in all of the surrounding major countries. Between 1894 and 1906, France was transfixed by the Dreyfus affair. Between 1897 and 1910, Karl Lueger, the leader of the anti-Semitic Christian Social party in Austria, was the mayor of its capital Vienna. The 1903 publication in Russia of the falsified Protocols of the Elders of Zion (about a Jewish plot to conquer the world) accompanied a new wave of pogroms, which killed thousands of Jews. This hoax book was subsequently widely translated, and continues to exert influence to this very day. Umberto Eco discusses it in his 2010 bestselling novel The Prague Cemetery.21

German education

The Baschwitzes belonged to the 2 or 3 percent of the educated middle classes, which included many professionals who often had liberal leanings. Benedict Anderson’s famous study has explained that nations are in fact Imagined Communities. German children were taught that theirs was a land of Dichter und Denker, poets and thinkers: of writers like Goethe, Lessing, and Schiller; philosophers like Kant, Fichte, and Hegel.

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20 Kitchen, Modern Germany, p. 43-44, 117-123. The prominence of Jews in Germany and elsewhere is documented in great detail by Keller; opposition to them in Poliakov.
21 My earlier studies Crowds, psychology and politics and Mass movements provide detailed analyses of the French and Austrian politics of those days.
Kurt Baschwitz was familiar with many of these authors’ works and sayings from an early age; references and quotations abound in his articles and books. Germany (and Austria) were of course also considered the homeland of classical music, with composers like Bach, Beethoven, Brahms, Haydn, Schubert, Schumann, Mahler, Mendelssohn, Mozart, Strauss, Wagner, and many more. Baschwitz was familiar with most of these composers, and continued to listen to them throughout his life: first through live performances in the family circle and concert halls, then through gramophone records and radio.

I already mentioned that young Baschwitz was proud of the achievements of the newly unified Germany, the role of Prussia, and enlightened earlier leaders like Frederick the Great. He read the memoirs of these great statesmen, and frequently quoted them. They often implied that German Kultur was different and more profound than that of ‘mercantilist’ Britain or ‘decadent’ France. Kurt Baschwitz’s generation often felt that the Empire was the new Greece, becoming obsessed with the new archaeological finds there, which gradually filled Germany’s new national museums.22

The Baschwitz’s family life

The nuclear family at the Baschwitz’s home consisted of father Joseph, mother Hedwig, and eldest son Siegfried Kurt (such first first names were habitually not used). His younger brother, Alfred Bertram, died at the age of nine months. After that, he had a younger sister Johanna, who was later also called ‘Hans’. There was also a favourite aunt, Hedwig’s sister Lydia Metzger, who often visited. The larger family included his mother’s relatives: there were close links with his maternal grandparents, and holidays were often spent with cousins in places like Switzerland.

The children’s education followed the Goethe precepts: correction does much, but encouragement does more. Self-discipline and character building were important, cultural development even more so – for instance through extensive reading and active involvement in theatre and music. Ebels-Dolanová received a number of family pictures from Kurt’s youth on loan, which characterized the atmosphere at home. Unfortunately, the reproductions in her mimeographed master’s thesis are less than perfect; the originals were returned to his widow, and it is not clear where they are now.

22 See the recent thousand-plus page overview by Dutch Germany expert Frits Boterman. A central reference was businessman-turned-archaeologist Heinrich Schliemann (1822-1890), who is particularly known for his Troy dig.
One family snapshot shows Kurt as a young adolescent, dressed as a Pierrot for some party or performance, with a round pointed hat, a fluffy white collar over an equally white shirt, and large contrasting buttons. Alongside sits his sister (?) with a cat on her lap, and two adults behind them. A second scene shows a standing Kurt (with moustache) as an elder adolescent, playing the guitar alongside his sitting sister, who has another string instrument. A third scene shows father and son attentively looking at, and listening to, Kurt’s mother playing the piano and his younger sister playing a violin. A further scene shows Kurt’s mother Hedwig and aunt Lydia alongside a gramophone with a big horn, looking at a dancing couple seen at the back: possibly Kurt himself, rehearsing proper dancing steps with his sister.

The final scene is maybe most telling. It shows the entire family taking a meal in the kitchen. Seated around the table set with a large bottle and wide dishes are the mother, aunt, and daughter, all wearing elaborate dresses. In the background to the left there is a smiling female cook with a white apron. In the background to the right is the discreet father in a dark suit. In the centre and the foreground there is a standing Kurt, with maybe a glass in his hand. Smiling, slightly taller than the rest of the adults, he is wearing a shining white shirt or vest. He dominates the picture, as a promising young man, already outshining his father: the obvious future of the family.

