

# ANTI-LIBERAL LIBERALS, THE NATION AND LIBERAL ANTISEMITISM

*Liberales anti-liberales, la nación y el antisemitismo liberal*

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Received: July 12, 2021

Accepted: October 16, 2021

## ABSTRACT

Starting from a discussion of remarks on liberalism in Horkheimer and Adorno's 'Elements of Antisemitism' in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, Stoetzler explores the relationship between liberalism, nationalism and antisemitism, using as source material an emblematic discussion among German liberals around 1880 known as the 'Berlin Antisemitism Dispute'. In this dispute, leading political and academic figures including Theodor Mommsen, Moritz Lazarus and Ludwig Bamberger responded to anti-Jewish remarks by the historian and National-Liberal politician Heinrich von Treitschke. Treitschke's texts have been central to the development of modern antisemitism in Germany, while analysis of the debate they provoked illustrates the limitations of the liberal critique of antisemitism. The article suggests that both Treitschke's support for antisemitism and the ambivalence evident in the views of his opponents are rooted in the contradiction between inclusionary and exclusionary tendencies inherent in the nation-form: to the extent that liberal society constitutes itself in the form of a national state, it cannot but strive to produce some degree of homogeneity of a national culture, which in turn cannot be separated from issues of morality and religion. Discussion of the 'Berlin Antisemitism Dispute' can help interpreting an important dimension of Horkheimer and Adorno's 'Elements of Antisemitism' and putting both together to work for current debates on crucial aspects of liberal thought such as nationalism, patriotism, ethnic minorities, immigration and 'multicultural society', in addition to antisemitism.

*Keywords:* liberalism, antisemitism, nationalism, capitalism, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, critical theory, Adorno, Horkheimer, Treitschke.

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## RESUMEN

Partiendo de la discusión de algunas observaciones sobre el liberalismo en los “Elementos de antisemitismo” de Horkheimer y Adorno en *Dialéctica de la Ilustración*, el artículo explora la relación entre liberalismo, nacionalismo y antisemitismo usando como material la emblemática discusión entre los liberales alemanes en torno a 1880 conocida como la “Disputa del antisemitismo de Berlín”. En esta disputa, figuras políticas y académicas destacadas, entre las que estaban Theodor Mommsen, Moritz Lazarus y Ludwig Bamberger respondieron a unas observaciones anti-judías del historiador y político Nacional-Liberal Heinrich von Treitschke. Los textos de Treitschke fueron centrales para el desarrollo del antisemitismo moderno en Alemania, mientras que el análisis del debate que provocaron ilustra las limitaciones de la crítica liberal del antisemitismo. El artículo sugiere que tanto el apoyo de Treitschke al antisemitismo como la evidencia que revelan las perspectivas de sus oponentes arraigan en la contradicción entre las tendencias incluyentes y excluyentes inherentes a la forma nación: hasta el punto de que la sociedad liberal se constituye en la forma de un Estado nación, no puede sino intentar producir un cierto grado de homogeneidad en la cultura nacional, que a su vez no puede separarse de cuestiones de moralidad y religión. La discusión de la “Disputa del antisemitismo de Berlín” puede ayudar a interpretar una dimensión importante de los “Elementos de antisemitismo” de Horkheimer y Adorno y la colaboración entre ambos puede iluminar debates contemporáneos sobre aspectos cruciales del pensamiento liberal, como el nacionalismo, el patriotismo, las minorías étnicas, la inmigración y la “sociedad multicultural”, además del antisemitismo.

*Palabras clave:* liberalismo, antisemitismo, nacionalismo, capitalismo, *Dialéctica de la Ilustración*, teoría crítica, Adorno, Horkheimer, Treitschke.

My proposition on the matter of liberalism, the nation and antisemitism is simple, and although arrived at ‘empirically’ (through a nineteenth-century historical case study), it can be presented as a straightforward theoretical inference:

- *Liberalism* presupposes and ‘contains’ nationalism (in both senses of the word: housing and facilitating, as well as limiting and controlling),
- on the one hand, directly: nation-building is a central liberal concern in nineteenth-century Europe; and,
- on the other hand, indirectly: if liberalism presupposes and contains the capitalist mode of production (again, in both senses of the word), it indirectly also points to the nation because capitalism presupposes the modern state system as its political form which is chiefly organized as a system of nation states.
- *Nationalism* is the notion that the realm of each particular state (within the global system of nation states) should coincide with, or ‘be mapped onto’ a particular cultural realm, a geographical space inhabited by ‘a culture’, which in turn is

nothing but the reified notion of actual culture as it happens to be lived by particular people in a specific geographical space, misunderstood – ‘fetishized’ – as somehow uniquely and essentially defining the people who find themselves within this realm, or even emanating from their collective ‘soul’.

- Nationalism is therefore by definition always ‘cultural nationalism’. The dichotomy between ‘political’ and ‘ethnic-cultural’ nationalisms often referenced by liberals does not exist.<sup>1</sup>
- *Culture* in turn includes all the things that are commonly addressed as ‘religion’, as well as all the societal, economic and political habits, practices, behaviours and customs that are supposedly informed by religion. (I say ‘supposedly’ because religion often merely canonizes and reifies these practices that typically predate the actual religions.) Because of this connection, it is very difficult for a liberal – who is by definition both a nationalist (as argued above) and a promoter of the capitalist mode of production – to be very liberal about religion, let alone nationality and ethnicity.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> If such a thing as ‘political’ or ‘constitutional’ nationalism that was not ‘ethnic’ or ‘cultural’ actually existed, except in the imagination of some political philosophers (typically proponents of republicanism), it would not really be nationalism. As it does not actually exist, though, there is no point in discussing it, except in order to argue with those who find the notion of non-nationalist nationalism (which they sometimes call ‘patriotism’) normatively desirable.

<sup>2</sup> ‘Ethnicity’ I consider to be but shorthand for ‘this is how we do stuff round here’, whose assertion is inevitably an authoritarian proposition meant to patronize and regulate, or else fend off, strangers who may (as imperialists) or may not (as immigrants of whatever other kind) be engaged in a project of imposing their own version of ‘how to do stuff’. Defensive assertion of ‘how we do stuff round here’ is the less authoritarian and the more emancipatory the more it relies on reasoned argument, open to interrogation by anyone, as to why, in a perspective of generalized human emancipation, this (‘traditional’) practice is worth defending against that other (‘modern’) practice (or vice versa). Certainly in the perspective of the *Communist Manifesto*, no cultural practice is *in and of itself* to be defended just because it exists, or has existed for a long time. Many of the cultural and societal practices that capitalist expansion has destroyed, and keeps destroying, are good riddance (e.g. church authority), many others are worth preserving or even bringing back (e.g. Welsh-language poetry), but each case must be argued on its own merits. (For example: all languages are, beyond their function as means of communication, means of expression as well as repositories of general ways to see the world, and as such the more there are of them, the better for humanity. This is a compelling reason to promote their usage but not an argument for a reformed world-system of nation states in which there was a separate state for every language group on earth.) A general opposition to ‘cultural imperialism’ that rejects the destruction of ‘the ways we do stuff round here’ *as such* is reactionary. In this context it is worthwhile studying the ambiguities of liberalism itself on imperialism in relation to ‘traditional society’, a concept that was invented in the context of imperial administration: while imperialism and colonialism were projects promoted by liberals (sometimes opposed by conservatives, sometimes supported by socialists), they made sure that imperial rule *preserved* or even reinforced elements of ‘traditional society’ whenever it suited their interests. They have always been marvellously flexible and undogmatic in this regard; emancipatory movements have to be the same, except that their interest is emancipation.

- This is the logical origin, or ‘the necessity’, of liberals’ adoption of ‘liberal antisemitism’, or at least their failure to fight antisemitism effectively.<sup>3</sup>

I will in the following try to illustrate this proposition, reflecting on and pulling together different aspects of work I have done in the past.

## 1 ON THE CONCEPT OF ‘LIBERALISM’

The concept of ‘liberalism’ is highly contested and deserves a few words of definition. A major source of the lack of clarity of the concept is that historically the presuppositions of the liberal *world view* and the more practical propositions of specifically liberal *politics*, or else societal and political liberalism, have not necessarily always come in a package: invocations of progress, civilization, ‘industry and liberty’, individualism and social harmony can in practice lend themselves to very different and contradictory policies.<sup>4</sup> In this situation, only a historical look at the concept’s history can give some guidance.

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<sup>3</sup> I am alluding to Frederic Raphael’s famous essay, of course (Raphael, 1990). Raphael suggests, with some echoes of Adorno, that antisemitism is ‘Europe’s elastic, agile, weightless companion, as necessary to its articulations as is the negative to its vocabulary’ (ibid.: 34). Antisemitism is so deeply embedded in European civilization that it will remain a ‘necessity’ as long as there are Jews who for (Christian) Europe cannot be allowed to simply exist: they can only exist as a negative, dead or alive. My argument, like that of Horkheimer and Adorno, is somewhat more optimistic: the Critical Theory position is that civilization *can* overcome such ‘necessity’ if it overcomes the way in which capitalist modernity, including liberalism, has locked civilization into its worst possible self. Another civilization remains possible if enlightenment reflects on and overcomes its own limitations (Stoetzler, 2009; 2018; 2019a and b). Support for Raphael’s much more pessimistic vision may be taken from David Nirenberg’s *Anti-Judaism* (Nirenberg, 2013) who provides the historical argument for Raphael’s (much earlier) conclusions.

