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### THREATS TO MODERNITY, THREATS OF MODERNITY

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# THREATS TO MODERNITY, THREATS OF MODERNITY

Racism and antisemitism through the lens of literature

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**ABSTRACT:** This paper illustrates how the study of literature can inform sociological research on racism and antisemitism by sharpening our perception of the commonalities and differences between the respective stereotypes and of their functions for the construction of collective self-identities. Drawing on the case study of Gustav Freytag's best-selling novel *Soll und Haben* (*Debit and Credit*, 1855), the paper argues that antisemitism and racism frequently represent complementary reactions to the experience of capitalist modernisation.

**Key words:** antisemitism; racism; Islamophobia; literature; capitalism; modernity

The following pages seek to illustrate how literary studies can inform our thinking about the social imaginary and provide impulses for empirical research. Not only is literature obviously part of social discourse, but the tools of literary analysis – the investigation of structures of meaning, narratives, images and tropes – can sharpen our understanding of social discourses more generally. Literature itself is a symbolic codification of historical experiences and social constellations, even though filtered through an individual and often idiosyncratic sensitivity. Beyond the manifest content of a text, literary form frequently encapsulates fundamental assumptions about the deep structure of reality and the relationship of subject and world. Classical literary realism, wedded to an organic conception of the work of art, to an omniscient narrator and to a transparent narrative governed by rationally comprehensible causation and exemplifying fundamental moral values, for example, conveys a very different sense of being in the world than the conflicting perspectives and disjointed narratives, the aesthetics of rupture and estrangement and the general

scepticism towards the relation of language and world that characterise so many modernist texts. However, literature does not just react to social experience but structures it in turn by creating shared patterns of perception and interpretation. While a work of literature cannot simply be assumed to represent collective views, or even to be a direct expression of the author's opinion, literary analysis can provide case studies and exemplary models of interpretation, and suggest possible patterns of meaning that we might want to look out for in social discourse more generally.

I would like to illustrate this with reference to the relationship of antisemitism to other forms of racism. Their analysis often suffers from the fact that these different forms of group stereotyping are either discussed in separate scholarly and discursive universes, or are simply treated as variants of the same.<sup>1</sup> Frequently, little attempt is made to study the specific content of these images and their differences. If one sees such constructions as – at least in part – phenomena of projection, however, their understanding requires a closer look at these different ideas of 'otherness' and the varied roles they play for the construction and stabilisation of a collective self-understanding of majority society.

Let me turn to a contemporary example to make this more palpable. In recent years, the notion that 'Islamophobia is the new antisemitism' has gained ground in both media and academic discourse.<sup>2</sup> This observation is usually based on the fact that both are forms of group stereotyping along ethnic, cultural and/or religious lines, and lead or have led to devaluation, discrimination or even physical attacks.<sup>3</sup> Literature on the relationship between antisemitism and anti-Muslim racism<sup>4</sup> frequently focuses on the fact that both Jews in the nineteenth and early twentieth century and Muslims today were or are being perceived as strangers who resist assimilation, whose religious conviction seems to militate against their integration into what is thought of as a rational secular order (even though in fact strongly influenced by Christianity), and whose visibly different culture, expressed through clothing and customs, is seen as backwards, a foreign element, a nuisance or a threat (e.g., Malik 2007; Meer and Noorani 2008). Both groups were or are predominantly poor and hence

1. See also the article by Cousin and Fine in this issue.

2. See, e.g., Dalrymple (2004); Malik (2007); Guarnieri (2010); Meer and Noorani (2008); Bunzl (2005, 2007); Benz (2009); Luban (2010).

3. See, e.g., Gilman (2005); Malik (2007); Guarnieri (2010); Meer and Noorani (2008); Ahmed (2004); Firestone (2010); Silverstein (2008); Benz (2009).

4. I prefer this term to that of 'Islamophobia', as it avoids conflation of the critique of religious fundamentalism with anti-immigrant or Orientalist racism. See also Halliday (1999: 898f.); Al-Azmeh (2009: xii, 1–10); Fourest and Venner (2003); Malik (2008). I use the term 'racism' in a broad sense here to include cultural racism (see also Balibar 2005; Guillaumin 1995: 90–4).

seen to represent a social problem, and the fear of the ‘Jewish anarchist’ preparing bomb attacks on British society in the early years of the twentieth century corresponds to today’s fear of the Islamist terrorist (e.g., Malik 2007; Meer and Noorani 2008).

