CULTURES OF ABORTION IN WEIMAR GERMANY
## Monographs in German History

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Volume</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Author</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Osthandel and Ostpolitik: German Foreign Trade Policies in Eastern Europe from Bismarck to Adenauer</td>
<td>Mark Spaulding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>A Question of Priorities: Democratic Reform and Economic Recovery in Postwar Germany</td>
<td>Rebecca Boehling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>From Recovery to Catastrophe: Municipal Stabilization and Political Crisis in Weimar Germany</td>
<td>Ben Lieberman</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Nazism in Central Germany: The Brownshirts in ‘Red’ Saxony</td>
<td>Christian W. Szejnmann</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Citizens and Aliens: Foreigners and the Law in Britain and the German States 1789–1870</td>
<td>Andreas Fahrmeir</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Poems in Steel: National Socialism and the Politics of Inventing from Weimar to Bonn</td>
<td>Kees Gispen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>“Aryanization” in Hamburg:</td>
<td>Frank Bajohr</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>The Politics of Education: Teachers and School Reform in Weimar Germany</td>
<td>Marjorie Lamberti</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>The Ambivalent Alliance: Konrad Adenauer, the CDU/CSU, and the West, 1949–1966</td>
<td>Ronald J. Granieri</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>The Price of Exclusion: Ethnicity, National Identity, and the Decline of German Liberalism, 1898–1933</td>
<td>Eric Kurlander</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Recasting West German Elites: Higher Civil Servants, Business Leaders and Physicians in Hesse between Nazism and Democracy, 1945–1955</td>
<td>Michael R. Hayse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>The Creation of the Modern German Army: General Walther Reinhardt and the Weimar Republic, 1914–1930</td>
<td>William Mulligan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>The Crisis of the German Left: The PDS, Stalinism and the Global Economy</td>
<td>Peter Thompson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>The ‘Conservative Revolutionaries’: The Protestant and Catholic Churches in Germany after Radical Political Change in the 1990s</td>
<td>Barbara Thériault</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Sex, Thugs and Rock ‘n’ Roll: Teenage Rebels in Cold-War East Germany, 1949–1957</td>
<td>Mark Fenemore</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Cultures of Abortion in Weimar Germany</td>
<td>Cornelie Usborne</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>Selling the Economic Miracle: Economic Reconstruction and Politics in West Germany, 1949–1957</td>
<td>Mark E. Spicka</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>Between Tradition and Modernity: Aby Warburg and the Public Purposes of Art in Hamburg</td>
<td>Mark A. Russell</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>A Single Communal Faith? The German Right from Conservatism to National Socialism</td>
<td>Thomas Rohkrämer</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
# CONTENTS

**List of Plates**

**Preface**

1. **Towards a Cultural History of Abortion**
   - Historical perspectives
   - Cultures of abortion in Weimar Germany

2. **Cultural Representation: Abortion on Stage, Screen and in Fiction**
   - Abortion in the movies
   - The novel *Gilgi* and the female reader and spectator
   - Socialist plays and novels
   - Abortion pathologized

3. **Medical Termination of Pregnancy: Theory and Practice**
   - The case of Dr Hartmann
   - Abortion in the medical discourse
   - Divided opinion within the medical profession
   - Medical blunders and legal practice
   - The case of Dr Hope Bridges Adams Lehmann
   - Financial considerations
   - Medical attitude and medical power
   - Women’s experience

4. **Abortion in the Marketplace: Lay Practitioners and Doctors Compete**
   - The anti-quackery campaign
   - Self-induced abortions
   - Lay abortionists
   - Gender and the abortionist
   - The careers of ‘wise women’
   - The safety record of quack abortionists
Methods and money 123
Class differences and shared culture 125

5 Women’s Own Voices: Female Perceptions of Abortion 127
The construction of the criminal in abortion trials 130
The experience of abortion 136
‘Blocked menses’ (Blutstockung) as a popular lay concept 148
Advertising abortifacients 151
Women’s sensory perceptions 154

6 Abortion as an Everyday Experience in Village Life:
A Case Study from Hesse 163
Rural communities in decline 167
Female communication networks 174
Reproductive Eigensinn 179
Rebellious women and men 181
Relations between the sexes 186
The career of a successful abortionist 192
Denunciation 195
Conclusions 199

7 Abortion in Early Twentieth-century Germany: Continuity and Change 201
Gender roles and gender relations 203
The blurring of boundaries 209
Continuity and change 214
Abortion in Nazi Germany 216
Continuity with Imperial Germany 223