It seems to be a key moment, expressing a key sentiment.

School and student years

From 1897 onwards, Kurt Baschwitz went to the Lessing Gymnasium or grammar school in Frankfurt am Main. His autumn 1904 results were marked as just ‘satisfactory’. He later told his children that some teachers resented his critical articles in the school magazine, and therefore gave him lower notes. He only had ‘good’ scores for Gymnastics, Singing, German, and Physics and ‘sufficient’ scores for Mathematics, History and Geography, Greek, Latin, and French.

He apparently did not take English, and continued to only poorly read and speak it until late in life, which was to affect his international contacts and post-war stature. Nor did he take Hebrew, which would apparently have been a possibility. (Proportionally, Frankfurt am Main had the largest Jewish population of all major German cities at the time).

There was a further snag, according to Anschlag’s master’s thesis. Kurt planned to take up the relatively new study of economics at university (the only social science at the time). But in order to be admitted, he needed better
grades, as well as a special economics class, which the school apparently did not provide. So he completed these studies at a special grammar school that did have economics, in Bruchsal near Karlsruhe, in the north of his original state of Baden.

He later boasted to his children that this had been no big deal, since by that time he had already read most of the literature anyway. This final little detour allowed him to shave some time off his school career, get better grades, and take up further studies at the University of Heidelberg in the state of Württemberg in the summer of 1905. Note that Germany already had a well-developed railway network, and that the distances between the towns and cities of his youth were therefore limited.23

What about student life? Under the Empire, the number of students in the country more than quadrupled to 60,000.24 There was considerable anti-Semitism at universities; the most traditional and elite Burschenschaften or fraternities refused ethnic Jews, although less so if they were baptized Christians. Apparently, Kurt Baschwitz adhered to more-or-less traditional fraternities.

One picture shows him with two comrades in student uniforms, drinking and smoking. Another shows him with a doctor treating a fresh Schmiss or sabre wound on his upper cheek, right under the eye. This was a highly visible sign of duelling, a standard mark of manhood and courage at the time. Some cultivated these scars after graduation and throughout their lives. (Baschwitz apparently did not).25

Students circulated. When Germany was still fragmented, apprentice craftsmen usually travelled from one regional capital to the next to learn all of the ‘tricks of the trade’. Students also did, to get acquainted with the rest of the country, with different approaches to their disciplines, and to build larger networks. One accumulated points by studying half a dozen relevant subjects during each semester, and often took successive years at different universities.

Kurt Baschwitz first went to nearby Heidelberg, then to the far-away Prussian and national capital Berlin, before coming back to the ‘Academy for social and trade sciences’ in familiar Frankfurt am Main.26 Among other things, he took ‘national economics’. After that, he went on to the South German (i.e. Bavarian) capital Munich, to do his Ph.D. doctoral dissertation

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23 Grade list reproduced, and school career related, by Anschlag, p. 12-13.
24 Guillen, p. 113.
25 Ebels-Dolanová, opposite p. 22-23.
26 Baschwitz’s diplomas and grade lists are kept in a box that was later added to the end of his personal archives kept at the Amsterdam University library/ special collections.
in economics, with the famous Lujo Brentano. But the thesis had mostly sociological and political accents.\textsuperscript{27}

### The early German social sciences

Germany’s accelerated transformation from a traditional rural society with small towns to a modern industrial society with large cities had been very disruptive, even more so than in other major countries. The new sciences of man and society thus focused on understanding and helping to manage this entire process – again, even more so than elsewhere. This held for the whole range of disciplines that emerged one after the other: economics, sociology, applied psychology. Many of its pioneers were reformist liberals, who recognized the legitimacy of workers’ social demands but opposed revolution.\textsuperscript{28}

The first major German sociologist proper was Ferdinand Tönnies. His most important work was precisely about the opposition between Gemeinschaft and Gesellschaft (1887), translated much later as Community and Society. The former referred to the traditional social bonds and feelings of togetherness and belonging that was associated with families, villages, and regions. The latter referred to the modern social organization that was instrumental to the realization of common goals and associated with voluntary associations, corporations, and the state. Later Tönnies also published a major study on the new phenomenon of ‘public opinion’ (1922), which influenced some of Baschwitz’s early ideas.