<sup>4</sup> George L. Mosse (1987: xiv) suggested to distinguish between ‘Liberal thought’ – in particular individualism and the concept of *Bildung* as an unending process – from ‘Liberal politics’. Jarausch and Jones write similarly that liberalism is not only ‘an organized political movement’ but also ‘a set of cultural attitudes, social practices, and economic principles’ (Jarausch and Jones 1990: 13). Arblaster (1984) suggests that only such positions ought to be called liberal in the full sense of the word that pursue specifically liberal *goals and values* – such as individual rights and freedoms, limited government, religious toleration, free-market economics – against the backdrop of the specifically liberal *world-view*, namely methodological individualism, secularism, confidence in the use of reason, confidence in progress. This definition has the advantage that it acknowledges that goals that are typically pursued by liberals can also be pursued by people who have different (for example socialist or conservative) world-views, and also that liberal presuppositions (in terms of world-view) can lead to ‘illiberal conclusions’ (as in the case of Hobbes). Wallerstein makes a similar case with his suggestion to distinguish between ‘lower case’ and ‘upper case’ liberalism. He argues that liberalism is, on the one hand, ‘the global ideology’ or ‘the geoculture (...) of the modern world-system’ (Wallerstein 1995: 1) – ‘lower case’ liberalism – but on the other hand, a particular movement or party within this framework – ‘upper case’ Liberalism.

The political concept of liberalism emerged in the context of the French Revolution (the *Directoire*) as the predominant centrist position opposing simultaneously reaction and (revolutionary, republican, democratic or socialist) radicalism (Vierhaus, 1982). Liberalism was supposed to be the politics that would warrant social harmony, by implication the very existence of society itself in spite of its contradictions. The advent of modern class society as shaped by industrial capitalism and its sharpened antagonisms led to a redefinition of the liberal notion of social harmony and how it was to be secured.<sup>5</sup> German National Liberalism, which much of the following refers to, emerged from the experience in 1848 that the liberal vision of society could only be maintained in a coalition with the traditional ruling classes because democratic-republican movements were ready to take advantage of any power vacuum caused by a defeat of the aristocracy. In the German case, National Liberals entrusted the Prussian state with the destruction of traditional social structures in the various German states without allowing any such power vacuum to emerge. German National Liberals assumed that in the overall context of capitalist development, the modernizing dynamic of national unification would more or less automatically transform and modernize non-bourgeois political forms (basically what in the twentieth century came to be known as the optimistic version of ‘modernization theory’, developed by social scientists who were inheritors or even direct descendants of the German nineteenth-century National Liberals). Therefore, a ‘realist’ alliance with the representatives of non-bourgeois, more or less pre-capitalist political forms (Bismarck in particular) could seem to be legitimate and of long-term benefit to the liberal cause. At the same time, enmity towards state-led social policy was not universally shared among National Liberals: the notion that it was the task of the state to warrant social harmony had not been alien to the petty-bourgeois liberalism of the pre-1848 period, and also in the 1880s some liberals advocated moderate state-socialist reform. Some of them would have been perceived as ‘right-wing’, National Liberals, as opposed to ‘left-wing’, that is, ‘Manchester’ liberals, others evolved into a version of what in the British context is called ‘New Liberalism’. (Some free-market liberals were more friendly disposed to trade unionism than state-centric liberals typically were – that is, if and when they took their contractualist philosophy seri-

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<sup>5</sup> German liberalism before the caesura of 1848 was very much centred on the notion of (quasi natural) social harmony (that ought not to be disturbed by class-based organizations) (Langewiesche, 2000).

ously.) The continued existence of opposition within liberalism to what some German liberals called ‘English conditions’ or ‘Manchester capitalism’ on the grounds that they undermined the harmony of national unity constituted an important ideological bridge between liberal and antisemitic nationalism. More generically, the notion of opposing ‘Manchester conditions’ while endorsing (even if only implicitly) somehow acceptable forms of capitalism that are benign, harmonious, ‘fair’, humane etc. is a key ingredient of ‘left wing antisemitism’ beyond its explicitly liberal variety.<sup>6</sup>

## 2 HORKHEIMER AND ADORNO ON LIBERALS AND THEIR ANTI-LIBERAL OPINIONS

If one looked for one short key text on the subject of liberalism, nationalism and antisemitism within the context of Critical Theory, it would have to be the seventh thesis of Horkheimer and Adorno’s ‘Elements of Antisemitism’ in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, originally published in 1947. It begins with one of this book’s more puzzling assertions: ‘But there are no antisemites anymore. In their most recent form, they were liberals who wanted to assert their antiliberal opinion.’ (Horkheimer and Adorno, 1987: 230; 1971: 179; 2002: 165).<sup>7</sup> Horkheimer and Adorno propose in this section of the text a theoretical articulation of the difference between Nazi antisemitism and the one that had preceded and prepared it. As for the latter, they further distinguish between the antisemitism of old-school conservatives who had become ‘bloß reaktionär’ (Horkheimer and Adorno 1987: 230), ‘merely reactionary’, and the new type of anti-conservative, proto-fascist antisemites emerging around 1880<sup>8</sup> who embraced antisemitism as an attack on the social order, invoking ‘the Jewish question’ as ‘the social question’. By the last decades of the nineteenth century, those

<sup>6</sup> On ‘left wing antisemitism’, see Stuetzler, 2019c and 2021a.

<sup>7</sup> ‘Aber es gibt keine Antisemiten mehr. Sie waren zuletzt Liberale, die ihre antiliberalen Meinungen sagen wollten.’ All translations are adapted from the available two (quite unreliable) English-language versions on the basis of the German text.

<sup>8</sup> This periodization seems roughly to correspond to the notion that around that time liberal, market-driven capitalism began to turn into totalitarian, state-centric monopoly capitalism that was a precondition or foundation of both National Socialism and Stalinism. This conception, articulated by Horkheimer and Pollock at the time, although less so by Adorno, has often been critiqued (e.g. Postone and Brick, 1993). Without being able to discuss this here, I think it is neither quite as central a presupposition of *Dialectic of Enlightenment*-period Critical Theory as is usually asserted nor indeed quite as wrong.

were 'zeitgemäß', 'timely' or 'cutting edge'.<sup>9</sup> Although the text is not entirely clear on this, 'liberal antisemites' might have belonged to the old-fashioned, properly nineteenth-century group who disliked Jews for various traditional reasons, but also the new, 'timely', transitional type of antisemites whom Horkheimer and Adorno describe as bourgeois rebels. Not unlike the agitation of contemporary anti-vaxxers and anti-maskers, the 'völkische Schimpfen war noch die Verzerrung von ziviler Freiheit' (ibid.: 231), 'the *völkische* yelling was still a distorted form of [exercising/asserting] civic liberty': these modern, political antisemites attacked 'the Jews' because they thought Jews stood in the way of the proper evolution of modern society, social justice, liberty and harmony. Talk about the republicanism of fools (although these were often rather 'educated' and articulate fools). Horkheimer and Adorno suggest that the type of antisemites that became dominant in the half-century between circa 1880 and 1933 then evolved into a type of antisemites, characteristic of National Socialist and post-Nazi societies, that is not really one, inasmuch as it does not proudly confess or even mention it: hence their (sarcastic) claim that 'there are no antisemites anymore'. This, perhaps the ultimate, most mature stage of antisemitism, takes itself for granted, not needing anymore to campaign about the evil that are 'the Jews'. It becomes part of the fabric of the accepted general worldview rather than an ideology in its own right, with its own name proudly declared and flagged up. It must be maintained, of course, that both the traditional and the transitional types never left the historical scene and were still very much around, and National Socialism certainly produced plenty of antisemitic propaganda (except in periods when the Nazi leadership dialled it down deliberately for strategic or tactical reasons). Horkheimer and Adorno (not untypically) make here an exaggerated and one-sided point for rhetorical purposes. Furthermore, traditional and transitional antisemitism types certainly have returned since to the effect that in the present, there indeed *are* antisemites of every conceivable type or flavour, arguably in addition to the naturalized, endemic variety that does not speak its name. Horkheimer and Adorno did not anticipate at the time quite to what extent this colourful variety of antisemitisms would bounce back after 1945 and endure.

In the next sentence, Horkheimer and Adorno expound on the dialectical relationship between liberalism and antisemitism: 'In der Bierbankpolitik der Antisemiten kam die Lüge des deutschen Liberalismus zum Vorschein, von dem sie zehrte

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<sup>9</sup> Horkheimer and Adorno name Hermann Ahlwardt and Hermann Kunze as examples of these modern types.

und dem sie schließlich das Ende bereitete' (ibid.: 231): 'The beer hall politics of the antisemites revealed the lie of German liberalism, on which it fed and whose demise it finally brought about'. 'The lie' would seem to refer to the false promises of harmony, fairness and equality made by liberals, in good faith or not, that are not practically delivered by the capitalist mode of production, though, which liberals also endorse:<sup>10</sup> in denouncing its contradictions, antisemitism reveals the truth of liberalism. It 'feeds on' liberalism in two ways: it continues and evolves from, but also negates and destroys it. It is a kind of destructive realization or consumption, a negative kind of *Aufhebung*.