Abbreviations 227
Notes 228
Bibliography 260
Index 279
LIST OF PLATES

1. Demonstration by communist Rotfrontkämpferbund, 19 August 1928, Leipzig (Bildarchiv Preussischer Kulturbesitz)  
2. Anja Zimowa as the modern wife, Maly Delschaft as the young teacher in Kreuzzug des Weibes, directed by Martin Berger, 1926 (ASDKB).  
3. Maly Delschaft as the young teacher, rape scene, Kreuzzug des Weibes, directed by Martin Berger, 1926 (Deutsches Filminstitut Frankfurt).  
4. Renée Stobrawa as Hete in Friedrich Wolf’s play Cyankali. §218, Berlin, 1929 (Ullstein).  
5. Film poster, Cyankali. §218, directed by Hans Tintner (1930), Grete Mosheim as Hete, ‘Madame Heye’, the abortionist in the background. (Deutsches Filminstitut Frankfurt)  
6. Programme for Carl Credé’s play §218. Gequälte Menschen, directed by Erwin Piscator, illustration by Käthe Kollwitz, ‘At the Doctor’s’. (Author’s own copy)  
7. Poster for mass demonstration against §218, March 1922, Hackerkeller, Munich. It lists Dr Klauber and Wendelin Thomas, member of the Reichstag, but Dr Hartmann also spoke (BAB).  
8. Hope Bridges Adams Lehmann, September 1914 (Monacensia Literaturarchiv, Munich).  
10. Article about ‘sexology, enforced procreation and mass misery’, Arbeiter Illustrierte Zeitung, no. 30, 1928.  
13. Timbered buildings in Nauheim as it is today. (Photo: C. Usborne)  
14. Oberbrechen seen from a field above the village (Josef Kramm, Brechen stellt sich vor, 1974).
Abortion has been legalized in many Western countries in the last three decades or so and yet it remains controversial and a subject which is never far away from the news. In March 2006 the American state of Dakota passed the most sweeping ban on abortion in more than thirty years and provoked what one newspaper report called an ‘epic confrontation’ by ‘activists on either side of the abortion divide – the great faultline of American politics’. Hardly a year goes by without a private member’s bill in the British parliament to reverse the liberal abortion law reform of 1967. As I write, a referendum has been won in Portugal on a proposal for abortion on demand which would end ‘one of Europe’s harshest abortion laws’. In May 1991 the disagreements over the abortion law threatened to split the German coalition government and in January 1998 German Catholic theologians called for a campaign of disobedience against a papal edict on abortion counselling. The new German Pope Benedict continues to wrestle with the dilemma. Abortion remains newsworthy because women of all classes, creeds and ethnicity continue to terminate their unwanted pregnancies in spite of laws criminalizing abortion and religious dogma condemning it, just as they have always done. It reveals women’s agency in exercising control over their lives and destinies, which is why abortion remains controversial to this day in societies that are still essentially patriarchal. In Weimar Germany abortion was practised not just as a back-up to other contraceptive methods but often as the first choice of family limitation; in the great majority of cases women were able to terminate unwanted pregnancies successfully and without harm to themselves. What is more, hundreds of thousands did so and influenced the law, public policies and official attitudes to women’s social role.

I originally set out, many years ago for my doctoral thesis, to study women's reproductive behaviour in Weimar Germany; as my archival research progressed, however, and I found file after bulging file containing evidence of abortion reform campaigns and the reaction to this in official circles, another story began to emerge, more amenable to historical study. This was the evolution from an anti-abortion society to one in which it was increasingly condoned. At the beginning of the Weimar Republic abortions rose sharply but were officially condemned and heavily penalized; during the Depression it was estimated that the abortion rate exceeded the birth rate and the authorities of state, law and even the Protestant – though not the Roman Catholic Church – were increasingly accommodating the changing demographic behaviour. The result of this research was my monograph, Politics of the Body in Weimar
Germany: Women’s Reproductive Rights and Duties (1992) which provides the sociopolitical context for this book. It explores how abortion features in popular culture but focuses mainly on women: how abortion affected their relations with husbands or lovers and how they experienced it, whether it was performed by family members or friends, professional abortionists or doctors.

Court records proved an invaluable source for my investigation but there were some anxious moments when it looked as if the German law on personal data protection would bar me from studying them. I was familiar with and had respected this law in my previous publications; but so worried were some archivists about letting me loose on what they regarded as delicate and compromising personal data that only protracted negotiations secured my access. Photocopies of records would have to be made anonymous by blanking out all proper names. I argued that this made it impossible to establish sexual, family and work relationships, understand their material circumstances or indeed recognize when individuals were accused a second or third time of criminal abortion. In one instance I was told to swear on the Bible to uphold the law and protect the secrets of my historical subjects. I accepted – but not before securing a better site than outside the gents’ lavatories for this ceremony. The table with the Bible was moved, my oath was sworn and access was granted to what turned out to be very rich material indeed. In deference to the data protection law all proper names of suspects, accused or defendants in criminal abortion trials have been changed in this book but care has been taken to choose new names with an appropriate regional flavour. Only personalities well known at the time have retained their real names, either because they were familiar to the public from their political or professional role or because they gained notoriety through their involvement in a sensational court case which was covered extensively in the contemporary press.