Another influential early German sociologist was Max Weber. His most important ideas concerned the supplanting of traditional forms of authority with modern rational-bureaucratic ones, and the Entzauberung der Welt or ‘disenchantment of the world’. He also noted a third exceptional form of authority, charismatic leadership, which re-emerged in surprising ways after the catastrophe of the First World War. Weber further wrote that ‘the protestant ethic’ of working hard and saving was a major driver for the rise of capitalism. Weber was an active social liberal, who was involved in left-leaning liberal parties and in the writing of a new democratic Weimar constitution after the First World War.\textsuperscript{29}

\textsuperscript{27} Ebels-Dolanová, p. 28-34.
\textsuperscript{28} See Bramson; and Coser.
\textsuperscript{29} Arthur Mitzman published perceptive psycho-biographies of both Tönnies (Sociology and Estrangement) and Weber (The Iron Cage) in their social context.
In economics, noteworthy German academics pursued a compromise. On the one hand, there were the ‘laissez faire’ representatives of the Manchester School, who believed in Adam Smith’s ‘invisible hand’ and at one point seemed to prevail within the British Empire. On the other, there were the anti-capitalist polemics of the German Karl Marx, who preached the necessity of a proletarian revolution. So the German academics founded the reformist Verein für Sozialpolitik, the Social Policy Association, to advocate a middle road through state intervention that could help solve labour conflicts and alleviate poverty. Max Weber was an early member of the Verein, but later split off a more purely academic sociologists’ association.

Under Bismarck, the German empire did indeed become a European front runner in introducing nationwide, obligatory social insurance. Opponents labelled the representatives of the association Kathedersozialisten, or ‘socialists at the (academic theorists’) lecture desk’. But Brentano and Baschwitz were both sceptical about socialism.30

Baschwitz’s Ph.D. dissertation

Baschwitz thus chose one of the major founders of the Verein as his Ph.D. thesis supervisor in Munich. It is important to note that the nature of this exercise was slightly different from what it is today. The final classes of grammar school already included some science. After that, the university curriculum, which conferred a doctorate, on completion, took four years. Today, a bachelor’s plus master’s degree also takes four years, but an additional Ph.D. usually takes four more years after that. So at that time the title of ‘doctor’ entailed somewhat less than it does today, but it was very important in the title-conscious Germany of those years. It was a cherished entry ticket to the elite and the ruling class.

The first major work of Baschwitz’s thesis supervisor Lujo Brentano recognized the positive role of trade unions as ‘present-day workers’ guilds’. Although Brentano was not a party member or deputy, he was close to both of the liberal factions that ultimately merged to form the second-largest party in the Reichstag or national parliament, after the big Catholic centre party. (Baschwitz later wrote one of his very first newspaper articles about a commemoration of this merger). These liberal

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30 Baschwitz’s later commemorative article in the Deutsche Allgemeine Zeitung, for Brentano’s 85th birthday on 18 December 1929. (Repr. in Ebels-Dolanová, opp. p. 91).
groups had put their hopes on the supposedly liberal-minded Crown Prince Friedrich, but he was ill and only ruled for a brief period of three months between Wilhelm I and II.

So Brentano helped inspire Baschwitz’s doctoral dissertation. But, at the time, ‘Economics were not a well-defined territory like today’, Baschwitz later said: ‘It was even a new discipline, related to all the other social disciplines’ such as sociology.31 His dissertation was labelled ‘A critical research’ project on ‘The organisation of urban owners of houses and land in Germany – Their development, essence and functioning’ (1909). Baschwitz described it as ‘an attempt [...] to draw an image of the typical urban homeowner, as it emerged from speeches and writings, [but] primarily from the functioning and goals of their own organisations’.32

He collected, ordered and interpreted a huge amount of detailed historical and social documents and data. First, he visited the considerable Munich ‘chapter’, its substantial office, and library. Then other local chapters, and the Zentralverband, or national federation. Baschwitz’s dissertation can be seen as a study in social (or political) economics, or as one in economic (or political) sociology. The owners’ self-image played a key role, but also the federation’s mode of operation.

It was a typical example of how civil society played a mediating role between the state and markets, he wrote. The first part of the dissertation looked at the development of this entire social stratum, and its organization. The second part looked at the interplay of home ownership with the economics of capital and credit. The third part looked at the role of fiscal law. The fourth part looked at other legal matters. The fifth part looked at rent. The sixth part looked at how all of this affected competition and supply in the housing sector.