Post-liberal, totalitarian society in all its forms – fascist, western-democratic and Stalinist – has produced a form of antisemitism that has overcome the last vestiges of its origins in the age of liberalism and competitive free-market capitalism:

“Even though they insisted on using their own mediocrity as a license to subject the Jews to beatings in which universal murder was already latent, they at the time still had too much to lose economically (so sahen sie ökonomisch doch noch genug vor sich selber) when they weighed up the risks of the Third Reich against the advantages of a hostile form of toleration (die Vorteile einer feindseligen Duldung). Antisemitism was still one amongst a range of competing impulses that determined subjective choice (ein konkurrierendes Motiv in subjektiver Wahl). The outcome related specifically to it. The whole chauvinistic vocabulary was implied, though, from the start in the adoption of the *völkische* thesis. Antisemitic judgement had always already reflected stereotyped thinking. Today only stereotypy remains. Choices are still being made, but only between totalities.” (1987: 231; 1971: 179; 2002: 166)

Its fascist form was already contained in the antisemitism of the transitional period 1880-1933, just as the *völkische* movement already contained the NSDAP,<sup>11</sup> but individuals then still made choices on the basis of competing impulses, only one of which was the antisemitic one. These impulses were not yet integrated and automated into programmed totalities of sets of impulses. Individuals were still able to

<sup>10</sup> The genitive 'the lie of German liberalism' is a bit tricky to interpret: it could mean that German liberalism told a particular lie, but it is unclear which one. It seems rather that it materially is or consists of a lie. One also wonders whether they really meant that only *German* liberalism is a lie, or liberalism in *Germany* was a lie, or always was or is one anywhere, which seems more plausible within the framework of Critical Theory.

<sup>11</sup> On this see Ziege, 2002. Ziege uniquely and importantly includes the gender dimension in her detailed and closely source-based analysis of this discourse.



decide against moving from pogroms to extermination when economic rationality and self-interest dictated it. Whenever they acted antisemitically, they did so deliberately because they decided in one situation it was safe, advantageous or reasonable to do so, when in another situation they decided otherwise. They were antisemites because they wanted to, whereas the post-liberal, totalitarian types were antisemites by default, having subscribed to being a *Volksgenosse*, a member of the nation-race, the *Volk*. Different from the former, the latter could be antisemites without even knowing it, but they were ever more efficient antisemites for it. It had become part of 'second nature', as it were. Horkheimer and Adorno construct here what is a kind of ideal-type (in the sociological sense) on the one hand in order to understand National Socialism but on the other hand because they expected the fully post-liberal type of antisemite to survive the end of fascism and to constitute part of the fascist inheritance of the western-democratic type of societies. (In Stalinism it was evident anyway, but about this they never say very much in detail).

Ideology becomes an 'inventory of slogans', antisemitism 'a plank in the platform'. In order to remain relevant, one must vote for one of the big parties whose candidates form 'blocs' or 'tickets': if one supports fascism because one wants the trade unions destroyed, the destruction of the Jews is automatically included as it is part of the same 'ticket' or 'platform'. (One imagines the situation would be different if there were for example several fascist parties on offer, including fascist parties with differing policies concerning the neutralization of 'the Jews', as well as multiple other parties with specific profiles. Arguably such systems may lend themselves to less automatized decision-making and therewith also less stereotypical thinking. Horkheimer and Adorno seem to presuppose here that the typical late-capitalist situation is that of a two-party state like in the USA or UK, to which the Weimar system approximated itself in its last years.) 'The antisemite's conviction, however mendacious it may have been, has been absorbed into the preconditioned reflexes of the subject-less exponents of particular standpoints (Standorte)' (Horkheimer and Adorno 1987: 231). 'Standorte' seems to refer here to what sociologists today would call 'social positionings' – the idea (first expressed by Karl Mannheim and fiercely critiqued by Horkheimer at the time) that political positions mechanically reflect social positionings, usually conceived of in terms of class, without much interference or

mediation by actual, active subjectivity, i.e. *thinking*.<sup>12</sup> Parties that are properly partisan and partial, and therewith, in a complex modern society, inevitably multiple, are replaced in post-liberal, totalitarian society by ever fewer large-scale, unified political apparatuses that one ‘belongs to’ by virtue of positioning, not of ideological convictions and actual social experiences made as an individual within civil society. One does not need to develop active subjectivity as none is required – the choices are already made, ready to go.<sup>13</sup> It is perhaps worth pointing out that the qualification ‘however mendacious it may have been’ indicates that Horkheimer and Adorno do not in fact suggest that era of free-market liberalism was a golden age of some sort: the overall thrust of the text is clearly that the totalitarian constellation negated but also immanently evolved *out of* the liberal constellation. The former is *both* the negation and the fulfilment of the latter. To remain comprehensible also to philosophers: their identity is that of the identity of their identity and their non-identity.

### 3 THE BERLIN ANTISEMITISM DISPUTE OF 1879/80: REJECTION OF, VERSUS MIXED FEELINGS ABOUT, ‘GERMAN-JEWISH MISCHCULTUR’

The German National-Liberal historian and politician, Heinrich von Treitschke (1834-96) is the classic example of the type of antisemite described by Horkheimer and Adorno as ‘liberals who wanted to assert their anti-liberal opinion’, a notion Horkheimer and Adorno proposed in contrast to that of late-modern, post-liberal, fascist and post-fascist antisemites. As ‘western’ liberal society has historically defeated fascism in WW2 (and subsequently defeated also its Stalinist ally in the Cold War), study of the forms of antisemitism that occur in *liberal* societies is (again) of highest urgency: if liberal antisemitism ever disappeared at all, it bounced back after the defeat of fascism. As we are currently in a constellation where all kinds of political forms seem to be present and to morph into each other, creating new mutations and variants in the process, the type of antisemitism represented by Treitschke demands analysis as much as the Nazi variety that followed it. The ability of the one

<sup>12</sup> Mannheim’s position resembles in this regard the notion of the ‘societal dopes’ that mainstream sociologists typically accuse the Frankfurt School of promoting. Mannheim proposed his version of ‘standpoint theory’ as a general sociological theory, though, whereas in Horkheimer and Adorno’s hands it becomes an indictment of *totalitarian, post-liberal* society in particular. This implies of course that things do not *need* to be thus.

<sup>13</sup> It is striking how similar this account is to Guy Debord’s concept of ‘the spectacle’, formulated twenty years later.

to metamorphose into the other is an instance of what Horkheimer and Adorno named the dialectic of enlightenment.

Treitschke, although born in Saxony, was a main ideologist of a Prussian-led unification of ('smaller') Germany. He was a National-Liberal Member of Parliament and professor at Berlin University. One of the reasons that Treitschke became the poster boy for German antisemitism around 1880 is that he made some remarks supporting the then newly emergent antisemitic movement that were responded to by a number of key figures of German liberalism at the time. Often dubbed the 'Berlin Antisemitism Dispute', it is a highly revealing case study for researching the relationships between liberalism, nationalism, antisemitism, and ideas about race, culture, society and religion. Treitschke and his fellow liberals reacted to and discussed the antisemitic movement that was to become the precursor of the Nazi type of antisemitism, but produced a discourse that is more accurately understood as a precursor of today's discussions on liberal multiculturalism. Close reading of the dispute reveals how difficult it was for the anti-antisemitic liberals, who aimed to defend Jewish emancipation and legal equality, to distance themselves from their pro-antisemitic colleague, and how the radical antisemites, who watched and commented on the liberals' dispute, exploited the spectacle as affirmation of their own answers to the same questions. This constellation allows us to get a good impression of the dialectic between liberal and radical ('racial') antisemitism, and of the half-hearted and mostly toothless liberal defence against antisemitism, exposing liberals' difficulties with what we would now call multiculturalism.<sup>14</sup> The gist of my argument here is that the liberal defence of emancipation was hampered by the limitations of liberalism itself. I suggest that Treitschke was the kind of illiberal liberal referenced in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, while the analysis of the 'Berlin Antisemitism Dispute' also provides a route into exploring the relationship between the themes of *Dialectic of Enlightenment* and contemporary debates on race, culture, nation and multicultural liberalism. Reading these texts in this constellation puts the latter into the much grander, more radical perspective of *Dialectic of Enlightenment's* interlocking critiques of capitalist modernity and of civilization.