While making valid and important points, this historic picture of anti-Jewish feeling is, however, only a partial one. Much of the argument is based on the assumption that racism results from an inability of the majority culture to cope with the presence of the visibly ‘other’. Such a focus obscures the fact that strong antisemitic currents in most European countries were not concerned with visible Jewish differences, but on the contrary with the fact that Jewish assimilation had been all-too successful. The most important power ascribed to Jews was typically not the power of explosives but the secret power of money and manipulation. This suggests that what we usually subsume under modern ‘antisemitism’ are in fact two different kinds of phenomena that, although interrelated, should be distinguished analytically: what I call ‘anti-Jewish racism’, and ‘antisemitism’ in the narrow sense of the word. While the former typically targets unassimilated recent Jewish immigrants from Eastern Europe for their self-segregation, cultural maladaptation, poverty and backwardness, the latter operates with a diametrically opposed set of stereotypes: it is directed against the wealthy, assimilated Jew who does not live in a ghetto, but has blended into the fabric of the nation where he is pulling the strings of modern economy and politics as part of a secret conspiracy. Whereas the former refuses to become part of modern society, the latter is nesting at its heart and manipulates it to his nefarious ends.

Many parallels can be drawn between anti-Jewish racism and contemporary anti-Muslim racism. But while anti-Jewish racism can indeed be seen as on its way out – all the more so since during the Second World War, the culture it targeted has been eradicated along with those who filled it with life –, antisemitism in the latter sense may challenge simple parallels with anti-Muslim racism and call into question widespread assumptions about the origins of racist stereotypes themselves.<sup>5</sup> Rather than emerging from an inability to cope with the presence of the visibly ‘other’, these projections may, on the contrary, call this ‘other’ into being. In his seminal *Reflexions sur la question juive*, Jean Paul Sartre

5. It should go without saying that the observation that these two forms of stereotyping operate with different images and work in different ways has no bearing on the fact that either deserves our criticism wherever it occurs, and that the victims of each should be able to lay claim to our solidarity. To shy away from noting differences for fear of establishing hierarchy between different forms of hatred and exclusion, though, does not further the anti-racist cause, but damages our ability to understand and confront either of them.

observed that ‘if there were no Jew, the antisemite would have to invent him’ (Sartre 1946: 14). Despite their difference in function and content, the same can also be said for other forms of racism, and in order to understand their origins, parallels and differences, we have to understand *why* each of these different ‘others’ had to be invented.

A contribution to the debate on antisemitism and anti-Muslim racism that is of particular interest because it does approach the issue in terms of the functions of both forms of stereotyping is that of Matti Bunzl (2005). Bunzl’s analysis, however, seems at times too schematic to fully do justice to historical reality and is based on what appears to be an intentionalist paradigm. According to Bunzl, modern, secular ‘[a]nti-Semitism was invented in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century to police the ethnically pure nation-state’ (Bunzl 2005: 499). Islamophobia, by contrast, ‘is a phenomenon of the late 20<sup>th</sup> and early 21<sup>st</sup> century’ (Bunzl 2005: 502); at its heart is not a notion of race, but of a fundamental incompatibility of Islam with Western culture. According to Bunzl, this reveals ‘the thorough insignificance at the current time of the modern variant of anti-Semitism’ (Bunzl 2005: 502), which has ‘become obsolete in the supranational context of the European Union’ (Bunzl 2005: 502).<sup>6</sup>

There is much in this description that needs to be interrogated. The assumption that anti-Muslim racism is a recent development,<sup>7</sup> the claim that the age of nationalism is over and the diagnosis that antisemitism is no longer ‘a phenomenon of the current age’ (Bunzl 2005: 506) all seem open to challenge. A host of research shows that while violence and open expression of hostility towards Jews have, after the Holocaust, mostly become the business of a right-wing fringe and, more recently, some young Muslim radicals,<sup>8</sup> feelings of resentment against Jews that reiterate the idea of secret Jewish power and are replete with what Theodor W. Adorno has called ‘secondary antisemitism’, antisemitism after and because of Auschwitz,<sup>9</sup> are widespread and intensifying in most European countries<sup>10</sup> and by no means restricted to the Right.<sup>11</sup>

6. For a thoughtful and incisive critique of Bunzl’s approach see Fine (2009).

7. Cf. Said (1978); Firestone (2010); Al-Azmeh (2009: 174–95).

8. Bunzl (2005: 504).

9. Adorno (1971: 10).

10. See e.g., Zick *et al.* (2011); EUMC (2003); Anti-Defamation League (2009); Porat and Stauber (2009). For examples of nationally specific data see Heitmeyer (2010); Zick and Küpper (2005); Community Security Trust (2010, 2011); Country Reports of the Stephen Roth Institute, Tel Aviv University (<http://www.tau.ac.il/Anti-Semitism/CR.htm>).