The study concluded (p. 184) that the house-owners saw themselves as the backbone and primary representatives of the propertied middle classes. They favoured ‘free markets’ and were against price distortion through subsidized social housing projects. They defended small shopkeepers against department stores. They opposed big capital and the banks, but were also against excessive taxes and the state. The dissertation’s appendices provided figures about their numbers, a list of all 237 local chapters, and an excerpt from the latest federation report.

Bascwitz completed his dissertation in 1908. The subsequent year, it was officially published in an economic book series that was edited by
Brentano. Anschlag’s master’s thesis (p. 12, 109, n. 10 and 11) quotes some positive reviews from specialist journals. At the same time as Baschwitz, Brentano also had several other promising Ph.D. students. One was the later liberal leader Theodor Heuss, who would become the first president of the post-war Federal Republic, and to whom Baschwitz paid a special visit in his later life.

After completing his Doktorarbeit, Baschwitz had officially become an adult, responsible for his own further life and career. On the one hand, he gradually grew into the role of the male intellectual. He was not very extraverted, but rather somewhat introverted. And occasionally even somewhat of a loner for long stretches of his life. After marriage and the birth of his children, he was often a somewhat aloof patriarch, retiring into the inner sanctum of his study, eternally filled with cigar smoke. He loved his children but was not closely involved in their everyday life: such things were often left to mothers in the middle class families of those days.

On the other hand, he often tried to express his emotional attachment to his family, for instance by explicitly dedicating most of his books to one close family member or another. The first editions of Mass delusions in 1923 were dedicated to his first wife, the last edition in 1932 to his mother. You and the mass of 1938 was dedicated to (the memory of) his father. The struggle against the devil of 1948 was even dedicated to his favourite aunt, Lydia Metzger-Bikard. And finally the major Witches and witch trials of 1963-4 was dedicated to his second wife, Ilse Scholz.

Writing skills

In 1909, Kurt Baschwitz was still only 23 years old. The big question was what he was going to do next. What kind of career did he want to pursue? Would he get into economics or finance, work for a corporation or the state? Or did he fancy a more multi-faceted and lively job? He had always had a knack for writing and had tried to further develop this skill, as he felt he might later make it his profession.

Baschwitz later told his children that at the Lessing gymnasium in Frankfurt am Main he had founded a school magazine, and had largely filled it himself. At the same time, he also tried to publish elsewhere. One opportunity was in a promotional monthly of the Stuttgart savings bank, where his father Joseph had found a job as a representative – also selling life insurance. Young Kurt had contributed the story ‘On the threshold of the afterlife’, to a special Christmas issue. It covered only two dense pages,
four columns in all. But looking back at it, one can easily see that it was indeed relatively well written and well construed.33

This tale is ostensibly related by a lonely medical doctor, who had been invited to celebrate Christmas at the happy house of Otto, his friend since university days, his wife, and their children. At one point, the visitor tells the kids a dramatic tale. About a student with debts, who was forced to break off his education after the sudden death of his father and provider, with whom he lived. The son was desperate, went out to buy a gun, and tested the cold metal on his head. But before pulling the trigger, he opened a drawer to take one last nostalgic look at a blonde lock of his fiancée.

He then suddenly discovered a piece of paper that had been hidden from sight. It was headed: ‘Life insurance’. He was thus able to complete his degree, to marry and found a family – with three lovely little children. ‘Just like us!’ the daughter interrupts. The kid then suddenly makes the connection. ‘Papa, were you that student?’ The mother’s eyes fill up with tears. The father silently takes a little box from his desk, and opens it. It contains a blonde lock, a little revolver, and the piece of paper in question ... with the letterhead of the Stuttgart bank. So it seems that Kurt did indeed have a knack for writing, early on.

There is even an apocryphal story that he wrote a complete science fiction novel. The year after Baschwitz died, his own social science faculty in Amsterdam engaged Norbert Elias, another Jewish-German scholar who was much younger, but whose life had partly run parallel to Baschwitz’s own. Elias later became world famous for his studies about the psychodynamics of the civilization process over the last few centuries.