Registered medical practitioners attempted to gain a professional monopoly by marginalizing or even outlawing lay practitioners whom they called ‘quacks’. In the interest of legibility the words quacks or quackery will be used without quotation marks, which does not, however, indicate that I share contemporary doctors’ prejudices against their competitors in the medical market.

During its long gestation, the embryonic project has been nourished by the support and advice of many colleagues and friends: different parts of my research were discussed in London by the Modern German History Seminar and the Women’s History Seminar (both at the Institute of Historical Research), the Wellcome Institute for the History of Medicine and the History Workshop Seminar; in History seminars at the universities of Cambridge, Manchester, Roehampton, Southampton, Surrey and Sussex; in Germany at the universities of Hanover and Magdeburg; and at conferences in Britain, Germany, Ireland, Italy, the Netherlands and the U.S.A. I am grateful for the many valuable comments I received. There is not the space to thank everyone by name or convey the extent of my indebtedness but I owe a special debt to Lynn Abrams,
Preface

Meg Arnot, Anna Bergmann, Richard Bessel, Kelly Boyd, Barbara Brookes, Kathleen Canning, Gabie Czarnowski, Anna Davin, Ross Dickinson, Barbara Duden, Isa van Eeghen, Richard Evans, Karin Friedrich, Johanna Geyer-Kordesch, Marijke Gijswijt-Hofstra, Karin Hagemann, Anne Hardy, Liz Harvey, Karin Hausen, Robert Jütte, Annette Kuhn, Eva Labouvie, Machteld Löwensteyn, Angus McLaren, Elisabeth Meyer-Renschhausen, Jinty Nelson, the late Roy Porter, Lyndal Roper, Mark Roseman, Adelheid von Saldern, Lutz Sauerteig, Jürgen Schlumbohm, Reinhard Spree, Nick Stargardt, Pat Thane, Richard Wetzell and John Woodward. Many scholars helped me with advice and finding material of early films: Heide Schlüpmann, Ursula von Keitz, Reinhard Kämpf and Malte Hagener. Several people read earlier versions or portions of the manuscript, and I thank them for their encouragement and criticism: Willem de Blécourt, Kathleen Canning, Liz Harvey, Matthew Jefferies, Sabine Kienitz, Dorothy Rowe, Katharina Rowold and Susan Tegel. My research trips in Germany were made more enjoyable by the generous hospitality offered on numerous occasions by my friends Steffi Gäbler, Gudrun von Rimscha and Katja Schwalb, my brother Werner Tücking and his wife Marliese, my niece Eva Tücking, my cousin Ursula Hornack (who selflessly drove us round the many villages in Hesse which feature in Chapter 6) and Peter and Gudrun Tücking. In Berlin I was always welcomed by Anna Bergmann, Gabie Czarnowski, Elisabeth Meyer-Renschhausen, Carola Sachse and Karen Schönwälder.

An unusual number of midwives finally delivered me from the burden of my labour: the five other members of my brilliant writing group, Lucy Bland, Clare Midgley, Alison Oram, Krisztina Robert and Katharina Rowold did some exacting close reading of several chapters and gave wonderful advice for how to improve them. Jenny Willis was, as always, invaluable for polishing my English. This book would not have been conceived or completed without the support of my husband, Willem de Blécourt, who was not only a constant source of inspiration and comfort but also acted as a daily reminder of how much still needed doing, spurring me on to bring this project to fruition. My children, Nicola and Martin, managed to divert my attention in a most delightful manner and my grandsons Jesse and Caspar, very much wanted children, set the perfect counterpoint to the sombre theme of this book.

Last but not least I owe a debt of gratitude to the many (now anonymous) women I found in the archives and on whose stories I base much of my book. I have come to admire their strength of character in the face of adversity and their determination to fight their corner in the male-dominated world of law and medicine.

For their financial support I am grateful to the Wellcome Trust and the Leverhulme Trust for Research Leave Awards, and to the British Academy, The Wellcome Trust, the Scouloudi Foundation and The German Academic Exchange Service for research travel grants.

Previous versions of the following chapters appeared in articles in journals and edited volumes and are used here, substantially reworked and extended,

London
February 2007