11. Cf. Haury (2002); Postone (2006); Hirsh (2007) and various articles in Rabinovici *et al.* (2004); Brosch *et al.* (2007); and Loewy (2006).

A closer look at the history of modern, secular antisemitism suggests that, firstly, it is not necessarily tied to biological essentialism and did, in fact, long precede the development of racial theory in the narrow sense;<sup>12</sup> and secondly, while nineteenth-century antisemitism frequently invoked the national community against the threat embodied by the Jews, there is no reason why its political frame of reference necessarily has to remain the ethnically defined nation state. Rather than attempt to define antisemitism and anti-Muslim racism by trying to connect one to biological and the other to cultural forms of racism, or to associate them with the age of nationalism and the supposedly post-national era, respectively, it seems more promising to look at *how* these ‘enemies’ are actually imagined, which tropes are employed in modern antisemitism and other forms of racism, and what idea of the collective ‘self’ is constructed through the opposition to these ‘others’. What position do ‘we’ and ‘they’ occupy within an overall image of how the world works, and what do these imaginaries tell us about the historical and social experiences that produce them?

In order to illustrate the usefulness of such an investigation and to interrogate Bunzl’s conception of nineteenth-century antisemitism, I would like to turn to a different, historical and literary example for the interrelation of antisemitism and racism: Gustav Freytag’s novel *Soll und Haben* (*Debit and Credit*, 1855). While the constellation of antisemitism and anti-Slavic racism in this text does obviously not allow any direct inferences regarding the relationship of antisemitism and anti-Muslim racism today, this case study brings out with particular clarity the differences between different kinds of group stereotyping. It therefore suggests a categorial framework for a more systematic comparison, both synchronically between antisemitism and anti-Slavic or anti-Muslim racism, and diachronically between different forms of racism then and now.

### 1. Gustav Freytag’s *Debit and Credit*

The novel’s historical significance is grounded in the fact that it was, by all accounts, the most widely sold and read German novel of the entire second half of the nineteenth century, appearing in frequent new editions into the post-war years of the *Bundesrepublik*. It constitutes one of the most influential attempts at defining German national and middle-class

12. See also Haury (2002: 25–9); Erb and Bergmann (1989: 11); Berding (1996: 193f., 198); Nipperdey and Rürup (1987: 122–25); Pulzer (1988: 47); Volkov (2000: 60f.); Hertzitz (1988: 236ff., 262–73).

identity after the demise of the emancipatory hopes of the 1848 revolution. At the centre of the novel stand the concerns raised by the emergence of a modern, capitalist society in the German countries around the middle of the century. The book develops the notion of a specifically ‘German’ way to modernity that remained part of national discourse well into the twentieth century. Freytag was an influential literary theorist and one of the most prominent national-liberal writers and journalists of his time, and the overall thrust of the novel is in many aspects decidedly progressive as regards the economic and social order it advocates (see Ping 2006). The text thus lends itself particularly well for a study of the interrelation of antisemitism, racism and modernity, and challenges the widespread perception that such ideologies were historically an exclusive concern of the reactionary Right.<sup>13</sup>

The novel, set in the 1840s, is chiefly a *Bildungsroman*, i.e., a novel of education, tracing the development of its hero, Anton Wohlfart, from romantic youth to sober and steadfast merchant. Early on in the narrative, on his way to the capital to take up his first employment as an apprentice in the merchant house of Traugott Schröter, Anton encounters the young noblewoman Lenore von Rothsattel, who will henceforth be the object of his secret desires which shall threaten to lead him astray on his way to a solid middle-class existence. On the same journey, Anton also meets the future anti-hero of the novel, the young Jew Veitel Itzig, who travels to the capital to start a new life in the services of the Jewish trader Ehrenthal. The lives of the two young men will from now on take an outwardly parallel, but morally markedly different course. Itzig and Ehrenthal, in league with an assortment of Jewish cronies, succeed in swindling the von Rothsattels out of their fortune, and the family is forced to relocate to their last remaining property, a dilapidated estate in Prussian-occupied Poland. Anton joins them to take care of their financial affairs. The recurring conflicts and battles with the rebellious Poles strengthen Anton’s national and bourgeois identity, and he eventually turns his back on the temptations of the life of the nobility. Back in the capital, he manages to find the von Rothsattels’ mortgage deeds that Itzig had stolen and saves the family from ruin. Unable to withstand the pressures of the investigation, Itzig murders his accomplice and eventually drowns himself, driven to madness by his feelings of guilt. Anton’s return into the fold of the middle classes is finally sealed by a marriage proposal from Schröter’s