Two young admirers interviewed Elias for a major Dutch weekly. In it, he mentioned that at an early age, he had been inspired by a novel about a futuristic war between The two planets by Kurt Baschwitz. At one point in this novel, the Martians used a giant magnet to disarm the troops of a hubristic Earth emperor. Unfortunately, it turned out that the interviewers had misheard, misunderstood, and misspelled the name. The novel had actually been written by Kurd Laszwitz.34

During his university career, Kurt Baschwitz continued to further hone his writing skills. He returned to Frankfurt am Main for part of his last year before submitting his dissertation in Munich. This was the city where the

Frankfurter (later Allgemeine) Zeitung (F.Z.) was published: one of the oldest and most prestigious of all German newspapers, with many Jewish staff and readers. Frankfurt also was (and remains) a financial and economic hub, so it devoted special attention to financial and economic matters.

Since Kurt Baschwitz was a doctoral student in economics, someone may have given him an introduction there, and he may have done an internship or minor job at the newspaper at some point. During a critical phase in his later career, he claimed that he had worked on the editorial staff of the famous F.Z. for a year, which was certainly a bit of an embellishment.35

After obtaining the ‘Doktor’ degree in economics, Baschwitz thus asked himself the question: ‘Should I become a Journalist?’ An experienced journalist gave him the answer: there were too many already, but too few good ones.

The supposed talent for writing is not enough in itself. It is very often the case that young people [like yourself] – just because they count as poets or at least writers within the family circle – conclude that they are apt for journalism […]. But there have also been many who had been highly talented as writers but who completely failed as editors – to their own distress and to their newspaper’s detriment. The journalist must know how to write, but not everyone who can write is a journalist.

This wise elder counsellor continued, tongue-in-cheek.

So: not every scribbler must unconditionally want to go to the press. There are many unrecognized geniuses among the young rushing forward, who have just completed their final exam. This [kind of feeling] simply goes with that age. But they must be told that neither immature young people, nor those without a completed general education, can be let loose in the public sphere. We know that the doctor’s title [that you just obtained] is in itself not proof of aptitude.

Who was this advisor? It was his own alter ego, 22 years later, after he had reached the top of the trade as editor-in-chief of the prestigious weekly of the newspaper business, in an article on the same question.36

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35 He claimed this in a C.V. submitted in 1947, when he was desperate to be finally named full professor of press science in Amsterdam after waiting 12-14 years. One was in a letter to the ‘Press Purge’ Commission (dated 16 April), the other a letter from the mayor and aldermen of Amsterdam to the Education minister (dated 19 November), which was based on Baschwitz’s information. More about this matter in the relevant later chapter.

Hamburg and the *Fremdenblatt*

But where to go to find a first job, as an aspiring journalist of just 23 years old? One history claims that later, with few exceptions, ‘All the important newspapers were published in Berlin, often bringing out two or three editions daily, and reporting the Reichstag debates in great detail. This was a lively, nervously aggressive and undeferential media world, concentrated in the Körnerstrasse just to the south of the political square mile represented by the Friedrichstrasse, Wilhelmstrasse and Unter den Linden, between Schlossplatz and Pariser Platz, near the Brandenburg Gate’.37

But more typical for the German press was the fact that, until then, it had remained much more decentralized than that of either Great Britain or France. Germany had *thousands* of daily newspapers: all of the present and former state capitals had relatively healthy ones. So at this point it was more interesting for Baschwitz to try and get work at one of these: preferably a somewhat internationally oriented one, in a booming part of the country.38

One of the most rapidly growing, lively, and cosmopolitan regions was the extreme northwest, where all of the major seaports of the country were crammed into a relatively small area. The largest was Hamburg on the Elbe River. The second was Bremen, on the Weser. Both gave direct access to the North Sea, and through it to the Atlantic Ocean. The third was Lübeck on the Baltic Sea, but from there ships had to pass through the straits between Sweden and Denmark to get to the ocean.

In his history of newspapers (1938), Baschwitz said:

> The big newspapers ‘within the empire’, so in various parts of the country outside Berlin, rejected the qualification of ‘provincial newspaper’. The *Hamburger Fremdenblatt* acquired its distinctive character through publisher Albert Broschek who took over this old family paper [...] in 1908. At the time it did not even have 40,000 subscribers; after a few years they were 150,000 – even though the subscription fee was not particularly low for Germany. But together with the massive sales the contents were improved as well, and thus the significance of the newspaper.

So much of this expansion took place during Baschwitz’s own first few years there.39

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37 Stürmer, p. 49.
38 *De krant door alle tijden*, 2nd ed., p. 251–254.
39 *De krant door alle tijden*, p. 255.
The new owner was a dynamic man. Broschek soon acquired a copper plate printing facility, allowing him to print better pictures, added illustrated pages, and supplements: a relatively new phenomenon. The editorial offices were right in the heart of Hamburg. Over just half a century, the city’s population had more than quadrupled to well over 700,000. It had an ‘old town’ with canals, chaotic and smelly. The old outer harbour of Sankt Pauli on the riverbank had plenty of ferries and boats arriving and departing all the time.