In November 1879, Treitschke reflected in a review of current affairs on the anti-Jewish activities of some groups and individuals, particularly in Berlin, in a way that

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<sup>14</sup> The following section is based on material discussed in much more detail in Stoetzler 2008b; see also Stoetzler 2008a, and Stoetzler and Achinger 2013.

was generally understood to support their cause.<sup>15</sup> The best known amongst the respondents to the remarks made by Treitschke included the social scientist Moritz Lazarus (1824-1903), the historian Theodor Mommsen (1817-1903) and the banker and politician Ludwig Bamberger (1823-1893).<sup>16</sup> The historical background to the Dispute is marked by the foundation of the German *Reich* in 1871 and the formation of fringe groups of radical antisemites in 1879, in the context of which the word 'antisemitism' itself was coined.

Treitschke's texts are notorious for formulations such as 'The Jews are our misfortune' (Treitschke, 1896: 26), or: 'our country is invaded year after year by multitudes of assiduous trouser-selling youths from the inexhaustible cradle of Poland' (ibid.: 23). Although they are generally acknowledged to have been crucial for the gaining hegemony of modern antisemitism in Germany, Treitschke was a figure of the centre, not the margins of German society at the time.<sup>17</sup> In the dispute, nationalist liberals responded to a fellow nationalist liberal's anti-Jewish remarks, while both sides were equally committed to defending and helping consolidate the newly founded German nation-state.<sup>18</sup> Both sides shared assumptions about the national state, emancipation and the status of cultural or ethnic minorities.

In one of the key passages of the article that triggered the 'Berlin Antisemitism Dispute', Treitschke stated the following:

"What we have to demand from our Jewish fellow-citizens is simple: that they become Germans, feel themselves simply and justly to be Germans, regardless of their faith and their old sacred memories, which all of us hold in reverence; for

<sup>15</sup> A comprehensive analysis of the dispute, as well as complete translations of Treitschke's 'Our prospects' and Lazarus' 'What does national mean?' are contained in Stoetzler 2008b. Good surveys of the dispute are contained in Abraham (1992) and Meyer (1966). The classic sociological interpretation of the dispute is by Arthur Rosenberg (1930). See also the respective passages in Massing (1949), Salecker (1999), Claussen (1987) and Reemtsma (1992).

<sup>16</sup> Lazarus was the president of the Israelitic Synods of 1869 and 1871 and co-editor of the *Zeitschrift für Völkerpsychologie und Sprachwissenschaft*, a journal that pioneered what nowadays would be referred to as cultural anthropology. Mommsen was also a professor at Berlin University and the author of *Roman History*, whose celebration of Julius Caesar influenced the political thinking of middle class Germans in the 1860s. Bamberger was a republican and had been a participant in the *Reichsverfassungskampagne* of 1849. Then a Proudhonist, he became a successful banker. On return from exile in 1868, he became an advisor to Bismarck and played a leading role in the restructuring of the German currency system. Bamberger and Heinrich Bernhard Oppenheim were crucial figures of successively the *Deutscher Nationalverein*, the *Fortschrittspartei* and the pro-Bismarck National Liberal Party.

<sup>17</sup> On Treitschke's liberalism cp. Langer (1998); Megay (1958) and Krieger (1957); see also de Ruggiero ([1927] 1981).

<sup>18</sup> Treitschke left the National Liberal Party in July 1879 because it was less than unanimous in its support for the introduction of a number of tariffs.

we do not want thousands of years of Germanic civilization (Gesittung) to be followed by an era of German-Jewish mixed culture (Mischkultur). ... it cannot be denied, however, that there are numerous and powerful groups among our Jewry who definitely do not seriously intend to become simply Germans” (Treitschke, 1896: 23).

The logical structure of this statement is contradictory: the demand the Jews become Germans ‘regardless of faith and memories’ seems to imply that religion is irrelevant for being German. This ‘demand’ appears to be a statement about state citizenship and loyalty only. Treitschke’s specification of Germanness as ‘feeling’ oneself to be German, however, seems to determine the ‘becoming German’ as a process in which a choice that is *political as well as cultural* is internalized. This impression is confirmed by the subsequent sentence – the sentence introduced by ‘for’ – in which Treitschke explains why he demands the Jews become Germans: ‘we’ do not want ‘Germanic civilization’ to be replaced by a ‘mixed culture’. The wish – a statement about ‘civilization’ and ‘culture’ – provides Treitschke with the reason for the demand the Jews become Germans. If the concern about the purity of German culture provides the grounds for the demand for the Jews to ‘become Germans’, the latter cannot be primarily a matter of state citizenship but must be cultural. It is doubtful then how ‘faith and ... old sacred memories’ could be bracketed out of the equation. Here lies a crucial contradiction in Treitschke’s discourse.

#### 4 THE LIBERAL NATIONALISM OF THE ‘DECLARATION OF THE NOTABLES’: HOW BEST TO OVERCOME PARTICULARITY

The most momentous statement against Treitschke’s anti-Jewish remarks was the ‘Declaration of the Notables’, published in November 1880 by a group of seventy-five leading politicians, businessmen and academics of Berlin. The declaration is a confident formulation of post-1848 German liberalism’s emphasis on the intrinsic connection between national unity, individual liberty and market economy. It is implied that endangering any one element of this packet endangers all of them:

“Fierce struggles have united our fatherland to a powerfully rising Empire. Unity has been achieved because the feeling of necessary belonging (nothwendigen Zusammengehörigkeit) carried the victory over the tribal and religious divisions that had fragmented our nation like no other. Making individual members [of the nation] pay for these divisions is unfair and vulgar and mostly punishes those

who honestly and seriously strive to overcome [their] particularity and to achieve true amalgamation with the nation (in *treuem Zusammengehen mit der Nation die Sonderart abzuwerfen*). They experience it [this discrimination] as a breach of loyalty from those with whom they feel they are striving for the same goals. It prevents what is and remains the common goal: the harmonization of all past divisions that still continue to exist within the German nation. ... respect for every denomination; equal right; equal sun in competition; equal recognition of merit and achievement for Christians and Jews” (‘Declaration’, 1965: 202; 204).<sup>19</sup>

Although being directed against (among others) Treitschke, the declaration took up the same basic theme – nation building through amalgamation and overcoming of particularity – with a different emphasis on its political-economic implications.

Ludwig Bamberger, a leading member of the National Liberal party that Treitschke had left just a few months earlier, reminded Treitschke of what tended to be at the time the National Liberal understanding of the concept of culture: ‘... culture is just the opposite of the linear propagation of a single national spirit (*Volksgeist*), and German culture stands so high because it managed to assimilate and digest so much’ (Bamberger, 1965: 171f). The similarity to today’s liberal-multicultural celebrations of ‘diversity’ is striking. Treitschke responded with a comment on what in today’s parlance would be ‘cultural hybridity’:

“The intellectual work of past millennia is given to all modern peoples to lean on. Although our German culture (*Gesittung*) flows ... from three sources, classical antiquity, Christianity and Germanity, it is not at all a mixed culture: we have amalgamated the Christian and the classical ideals with our own essence (*Wesen*) so totally that it has become part of our flesh and blood. But we do not want the neo-Jewish being (*das neujüdische Wesen*) to join these three cultural powers as a fourth one because whatever elements of Judaism fit in with the German genius have long been included into our culture through the mediation of Christianity. ... the neo-Jewish spirit leads our people astray when it faces ours independently” (Treitschke, 1896: 54).

Bamberger and Treitschke share the notion that national culture emerges over time through ‘amalgamation’ or ‘assimilation’ of disparate elements, a pivotal idea of nineteenth century liberal nationalism (Abraham, 1992). The disagreement is about the particulars of the recipe: at what point has the ideal mixture been found?

<sup>19</sup> This is from the ‘Erklärung’ (Declaration of the Notables [1880]), as contained in Walter Boehlich (ed.), (1965). An English version of the ‘Declaration’ is contained in Pulzer (1988: 326-7).

should there be another helping of Judaism in the mix, or would that mean over-egging the cake? Again, this motive is common in contemporary discourses on multiculturalism: right-wing liberals still today tend to argue that diversity is welcome as long as it makes society stronger (and eating out tastier) but there is a cut-off point when it becomes ‘too much’ and endangers ‘social cohesion’.<sup>20</sup>

## 5 MOMMSEN’S NOTION OF THE JEWS AS A ‘FERMENT OF COSMOPOLITANISM AND NATIONAL DECOMPOSITION’

A differing articulation of the liberal conception of German nation-building was offered by Theodor Mommsen.<sup>21</sup> Mommsen reacted to Treitschke’s referencing a passage in Mommsen’s own major work, *Roman History*.<sup>22</sup> Mommsen tried to argue that this passage should not be seen as supporting antisemitism. In *Roman History*, Mommsen had depicted the formation of the Roman Empire as a process of ‘national decomposition’ in the course of which ‘the Greek and the Latin nationalities find a peace with each other’ that is based on ‘the rubble of second rate peoples’ (Hoffmann 1988: 89). Greek and Latin elements are the ‘positive’ elements of the new citizenry, while the Jews and others form the ‘parasitical’ Hellenistic-Oriental population of Rome (a precursor of the nineteenth- and twentieth-century notion of *Ostjuden*, as it were). The ‘Barbarian’ nations had to be destroyed, while the Jews – that ‘peculiar, flexible but enduring people’ – acted ‘as it were’ as a third party (Mommsen 1857: 529f).<sup>23</sup>

“Already then we find the distinct antipathy of the Occidentals against this so thoroughly Oriental race and its foreign opinions and mores. Nevertheless, this Jewry – although it was not the most pleasant trait of the nowhere pleasant picture of the miscegenation of peoples (*Völkermengung*) of the day – was a historical element that developed in the natural course of things” (ibid.).