13. In his more explicitly political writings, Freytag even advocated Jewish emancipation. On the apparent tensions between Freytag’s political journalism and his novel see Achinger (2007: 337, 342). On the phenomenon of liberal antisemitism more generally see also Herzog (1996); Stoetzler (2008); Katz (1990: 148–52); Rürup (1975); Achinger (2011).

younger sister Sabine and an offer to become an associate in the merchant house.

The gender discourses that the novel develops and the oppositions and conflicts which structure the convoluted plot – between the German middle class characters and the nobility, the Jews and the Poles – all serve at the same time to thematise key problems of capitalist modernity as it emerged at the time. In particular the depictions of Poles and Jews help develop an image of a German ‘reconciled’ modernity, free of conflict and alienation. A key concept for this nationally specific road to modernity is that of ‘German labour’ as a form of conscious social synthesis, not expended for mere material gain, but for the greater good of all.<sup>14</sup> While the nobility and the Poles, representing different modes of pre-modern existence, are incapable of disciplined and systematic work altogether, the Jewish characters are industrious, but only for the sake of profit and their own private interest.

### 1.1. The Poles

In the battles with the Poles, the German nobility, middle class and settlers come to experience themselves, despite all internal tensions, as a homogenous, unified nation. The Poles figure in this context in two connected, but distinguishable roles: as revolutionary rabble and as backward colonial population. The depiction of the Polish revolt, identifiable historically as the Greater Poland Uprising of 1848 and lavishly illustrated with apocalyptic images of burning cities by night, chaos and looming disaster, replaces any engagement with the 1848/1849 revolution in Germany at the same time and displaces onto Poland the threat of revolution that exercised parts of the German middle class in the decades after the March upheavals. The novel tries to resolve the ambivalent perception of the working class – at the same time the labourers on whom the new capitalist society depends and the revolutionary rabble who pose a threat to this social and moral order – by associating these contradictory aspects with different ethnic groups. The rebellious, undeserving poor are symbolically expatriated and social conflict is turned into an external threat to the national community, stripped of its social content and presented as ethnic strife. The revolting Polish rabble are contrasted with the honest German labourers in the merchant’s house who are content with their social station, have internalised bourgeois values of discipline and systematic, self-directed

14. On the centrality of this idea for conceptions of German national identity see also Campbell (1989); Schatz and Woeldike (2001).

work and take satisfaction from the knowledge that they contribute to the greater good of the productive whole. This cross-fading between class and ethnicity helps reconfigure social conflict as a conflict between quasi-‘natural’ groups.<sup>15</sup> It is one of the key examples for an underlying constructive principle of the novel: the various groups which are opposed to the German middle class serve as projection screens; they externalise immanent contradictions of bourgeois society and naturalise what is historically and socially produced, as shall also become visible in the presentation of the Jews.

The image of the German nation as a harmonious productive community is further articulated through the colonial discourse the novel unfolds. In it, German order is opposed to Polish chaos, German productivity and progress to Polish inertia and incapacity to enter into history. When the hero Anton ventures out into this colonial space, he enters a landscape characterised by universal lack, passivity and emptiness. It is only through the German settlers that history enters this space and development supersedes the torpor of an eternal pre-modernity. This is particularly vividly illustrated in the description of the town of Rosmin, one of the German settlements on Polish ground, which is presented as seed crystal of a productive and progressive social order in a feudal, pre-modern space. The paternalist justification of Prussian quasi-colonial rule is condensed in a paradoxical image of liberation through captivity when Rosmin is described as one of the

knots in a firm net that the German has laid over the Slav, artful knots tying together innumerable threads through which the small labourer of the field is connected with other people, with education, with liberty and a civilised state (Freytag 1923 [1855], vol. II, 197f.).

## 1.2. The Jews

While the Poles serve to set off good German modernity against bad Polish pre-modernity, the Jewish characters introduce a split within the image of modernity itself. Rather than being antipodes of Anton and Schröter, Itzig and Ehrenthal can be seen as their negative mirror images. Every German middle-class virtue finds its correspondence in a Jewish vice: where the bourgeois is restrained, the Jew is stingy; where the German is industrious, the Jew is restless; the German spirit of enterprise is transformed into Jewish greed and bourgeois rationality into Jewish

<sup>15</sup> On the interrelation between constructions of class and race see also Balibar (1991).

cunning. The parallel development of Itzig's and Anton's careers reveals the lives of both as alternative variants of the same modern existence.