The standard *Baedeker* travel guide of those years, which Baschwitz probably bought and consulted when he first went there, listed five major railway stations, dozens of large restaurants, a dozen major hotels, half a dozen major theatres, a few concert halls, a circus, and a zoo. So a bachelor like Baschwitz, who liked music and plays, could go out as much as he wanted. The streets bustled with wholly new electric tramways and new taxi cars.40

Baschwitz continued his overview of the press situation:

The *Hamburger Fremdenblatt* is only mentioned here as a particularly successful representative of a certain category of newspapers within the empire. These were newspapers with circulations among the highest in Germany – meaning that they sold 100,000, sometimes 150,000, but only in one case 200,000 copies. These newspapers played a big role in the public life of the town where they appeared. They treated cultural affairs with predilection; often the theatre critic was the most popular figure of the editorial staff. They often had a special representative or their own editorial office in Berlin. They kept foreign correspondents abroad, often shared with similar other papers.41

Baschwitz was hired in mid-February of 1909 for a trial year, to be automatically renewed if he fulfilled expectations. The pay was 3,000 Marks a year, with four weeks of holiday. From that date on, his name regularly turns up in the annual New Year’s donation lists for the local association of journalists and writers. This association also co-sponsored an annual gala, the *Künstler und Presseball*, to benefit the retirement funds for the relevant professions.

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40 I checked the 1904, fourteenth revised edition in English for Northern Germany.
41 *De krant door alle tijden (The newspaper though the ages)*, p. 255.
Liberal journalist

The *Hamburger Fremdenblatt* (abbreviated as *H.F.*) claimed to be ‘the largest political daily of Northwest Germany’. It was also a very serious quality paper, well considered – soon even abroad. Yet few complete collections from those days survive today.\(^{42}\) It long had both a morning and an evening edition, normally closing at 6 a.m. and 6 p.m., respectively. They began with a classic title banner, including all kinds of publishing info with an elaborate, fancy seal in the centre. The first page often had one major headline across – particularly during the dramatic days that were to follow.

The paper had five columns in rather small and dense print, with little space in between. After the main story, minor items succeeded each other, flowing from one column into the next, in eternal succession. There also was a *Tagesschau* of smaller topical subjects. For the present-day reader, the pages make a very grey and not very lively impression. Readers of those days must have had a great capacity to focus on minuscule printed texts; they did not, after all, have the audio-visual distractions that began to flourish soon thereafter.

The paper consisted of one main news section and five further sections every day: usually a total of 24 pages, sometimes 36 during the weekends. The second and third sections focused on economic and financial affairs, concerning shipping, trade, and the stock markets. Further sections were devoted to national and local politics, and news from associations and churches. Then there was the weather forecast, a poem and games, reviews on sports and music, theatre and arts, literature and science – the whole familiar range. Soon there was also an ‘illustrated review’ with pictures, as well as a women’s page at some point.

In the course of his fifteen (!) years at this paper, Baschwitz probably contributed to most of these sections, in one way or another. Most of the time as an anonymous editor, sometimes with just his initials, and only rarely with his full name, in the case of a few longer opinion pieces. The paper apparently was in relatively good health, as it had a substantial number of pages with ads, both small and large. For instance, there were ads for large family firm clothing stores such as C&A and P&C, which are still in existence today.

\(^{42}\) I had to consult them at the *Institut für Zeitungsforschung* in Dortmund, which has wide-ranging microfilm archives. But they are of course in Gothic Frakturschrift, which is hard to read for someone not overly familiar with it – let alone to scan very rapidly and completely. A digitization project is underway, which will make it much easier to research specific aspects of his role, but this was not completed in time for me to use. The plan is to make it available and searchable through the website of The European Library.
The *H.F.* was a liberal paper, and Ebels’ master’s thesis on Baschwitz noted that he could freely express his political sympathies. At the end of his first year he published a piece lauding the earlier merger of the liberal factions in parliament, for instance, and a year later he published another on the centenary of the liberal first president of the German parliament – an assimilated and later ennobled Jew.43