Mommsen argues that Caesar wanted to take advantage of two characteristics of the Jews: first, their indifferent behaviour against any state, second, their tendency

<sup>20</sup> A current representative of this anti-multiculturalist discourse is Eric Kaufmann; cp. Stoetzler (2021b).

<sup>21</sup> Mommsen was also one of the key signatories of the ‘Declaration of the Notables’.

<sup>22</sup> Mommsen’s *Roman History* had considerably influenced the German educated classes, especially through the positive depiction of Julius Caesar, often seen as an endorsement of the kind of politics that Bismarck came to stand for.

<sup>23</sup> This is from *Römische Geschichte vol. three, second edition*, book 5, chapter 11.

to adopt any nationality to a certain extent in order to ‘wrap up’ (‘umhüllen’) their ‘national particularity’. The formulation by Mommsen that Treitschke referred to (in a text from 1880: Treitschke, 1896: 123-5) was this one:

“Already in the old world, the Jews/Judaism (Judenthum) were/was a powerful ferment of cosmopolitanism and national decomposition and for this reason a particularly legitimate member of the Caesarian state whose polity was nothing but cosmopolitanism, whose nationality (Volksthümlichkeit) was nothing but humanity” (Mommsen, 1857: 529f).

This remark became a staple reference in antisemitic literature since Treitschke quoted it. In his response, Mommsen emphasized that it had been meant to *celebrate* the constructive role Jewish destructiveness has for the processes of state-formation:

“Without doubt the Jews are an element of tribal decomposition in Germany just as they once were an element of national decomposition in the Roman state. This is why in the German capital, where the tribes actually mingle more thoroughly than anywhere else, the Jews hold a position for which they are envied in other places” (Mommsen, 1965: 217).

The equivalent of the *nationes* in the Roman Empire are the ‘tribes’ (Stämme) in the new German Empire. Their decomposition is a precondition of state formation. By using Mommsen’s formulation of the ‘ferment’ of ‘national decomposition’, Treitschke associated Mommsen’s view of the Jews with his own and that of the antisemites. Liberal defense of the Jews was henceforth vulnerable to pointing out the embarrassing fact that Mommsen, one of very few non-Jewish defenders of Jewish emancipation at the time, had himself provided a formulation that became a much used antisemitic slogan.<sup>24</sup> I would argue, though, that Treitschke’s use of Mommsen’s formulation was not as disingenuous as Mommsen furiously claimed it was. Mommsen’s supposedly ‘philosemitic’ position resembles the enthusiasm shown a few years later by many, including some Jewish intellectuals for Werner Sombart’s tendentious historiography of capitalism that attributed to Jews a pioneering role that was seen by some as flattering and celebratory, by others though as a slander – depending of course on what position anyone would have taken on the merits, or faults, of capitalism. For Sombart, in fact, whose politics were nationalist and state-socialist (‘new liberal’, as it were), Jews were responsible for *the wrong kind of capitalism*.<sup>25</sup> It also reverberates in some contemporary liberals’ invocations of the

<sup>24</sup> Hoffmann (1988,102) references amongst others Lagarde, Hitler and Göbbels.

<sup>25</sup> See various contributions in Stoetzler, ed., 2014.



supposedly ‘mercurial’, cosmopolitan and especially modernist disposition of Jewish people (e.g. Slezkine, 2004), be this understood as a national or a cultural-ethnic category. The entire approach of pointing out, let alone ‘celebrating’ this or that ethnic group for being ‘the pioneers’ of such a contradictory and ambiguous social phenomenon as capitalism is bound to be misleading in any case and is best avoided in any context whatsoever. Furthermore, Mommsen’s enthusiasm for Caesar and Roman imperialism suggest he was perhaps not entirely averse also to modern Caesarism and the imperialist destruction of ‘Barbarian peoples’ in the present.

Mommsen connected his rejection of Treitschke’s position with his own view of nation-building:

“A certain amount of mutual grinding down [of their peculiarities] on the part of the tribes (*ein gewisses Abschleifen der Stämme an einander*) is demanded unconditionally by the current situation, i.e. the formation of a German nationality that is not identical with any particular tribe (*Landsmannschaft*). The big cities, and first of all Berlin, are its natural protagonists. I do not consider it at all a misfortune that the Jews have been active in this direction for generations. It is my opinion that Providence, much more than Herr Stöcker, has understood very well why a few percent of Israel had to be added to form the Germanic metal” (Mommsen, 1965: 219).<sup>26</sup>

Mommsen presents progress in nation-building as a quasi-natural process that has to be somewhat painful. So, stop whining and grow up!, is Mommsen’s message to Treitschke. A large part of the rhetorical and emotive power of Mommsen’s statement lies in its ambivalence. His affirmative depiction of the role of the Jews for the modernizing process still leaves the antisemitic stereotype intact: Mommsen implicitly accepts the antisemitic diagnosis of ‘Jewification’ of society but recommends putting up with and embracing it, accentuating the positive, rather than opposing the inevitable.

## 6 TREITSCHKE’S NOTION OF THE JEWS’ INABILITY TO BUILD A STATE

Central to Treitschke’s view of the Jews was their inability to build a state of their own:

<sup>26</sup> Berlin court chaplain Stöcker, perhaps the most prominent antisemite at the time, had held a widely noted speech just a few months before Treitschke published ‘Our Prospects’ whose content overlaps considerably with Treitschke’s argument.

“Since its dispersion over the whole of the world, Jewry existed in an irresolvable inner contradiction; it suffered the tragic fate of a nation without state. The Jews always wanted to live under the protection of Occidental laws ... and yet claim to be a strictly separate nation. Such an attitude always had to provoke new struggles because it stands in such fierce contradiction to the hard necessity of the unity of the state (zu der harten Nothwendigkeit der Staatseinheit)” (Treitschke, 1896: 37f).

The root of all Jewish defects is their lack of statehood, an argument that seems to echo the Hegelian notion of the ‘historyless people’. In an environment that is characterized by the necessity that all (other) nations form states, this anomaly of the Jews cannot but lead to trouble; even ‘noble and highly gifted nations’ (such as the Germans) are driven by the Jews into hating them. But in spite of being unable to form a state, Treitschke argues that the Jews still maintained a sense of separate nationhood:

“Today the unfortunate struggle is settled, civil equality of the Jews has long been achieved in all civilized states (Culturstaaten) ... With emancipation achieved, however, the old Jewish claim to separate nationhood has also become totally obsolete. In the present century of national state formations, the European Jews can have a role that is peaceful and conducive to civilization (der Gesittung förderliche) only if they decide to dissolve into the civilized peoples (Culturvölkern), whose languages they speak – as far as religion, tradition and tribal characteristics (Stammesart) allow this to happen” (Treitschke, 1896: 38).

Not being able to build a state, the Jews ought to give up their nationality in order to be ‘conducive to civilization’, i.e. not to stand in the way of the other nations’ nation building. Treitschke appeals to the Jews to give up their stubborn resistance to assimilation but adds the important caveat that they may be prevented from doing so by their ‘religion, tradition and tribal characteristics’. The liberal expectation that the Jews give up their Jewishness is intertwined here with the implicitly racist suspicion that maybe they *cannot* do so.

## 7 MORITZ LAZARUS: THE PROPOSITION OF MULTICULTURALIST LIBERALISM

One contributor to the dispute advocated diversity in a manner astonishingly close to today’s liberal multiculturalism, Moritz Lazarus. His was the most comprehensively developed challenge to Treitschke. He commented:

“Mores, customs, strivings, life-styles can, may and should be diverse; they will have to be objectively different because they are meant to be the ultimate, the most pure, the most certain for everyone [subjectively]. (...) How will truth grow if not through spiritual struggle, (...) through the competition of forces?” (Lazarus, 1880: 42)<sup>27</sup>

Lazarus defends diversity in the name of ‘the competition of forces’ and the notion that truth grows thanks to it. His choice of words puts his argument in the vicinity of political economists’ view that general wealth grows through economic competition. For Lazarus, ‘the permanent vocation of the Jews’ is to be promoters of difference, a role Jews and Germans hold in common (ibid.: 44). Lazarus sees at the root of the problem of Jew-hatred a conception of history that is teleological and linear, and whose theological equivalent would be Christian supercessionism. He rejects the notion that the earlier ‘stage’ of a development has a right to exist only insofar as it ‘gives birth’ to the subsequent ‘stage’ or form of existence (ibid.: 41). He argues that ‘the generic’ or ‘humanity’ is not the *outcome* of an evolutionary process but the totality of all the forms or individuals that evolve in the process. Rather than believing that history is evolving towards an ‘end’ it ought to be understood that ‘the whole great diversity of spiritual life and creation’ is ‘precious in itself’.

“Here [in the linear and teleological conception of history] lies the deepest root of all intolerance. This is why for the Catholic, Protestantism is nothing but heresy, while for the Protestant, Catholicism is but a preparatory stage. (...) It has been held as an ideal that the whole world should adopt the culture of one people: all should become Roman or French. True culture, though, consists in diversity” (ibid.).

Lazarus condemns the imperialism of Roman and then French culture although he does not reject the notions of development and progress in general. The ‘ultimate’ though consists for him not in ‘unity’ but in ‘totality’ and ‘diversity’, ‘which neither can nor should be destroyed’. Lazarus’ position marks the most liberal limit point of liberalism, consisting in the (positivist, and philosophically conservative) affirmation of the totality of differences as they exist and evolve. He argues that ‘it has been long established’ that the most diversely mixed peoples turn out to be the culturally and historically strongest ones, a variant of the National-Liberal argument

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<sup>27</sup> This lecture, *Was heisst national? (What does national mean?)* was given on December 2, 1879, before the general meeting of the *Hochschule für die Wissenschaft des Judenthums*. The printed version of the speech was widely circulated.

already referred to above. For Lazarus, though, it follows that the German Jews ‘have the duty ... to remain Jews’ and to put their Judaism ‘to the service of German national spirit as a part of its strength’. This is not, however, an issue of the ‘mixing of blood’ but of ‘spiritual abilities, moral drives’, and the ‘longing to shape the world’. These ‘spiritual abilities’ are incorporated individually in the tribes that come together to form the nation: only in the nation they are harmonized and transcend the individual and the tribal towards the generically human. Lazarus remains in this way and in spite of his ‘multi-culturalism’ within the National-Liberal framework.<sup>28</sup>

## 8 TREITSCHKE’S NOTION OF ‘OUR PEOPLE’S ANCIENT GOOD-NATURED WILLINGNESS TO WORK’

Another one of the characteristics Treitschke held against the Jews was their economic spirit. He writes:

“There is no German merchant city that does not count many honest, respectable Jewish firms among its number. But it cannot be denied that the Semites have contributed a large part to the dishonesty and deception and the bold greediness of the boom-time mischief (Gründer-Unwesen), and that they share heavily in the guilt for the contemptible materialism of our age which regards every kind of work only as business and threatens to suffocate our people’s ancient good-natured willingness to work (die alte gemüthliche Arbeitsfreudigkeit unseres Volkes)” (Treitschke, 1896: 24f).

Treitschke’s term, ‘Arbeitsfreudigkeit’ seems to denote a sense of duty combined with the pride of good work. On this issue, Treitschke was strongly reprimanded by fellow liberals. Heinrich Bernhard Oppenheim (1819-80),<sup>29</sup> wrote: ‘The whining about the spiritlessness (Ungemüthlichkeit) of modern production comes from the bunglers who fail to produce up to date products and who would be saved if they could hide behind the privileges of a guild or a system of protective customs’ (Oppenheim, 1880: 20). Ludwig Bamberger likened the propaganda against the exploitation of the Germans by the Jews to that about the Germans in Russia: Russian nationalists and pan-Slavists similarly accused the Germans of being a foreign conquering

<sup>28</sup> On Lazarus, see Stoetzler, 2008b and 2014.

<sup>29</sup> Oppenheim was a journalist and a close co-operator of Bamberger. In his influential text on *Kathedersozialismus* (a term Oppenheim coined in 1871) of 1873, he argued that trade unions were a corrupting influence on workers, and academic theorists of (state-)socialism were a threat to academic freedom (Hamburger, 1968: 268).

group exploiting the native population. Bamberger insisted that a group of economically successful immigrants served rather than exploited their new country and added:

“Hopefully Herr von Treitschke, who used to profess sound economic principles, will not intend making concessions to the simplistic delusion – currently coming back into fashion – that those who make money through their labour exploit society and do not through their services make society so much richer” (Bamberger, 1965: 164).

Bamberger suggests here that Treitschke’s rejection of the ‘contemptible materialism of our age’ was a turn towards a covert form of socialism. The thrust of this attack was that Treitschke was a most prominent enemy of both *Kathedersozialismus* (socialism of the lectern; monarchic state socialism) and Social Democracy: it was a sharp move to suggest that Treitschke was now turning into a socialist:<sup>30</sup> Treitschke attacked specifically *the Jews* for being unproductive, whereas socialist antisemites attacked *unproductive wealth* as such for being ‘Jewish’. Bamberger deliberately conflates Treitschke’s liberal antisemitism with socialist antisemitism and, by implication, the latter with socialism *tout court*.

Bamberger’s formulation that it is a ‘simplistic delusion’ to say ‘that those who make money through their labour exploit society and do not through their services make society so much richer’ is the kind of liberal argument that Adorno and Horkheimer must have had on their minds when they claimed that a specifically bourgeois delusion was implicated in the overall social process that produces antisemitism: ‘Bourgeois antisemitism has a specific economic foundation: the concealment of domination in production’ (Horkheimer and Adorno, 1987: 202). Industrial capitalists do not usually admit to appropriating value but present themselves instead as producers. Exploitation must then be the work of the sphere of circulation. In reality, though, appropriation and exploitation take place ‘not only on the market but at the very source’, in production (ibid.: 203). Any serious theory of modern society must be able to explain the decisive social fact of capital accumulation. In situations where liberals are forced to fight Social Democracy (as in Imperial Germany), they must denounce the rational (Marxian) explanation of the apparent miracle (the labour theory of value) along with irrational ones (such as, cheating by ‘the

<sup>30</sup> Treitschke supported the (anti-social democratic) *Sozialistengesetze* in their sharpest form and had made in 1874 furore with a pamphlet against socialism (‘Der Sozialismus und seine Gönner [Socialism and its benefactors]’, in: *Preussische Jahrbücher* 34, 67-110).

Jews’): thereby they help create the intellectual confusion that typically benefits antisemitism. It is in this sense that the liberal position such as exemplified in Bamberger’s generic declaration that ‘those who make money’ are producers not expropriators is indirectly complicit with the antisemitic attack on ‘the Jews’.<sup>31</sup>

## 9 TREITSCHKE’S NOTION OF THE ‘SECULAR’ GERMAN STATE AS A ‘CHRISTIAN NATION’

Perhaps surprisingly, given that ‘modern antisemitism’ is often construed in opposition to ‘religious anti-Judaism’, a discourse on the role of religion was quite central to the way state, nation and culture were debated in the ‘Berlin Antisemitism Dispute’, and also in the wider antisemitic literature of the time. *The German Guard*, the most important of the radical antisemitic publications, carried on its front page a quotation from the Greek philosopher Plutarch: ‘You can rather build a city in the skies than see a state endure without religion.’ (*Die Deutsche Wacht*, July 1880: 629). It is quite clear from the overall discourse of Marr and Naudh – who seem to have been atheists – that for them religion is just an element of *raison d’état*. For Treitschke, the same seems to be true despite his more emphatic and regular professions of piety.

In a key passage of his third contribution to the Dispute, Treitschke argues that the state, although it ought to be secular, needs a degree of societal unity of ‘emotional life’, which in turn depends on some degree of clerical unity within the nation:

“¡That living consciousness of unity that constitutes nationality [can usually not be formed] amongst people who think in fundamentally different ways about the highest and most sacred questions of emotional life. ... I am not a follower of the doctrine of the Christian state, because the state is a secular order and has to exert its power with impartial justice also against non-Christians. But without doubt we Germans are a Christian nation” (Treitschke, 1896: 57f)

Treitschke reveals here a contradiction that lies at the heart of his thinking: the state be secular, but the ‘consciousness of unity’ that is pivotal to the state be based on a consciousness of the religion shared by the nation.

<sup>31</sup> Treitschke abandoned the economic line of antisemitic reasoning as a reaction to reprimands by his former party colleagues. The radical antisemites however showed themselves grateful for Treitschke’s acknowledgement of one of their pivotal and most popular lines of reasoning and developed it much further (see Stoetzler 2008b, 79-88).

Treitschke received (not necessarily welcome) assistance from the radical antisemite Naudh in this issue. Naudh argued that ‘since nationality has come back to life within the peoples, the talk about the separation of state and church has lost its meaning’ (Naudh, 1965: 194). This argument implies that separation of state and church had meaning only under conditions of non-national states, i.e. the early modern territorial states that did not (yet) make claims to ethnic-cultural unity.<sup>32</sup> Naudh connects his argument to the tradition of right-wing readings of Hegel to which Treitschke belonged, too:

“Religion is the supreme expression of the morality (Sittlichkeit) of a people and God is the embodiment of its consciousness of right (Rechtsbewusstsein). (...) Right, morality (Sitte) and religion originate from the same source. (...) Church and state are not hostile to each other but exert the same task in different spheres. In the sphere of the state lie the deeds: these, though, have first been thoughts and had to negotiate with mind and conscience, which lie in the sphere of the church. It is better and safer that the church educates conscience than that the state punishes deeds. The church does work in advance of the state in the world of thoughts, while the state merely needs to catch up with what might have escaped the church” (Naudh, 1965: 194f).