At the same time, he began to reflect on broader party politics within the framework of the Empire. On the last day of his first full year, the 24-year-old was allowed to publish a noteworthy ‘annual political overview’ that covered two-thirds of a page. He expressed his doubts about the capacities of the ‘dutiful civil servant’ Theobald von Bethmann Hollweg, the new chancellor, although he was said to be close to the liberals. But Baschwitz proved more critical of the rightist national conservatives who obstructed revisions in Prussia’s very unequal electoral system, which gave them a completely disproportional influence. Baschwitz also supported social reforms, but opposed the violence stirred up by some leftist social-democrats in the capital Berlin.44

He consistently pleaded against division and for national unity. He also began to reflect on international politics, and on Germany’s aspiration to be accepted as a major new world power by the ruling triumvirate of France, Britain, and the U.S. Ebels noted that Baschwitz published articles about the importance of population strength and growth, but also about the need to have a major fleet with access to the ocean and to colonies through the Suez and Panama canals.45

Another noteworthy piece focused on imperial grandeur: from the thousand-year ‘Holy Roman Empire of the [Austrian and] German Nation’ to the present day. It lyrically compared ancient scenes of subjects enthusiastically acclaiming the boat of a Roman emperor, to those of present-day Germans acclamining a giant Zeppelin airship dressed in national colours and hanging over a major imperial ceremony in which Wilhelm II had inaugurated an equestrian statue for his father Friedrich.46

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43 Articles about the Deutche Freisinnige Partei DFP (17 December 1909), and about Eduard von Simson (11 December 1910). Ebels-Dolanová, p. 34-35.
44 ‘Politische Bilanz’, 31 December 1910 (Section 4, p. 17). Von Bethmann Hollweg was chancellor from 1909 to 1917. He initially tried to work out deals with the British, but panicked over the rising Russian threat from the East. He also proved unable to contain the belligerence of the army command.
45 On 28 February 1911, and 20 June 1912.
So even though he was nominally a left-liberal, Baschwitz already felt attracted to patriotic dreams with chauvinistic overtones well before the outbreak of the First World War – just like most of his contemporaries. Dreams about a re-united Germany finally taking up its rightful place among the other major world powers. We all know how this ended, but we need to take a closer look at how this appeared at that time, in that place, and to that social group.

The ‘Balkan wars’: prologue and trigger for WW I

Most present-day western readers have forgotten, for instance, that the run-up to ‘The Great War’ (later re-baptized the First World War) did not start in the West, but in the East. Namely with the unravelling of the Turkish Ottoman Empire after 1908; with the Russian Empire and the Austro-Hungarian Empire vying over the spoils in the Balkans and over stable access to the Mediterranean; and with the smaller, resurging states in the same area, which were also vying for independence and territory. The Balkan wars of 1912-13 already produced unspeakable horrors, killed tens of thousands of civilians, two hundred thousand soldiers, and displaced millions. Already the major capitals were aware that this might sooner or later degenerate into a general conflagration. Arms expenditures of the six largest European nations thus rose with fifty percent over the five years preceding the war.

The editors of the Hamburger Fremdenblatt probably also had major discussions among themselves about where these events might lead, where Germany’s legitimate interests lay, and how they should be defended. The first trigger of further escalation was the assassination of Austrian crown prince Franz Ferdinand and his wife by Gavrilo Princip during a trip to Sarajevo in 1914. The earlier annexation of Bosnia by the dual monarchy in Austria Hungary was contested by its resurging neighbour Serbia. But Franz Ferdinand was not just any crown prince. He embodied the sole hope of Germany’s prime ally Austria Hungary for reform and rejuvenation. His uncle Franz Joseph was 84 and had already reigned for 66 years.

Gavrilo Princip in turn was not a ‘lone wolf’ assassin, as his compatriots claimed at the time, but a member of a seven-man team, armed with revolvers, bombs, and cyanide capsules. This team was close to the Black Hand secret society and was condoned by parts of the Serbian security apparatus and by the Pan-Slavists in Tsarist Russia – which was also Christian Orthodox. Russia in turn was a member of the mighty Triple Entente
East-West pact with France and Britain. (Through which Britain meant to keep Russia in check to protect its own strategic interests in Asia). 47

In response, Austria issued an ultimatum for the immediate and complete dismantling of these ‘terrorist’ networks, and more. When these demands were not immediately and fully met, it declared war on Serbia only a month later. Baschwitz wrote a piece on the ‘aggressiveness’ of the Slavs at the time. He also wrote a wider article on the threat of the war, and Germany’s interests overseas, for a specialized magazine that was also published in Hamburg. 48

47 The most complete recent study to reconstruct the actual course of events is Clark’s monumental 2012 study, which partly replaced Tuchman’s earlier classic. For the Indian connection, see Frankopan, Chapter 16.