In a note directed to Lazarus, Naudh mocks that the latter ‘could have learned’ from Hegel’s ‘Philosophy of History’ that ‘religion stands in the closest connection with the principle of the state: *the concept of God is the general foundation of a people*’.<sup>33</sup> Naudh’s notion that ‘church and state ... exert the same task in different spheres’ and ‘originate from the same source’ contains an element of a valid critique of a conceptual separation of spheres that often characterizes liberal thought. The decisive difference between a critical and a reactionary critique would be, though, the determination of what this ‘source’ actually is: rather than the *Volksggeist* that lurks between the lines of Naudh’s argument, a concept of society would be needed: antisemitism gives fatally wrong answers to some actual problems concerning the limits of liberal theory.

<sup>32</sup> Cp. Marx 2003.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.: 200; italics in the original. Naudh is probably quoting from Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Weltgeschichte, Band 1: Die Vernunft in der Geschichte (Lectures on the Philosophy of World History, vol 1: Reason in History)* [1830], section Bc, ‘Das Material seiner [des Geistes] Verwirklichung’ (Hamburg: Meiner 1955), 127. If this is what Naudh quotes, he is misquoting: Hegel does not leap (like Naudh does) from ‘state’ to ‘people’ but explicitly talks here about *states*, not peoples.

## 10 HARMONY, IDENTITY, EQUALITY

The modern liberal state presents itself as an institution dedicated to easing the societal antagonisms that come with the capitalist mode of production by conducting gentle social and cultural reform, led by the reasonableness of justice and equality. In order to be able to do so, however, the state claims to be expressive of a particular national culture: the liberal state typically comes as the nation-state, the state 'of' a particular nation. The history of the modern state as the political form of capitalist society suggests that the nation state is its only long-term successful form. The more the nation is suffused by explicit ethnic-cultural content – the form of legitimacy that outperforms any alternatives such as 'social justice' or 'civil rights' – the more the state will be able to function. The social harmony, cohesion and inclusion that the liberal state promises *are* in reality those of the national community, and thus inclusionary only to the extent that they are exclusionary.<sup>34</sup> Adorno and Horkheimer expressed this fundamental limitation of liberal society in the context of its most extreme breaking point, the Holocaust, when they observed that '[t]he liberal Jews had to experience at last the harmony of society, which they confessed to, as the harmony of the *Volksgemeinschaft* ...' (Horkheimer and Adorno, 1987: 199). The sarcasm of this remark has sometimes been construed as victim-blaming, but it is better understood as a desperately bitter 'told-you-so' directed at the many Jewish Europeans who were liberals or supported liberal politics, including some of their own friends, colleagues and family: few things could be more obvious from a Marxist perspective than the fact that liberalism's suggestion a reconciled, harmonious capitalism could be achieved through some kind of reform programme or other is a lie that obscures the fundamentally antagonistic character of capitalist society.<sup>35</sup> The point here is that liberals do not so much tell that lie to others but *to themselves*: they blind themselves to the reality of their own social position, fatally underestimating how precarious it really is. At a more general level and in the present day, liberals still tend to be badly surprised when bad things happen that they thought inconceivable (Brexit; Trump; climate disaster...), simply because liberal dogma makes them fail to conceive of so many things. The key figures of the Frankfurt School, including Horkheimer, were amongst the relatively few people who did see the Hitler regime

<sup>34</sup> On the racist implications of the concept of 'community cohesion' see Burnett, 2004, esp. p.11-2.

<sup>35</sup> For the purposes of the present argument, I subsume 'socialism' and 'social democracy' under the concept of liberalism, broadly conceived.



coming thanks to the empirical research they did based on their relatively open form of Marxist and psychoanalytical theory, which robbed them of a few illusions concerning the resistance Weimar society could be expected to offer up. Likely survivors' guilt notwithstanding, this entitled them to that somewhat snarky 'told-you-so' in the first thesis of 'Elements'. Rather than complaining about the polemical tone of Horkheimer and Adorno's text, contemporary liberals should perhaps better take seriously the diagnosis that the liberal belief in 'harmonious society' (that lives on in suicidal strategies such as 'bipartisan' politics in the USA) plays into the hands of those who bring about very illiberal harmony.

## 11 IS ANTISEMITISM GOOD OR BAD FOR THE NATION?

The 'Berlin Antisemitism Dispute' was predominantly about the ways in which national culture is understood to mediate between state, society and individual in the modern context: it is this larger concern, central to nationalist liberalism, that gave antisemitism a discursive place, relevancy and meaning, and that made some liberals such as Treitschke objectively help antisemitism become hegemonic, whether or not they subjectively felt they did. The nation-state's relation to 'cultural difference' constitutes one of the conditions of modernity that have provided antisemitism with a platform from which it was able (and in some way or other still is able) to unfold its destructive potential.<sup>36</sup>

The national question frames the value judgements of all sides involved. The movement that refers to itself with the neologism 'antisemitic' is understood by National Liberals (except by Treitschke) as a threat to national unity: the liberals see the nationalism of the antisemites as 'exaggerated' because it undermines the nationalist endeavour itself. Although Treitschke rejected pan-Germanism and pan-Slavism in similar terms as harmful forms of nationalism, he believed that antisemitism would *strengthen* national consciousness in Germany.

It is one of the intrinsic contradictions of modern liberalism that it entrusts the realization of legal equality, emancipation and individualism to a state that it is only

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<sup>36</sup> It goes without saying that the presence or absence of further conditions decided whether or not this potential was realized in one country, but not in another. The present essay abstracts from this particular problem.

able to conceive and actualize as a national state, i.e. a state that makes the claim of being based on and expressive of a cultural-ethnic community.<sup>37</sup>

The existence of the nation-state creates a pressure to enforce some extent of cultural homogeneity, especially in times of crisis. The issue here is, why did ‘the Jewish question’ seem so important to a nationalist like Treitschke that he rather took the risk of threatening social peace than accepting the presumed fact of the increasing ‘Jewishness’ of society? Treitschke stopped subordinating a general and diffuse antipathy to ‘the Jews’ to the larger objective, nation building and national unity, which is what fellow-liberals like Mommsen attacked him for. Even those who explicitly invoke ‘race’ present racial difference as dangerous *because* it signifies differences of cultural, religious, moral and economic social *practices*. Whether such differences are considered to be ‘immutable’ (i.e. ‘racial’) or merely to be changing very slowly over periods of hundreds or thousands of years (i.e. ‘cultural’), is often of only limited relevance: ‘culture’ (in a fixed state of reification) is no less inscribed into the body than ‘race’ is.

## 12 ARE ‘THE JEWS’ WILLING AND/OR ABLE TO ASSIMILATE?

If a minority appears not to be assimilating to the culture of the national state to the extent it is expected to, representatives of the established national culture tend to draw one of three conclusions:

- first, they may think the members of the minority are *prevented* from assimilating by social and historical circumstance – the classic position taken by Enlightenment figures such as Dohm and Humboldt and echoed by several of Treitschke’s critics;
- second, they may think the members of the minority are *unwilling* to assimilate, which is the dominant theme of Treitschke’s contributions: the Jews’ stubbornness needs to be overcome by a variety of more persuasive or more repressive means;

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<sup>37</sup> It should be added that the form of nationalism of which Treitschke was a major spokesman is as much of the ‘political’, allegedly ‘Western’ kind as of the ethnic, romantic kind that received opinion holds to be typically German. On Treitschke’s Hegelian background cp. Langer (1998) and Megay (1958).

- or, third, they may think the members of the minority are *unable* to assimilate, which is the ‘racist’ position held consistently by Naudh and sometimes by Treitschke: as they are a ‘different race’, there is no point in even trying to persuade or push the Jews to assimilate – they must be prevented from exerting any influence by marginalization, isolation, expulsion or murder, depending on a variety of conditions.

These three options work towards the same end, the consolidation of nation-building, and as the idioms of culture and race can be translated into each other, a call for *cultural* unity can never be immune against being transformed into a call for *racial* unity. Treitschke endorsed antisemitism because he expected it would accelerate the assimilation of the German Jews and strengthen national consciousness amongst all Germans. The racist side of his argument comes from his intimation Jewish assimilation *may* not be possible, and his trust (between the lines) that the overriding objective – strengthening nationality – can also be achieved without Jewish assimilation: if inclusion does not work, exclusion will.

Now as then, the liberal critique of the exclusionary tendencies of nationalism finds its limits at what Treitschke called ‘the hard necessity of the unity of the state’, which is a necessity produced by liberal society itself. The liberal discourse collapses and gives way to an anti-liberal one at the point where a whole series of conceptual dichotomies that are foundational to it prove unstable: ‘mixed culture’ is difficult to distinguish from ‘amalgamation’; ‘culture’ from ‘race’; ‘politics’ from ‘religion’; the ‘national state’ from ‘national society’; ‘*Sittlichkeit*’ from ‘religion’; ‘religion’ from ‘religiosity’. All these distinctions and differentiations, in spite of their intellectual appeal and importance, melt away when brought into the discursive force-field of ‘the hard necessity of the unity of the state’, especially in a historical context characterized by economic and political crisis.

### 13 STATE, NATION, CULTURE

The modern nation state is a form of state whose advocates and functionaries claim it is based on the congruence of the political and the ethnic-cultural. ‘The nation’ is here – different from what the word had meant in premodern times – the crucial mediator between a state and the society whose political form that state is. In the concept of the nation, society is articulated simultaneously as a cultural community and as a political one inasmuch as it forms a state. Conversely, the (emerging or

already existing) political formation is ethnicized to the extent that it is articulated as national. The respective state that demands loyalty and ‘identification’ from its members (beyond the mere payment of tributes or taxes) tends to demand that ethnic or religious minorities assimilate or convert. The relevance of such processes immensely increased in the modern context, especially since the nineteenth century. It is in this context that state and culture in their interplay came to be understood as furnishing ‘sites of reconciliation for a civil and political society that is seen to be riven by conflict and contradiction’ (Lloyd and Thomas, 1998: 1). The decisive shift in the modern context is that an arbitrary relation between state and population is now seen as illegitimate: the state is now seen as the historically developed ‘unifying representation’ of a ‘popular will’ (ibid.: 3). The state ‘expresses at a higher level the still developing essence’ of ‘its’ people. Culture, though, is supposed to sublimate competing partial interests by developing everybody to his (or her) ‘full human capacity’ – actually the capacity to be bourgeois – which promises the ending of all conflict. Culture supposedly ‘educates’ the ‘citizen’ from the mere ‘human being’ (ibid.: 5). This ‘educating’, or ‘education’, maintains a dialectic between partial interests and ‘full human capacity’: liberal society constitutes the individual twofold, as an ‘abstract’ and a ‘concrete’ individual (Postone, 2003: 94). To the same extent to which *Gesellschaft* (society) is always underpinned by some form of *Gemeinschaft* (community), the ‘abstract individual’ is always underpinned by a more specific (cultural, ethnic) ‘identity’ whose ‘characteristic role is to structure and limit the choices the individual makes’ (Poole, 1991: 94). So far, no liberal society anywhere has dared to rely on the purely ‘abstract identity’ of its citizen-individuals only: that is why liberal societies are usually nation states (there are still a few exceptions but they move in the same direction). Decisive in this context is *which* characteristics of an individual ought to be relevant for how this individual will participate in state and society, and which characteristics are irrelevant to this (i.e. ‘private’), and whether the line between the two is solid, precarious or perhaps not existent at all. The ‘emancipation’ of various groups of the population (women, Jews, workers, ‘ethnic groups’) is taken to mean emancipation into the ‘maturity’ or adulthood of being bourgeois subjects and citizens: it is ‘the function of culture to interpellate individuals into the disposition to disinterested reflection’ that alone allows the state to mediate conflicts between social groups (Lloyd and Thomas, 1998: 14).

The modern state assumes direct, unmediated authority over the individual, challenging and transforming traditional community. This authority is legitimized by the

claim that the state is the political embodiment of a new form of community that (logically) pre-exists the state. This new form of community, the nation, is supposed to 'speak' through 'its' state as it also speaks through 'its' culture. The open-ended and dynamic character of *actual* culture is in this process contained, neutralized and partially denied by the claim that it is the expression of the nation, an imaginary entity that is an abstraction from culture in its actual diversity: the claim that culture is national is based on fetishistic reversal. Culture that is understood as 'national culture', i.e. the basis of a collective national 'identity' (which means 'sameness' in time and space) that underpins a state (which is, by definition, something static),<sup>38</sup> must itself also be static: the concept of 'national culture' must reify and negate the dynamism that constitutes *actual* culture. A consistently dynamic concept of national culture, as Lazarus attempted to formulate, is logically impossible.

#### 14 GOOD AND BAD NATIONALISMS

In the liberal context, and in its following also in the socialist one, nation formation has often been construed as the overcoming of ethnic-racial divisions, as it has in the 'Berlin Antisemitism Dispute': nationalism tends to appear in these contexts as the opposite of racism. This notion lives on in the contemporary discourse that opposes republican 'patriotism' to nationalism, or good, moderate to bad, ethnic nationalism.<sup>39</sup> The opposite position that emphasizes the dialectic between inclusion and exclusion as intrinsic to the nation form is implied in the already quoted formulation by Horkheimer and Adorno: 'the harmony of society' which liberalism promised, turned out to be but 'the harmony of the *Volksgemeinschaft*', i.e. that of the mobilized national community, the community on the attack.

In the period of the French Revolution, what are today described as the 'civic' and the 'ethnic' discourse of the nation were developed and used *together* against that of the legitimist, traditional, historical rights of princes and nobility.<sup>40</sup> Talk

<sup>38</sup> The hint is in the name; cp. Holloway (2002). On 'identity', cp. Niethammer and Dossmann, 2000, 253.

<sup>39</sup> Critical of this are for example Yack (1996), Brubaker (1999), Balibar and Wallerstein (1991), Fine (1994).

<sup>40</sup> As Brubaker argued, the difference between French and German nationalism is not a distinction between political on the one side, cultural/ethnic nationalism on the other side, but that between a comparatively *integrated* political-cultural/ethnic nationalism as it emerged in France, and that of a tension-ridden *dualism* between political and cultural/ethnic nationalisms (in the plural) characteristic of nineteenth century Germany (Brubaker, 1992 and 1999) In both countries, furthermore, the

about the ‘will of the nation’ needed to be based on a determination of who the nation was. This implies a definition not only in socio-economic terms (the nation is the *Third Estate*, as famously stated by Sieyes)<sup>41</sup> but also in cultural-geographical ones. As John Gray, a helpfully plain-talking liberal, asserts, the notion ‘that a common allegiance can be sustained by subscription to abstract principles, without the support of a common culture’, is a ‘rationalist illusion’ (Gray, 1998: 25). Similarly, Stuart Hall writes that the modern liberal state is of necessity ‘enmeshed’ and ‘embedded’ in the social practices and imaginaries of national culture (Hall, 2000: 228-9). Bikhu Parekh confirms that ‘a morally neutral state, making no moral demands on its citizens and equally hospitable to all cultures, is logically impossible’ (Parekh, 1998: 6). The basic point, however, was made in its classic form already in 1835 by Alexis de Tocqueville: ‘Despotism can do without faith but freedom cannot. ... How could society fail to perish if, while the political bond is relaxed, the moral bond were not tightened?’ (Tocqueville, 2002: 280f).<sup>42</sup> Tocqueville says here more than he seems to say at first reading: the liberal state depends on ‘the moral bond’ being kept nice and tight, but who will do the regular tightening? Does the liberal state not better keep a close eye on that moral bond tightening itself, and just in case, be ready to ratchet it up a bit? Does it not thereby become despotic again? (This is indeed the argument Tocqueville ends up making later on in part two of his masterpiece.) Nineteenth-century liberals were acutely aware of the fact that one of the tasks of the liberal nation state was to create social coherence. Tragically, the nation state in the twentieth century has been astonishingly successful with creating homogeneity, using more brutal (fascist) as well as more subtle (democratic) means. As a result, today’s society is simultaneously as differentiated and as homogeneous as no other preceding form of society (Jacoby, 1999). In this context, ‘ethnic diversity’, especially the thin trickle of cultural alterity that results from immigration, has grabbed public attention out of all proportion.<sup>43</sup> An increasingly homogeneous society ever more neurotically debates the imagined threat stemming from ethnic difference as a fetish that helps it suppress its much more pertinent fear of cultural death by self-imposed monotony. It also compensates for the silence on differences other than cultural, forgetting how many vibrant cultural differences fell victim to

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‘inner’ nation-building through state-led unified educational and communication institutions happened on a large, truly national scale only from the 1870s onwards (Breuilly, 1992).

<sup>41</sup> Cp. Sewell (1994).

<sup>42</sup> This is in vol. 1, part 2, chapter 9.

<sup>43</sup> Cp. Stoetzler 2021b.

destruction by the 'culture industry'. Actual differences that escaped elimination are now repackaged, adapted and advertised as differences between 'ethnicities' or 'cultures'.<sup>44</sup>

The persistence, as well as more specifically the reform, of liberal society depend on the existence of a state; a state in the modern context can only be a nation state in which the construction of a national culture mediates between state, society and individual; national culture consists of inseparably interwoven assumptions about morality, social practices (including 'the economy') and religion; religious and other cultural difference is tolerated only on the condition that it is hidden away in the private realm, but at the same time the public realm cannot do without invocations of religiously informed culture; therefore 'the better state of things ... in which people could be different without fear'<sup>45</sup> must within this framework remain a utopian dream.

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<sup>44</sup> Failure to recognise and criticize this reality is one of the conceptual weaknesses of the discourse of 'multiculturalism' that is based on a rather thin concept of culture: 'No divergent political or economic vision animates cultural diversity. ... The secret of cultural diversity is its political and economic uniformity' (Jacoby 1999: 39f).

<sup>45</sup> 'Politics that are still seriously concerned with [an emancipated] society ought not, therefore, to propound the abstract equality of men even as an idea. Instead, they should (...) conceive the better state of things as one in which people could be different without fear' (Adorno, 1978: 103). The German word here rendered with 'state of things' is *Zustand*.

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