48 Baschwitz’s articles during the run-up to the war, in the H.F. 31 December 1910, 28 February & 20 October 1911, 29 July 1914; Afrika Post 9 August 1914 (Jhrg. 27, Nr. 15). These are listed in Ebels-Dolanović’s chronological overview of Baschwitz’s articles of those days – an appendix that could not be included in the published version of her master’s thesis, but that was deposited at the Baschwitz Archives.

**The outbreak of The Great War**

Socialists and pacifists had earlier persisted in demonstrating for peace, but were now swept away. When news of a general war finally broke, crowds of up to ten thousand people *celebrated* in the major capitals of Europe, and thousands of volunteers registered at recruitment offices. They were all deeply convinced of their countries evident moral and material superiority, and expected to be ‘home by Christmas’. That is to say, in four *months* rather than in four *years* time. Hamburg papers reported enthusiastic scenes at the Hamburg to Hannover railway station, where families said goodbye to their loved ones. The local infantry regiment number 76 had 3,000 men, of which only 647 were to survive – many crippled or otherwise handicapped. A total of 40,000 Hamburg soldiers were to die.49

Baschwitz had also been mobilized, but he was reportedly rejected on medical grounds.50 Ebels-Dolanová’s master’s thesis observed (on p. 114 and elsewhere) that it is probable that Baschwitz later came to feel uneasy about *not* having served in the end, and about spending the latter half of the Great War as a foreign correspondent in the relative comfort of the neutral Netherlands. He may have overcompensated for this guilt by cultivating an ultra-patriotic stance over the next period of his life, an attitude that at times became shrill – as we will see.

Meanwhile, anti-Semites claimed that Jews had dodged the draft, and that Jewish businessmen profited from the war. During the very same month Baschwitz was to travel to Rotterdam to become a foreign correspondent

49 Hamburg municipal and local history sites, and that of the regional public broadcaster NDR.
50 Ebels-Dolanová, Ch. 1914-24, p. 44, 197, n. 1, referring to information provided by Baschwitz’ youngest daughter. The exact reason is unclear. It may have been innocuous (flat feet, thick glasses), or related to his father’s recurring illnesses.
there, the Prussian war ministry ordered an official investigation into the proportion of Jews in the military. It turned out to be no different from that in the general population.51

In some respects, however, Baschwitz was even more in the midst of things at his desk than at the front. In retrospect, the First World War became the first truly modern war. Its outcome was not so much decided by the valour of the soldiers on the battlefield, as by the factories on the home front churning out endless quantities of vehicles, weapons, and explosives. That is to say, by the alliances’ respective industrial strengths, the total firepower and destructive capacity that could ultimately be mobilized. Hence also the unprecedented importance of winning the ‘hearts and minds’ of the working population, taxpayers, and voters at home.

New printing techniques had meanwhile produced a popular mass press with million-copy titles in all major countries, along with posters and flyers with chauvinistic overtones. Better photographic cameras added true action pictures for the first time. The gramophone played nationalistic songs, early

movies reconstituted historic events along the familiar lines of ‘us versus them’. Advertising and early public relations (increasingly abbreviated as PR) were in the process of becoming more sophisticated and beginning to exploit motivation and emotion. This is how modern propaganda took off. Heroism on one's own side and atrocities on the other, both real and imagined, played a key role.

Prize-winning British *Sunday Times* journalist Phillip Knightley later published an overview book about war correspondents and propaganda during the modern age. With the title *The First Casualty* (meaning: ‘The first casualty in war is The Truth’). He summed up:

> The First World War was like no other war before or since. It began with the promise of splendour, honour, and glory. It ended as a genocidal conflict on an unparalleled scale, a meaningless act of slaughter that continued until a state of exhaustion set in [...] More deliberate lies were told than in any other period of history, and the whole apparatus of the state went into action to suppress the truth.53

Young Baschwitz was to be caught in the crossfire – as we will see in the next chapter.

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52 Alluding to American senator Hiram Johnson’s famous statement (in relation to America’s entry into the war). It turns out this is actually a variation of an older German proverb: ‘Kommt der Krieg ins Land/ Dann gibt's Lügen wie Sand’ (‘When war visits a country, lies become as numerous as grains of sand’.) Quoted by Fernand van Langenhove, p. 1.