Also in other respects the Jews are too close for comfort. While the Polish external enemy serves to define the German nation through opposition, the Jews take on the role of an enemy who is simultaneously within and without and thus undermines stable boundaries. The Jewish figures represent a continuum from the unassimilated Eastern Jew with sidelocks and caftan who constantly crosses the border to make small business deals, to the assimilated Jews in the capital, Ehrental and Itzig who, towards the end of the novel, 'can in bad lighting hardly be distinguished from an elegant gentleman any longer' (Freitag 1923 [1855], vol. II: 158).

They undermine the boundaries and cohesion of the national community not just in a geographic and cultural sense, they also pose a completely different *kind* of threat to the German national community than the Poles. Whereas the Poles simply represent another, albeit hostile, nation and are part of a global order divided in nation states, the Jews embody a threat to the very principle of the nation itself; they represent those forces of modernity that undermine the imagined community from within.<sup>16</sup> The Jewish characters in the novel are associated with abstract forms of social mediation through the commodity form<sup>17</sup> rather than concrete and conscious forms of cooperation and collaboration, they are motivated by egoism and greed rather than moral considerations and the welfare of the whole, and in general represent the negative sides of capitalist modernity: social fragmentation, alienation, disenchantment and loss of meaning.<sup>18</sup>

The opposition between a 'German' and a 'Jewish' dimension of modernity is evident in many aspects of the social world depicted in the text. Consider the image of the city as an emblem of modernity: whereas the German town of Rosmin in Poland was a place of structure and permanence, of social as well as legal order, associated not with fragmentation and antagonism but with mediation and progress, the face of the city associated with the Jewish characters bears all the characteristics of a dystopian image of the modern megalopolis. It is chaotic, confusing, dirty and menacing, exhibiting a universal instrumentality of human relationships and a lack of mutual moral obligations. Veitel is restlessly prowling the squares and lanes of this city as a place of chance

16. On this constellation see Holz (2001).

17. For an extensive analysis of the implications of this category see Postone (1993).

18. The opposition between the Jewish and the German world thus enacts the one between *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft* theorised by Ferdinand Tönnies (1991 [1891]) more than three decades later.

encounters, always on the lookout for the next small deal, the next opportunity to take advantage of an unsuspecting customer (Freytag 1923 [1855], vol. I: 42).

Similarly, Freytag contrasts two types of industry: ‘natural’, productive industry, presented as a quasi-organic continuation of the improvement of agricultural methods, seems to grow out of the soil, its pipes mimicking the stems of the plants (Freytag 1923 [1855], vol. I: 447). On the other hand, industry built on credit and for profit interests – the kind of industry Ehrenthal and Itzig entice the Baron von Rothsattel into establishing on his estate – enslaves its owner, imposes external economic imperatives that run counter to the inherent developmental laws of nature and leads to failed harvests, proletarianisation and social decay (Freytag 1923 [1855], vol. I: 449f.).

Like production, distribution also has two faces: Itzig’s and Ehrenthal’s business is solely concerned with exchange value and profit. Veitel only buys in order to sell, to turn money into more money in unending, breathless activity (Freytag 1923 [1855], vol. I: 116f.), thus mirroring the movement of capital. Concrete, material qualities, those of his merchandise as well as the specific character of his own activities and the identity of his customers, become insubstantial. The German merchants, however, only seem to be engaged in the distribution of use values. Freytag’s text features long descriptions of all the different exotic commodities in the cellar of the German merchant’s house and their sensual qualities, their colours, shapes and smells, as well as where, how and by whom they have been produced. This evocation of a global community of producers renders both the immediate violence of colonial relationships and the abstract compulsion of the market invisible. In conversation with the one ‘good Jew’ of the novel, Ehrenthal’s son Bernhard, who is despairing about his father’s dubious business practices, Anton Wohlfart extols the virtues of German trade:

Whenever I put a sack of coffee onto the scales, I am tying an invisible thread between the colonist’s daughter in Brazil who has picked the beans and the young farmhand who is having the coffee for his breakfast. (Freytag 1923 [1855], vol. I: 268)

Bourgeois economic activity German style is here presented as creating conscious and concrete connections between producers and consumers rather than as blind and abstract mediation through money and the market.<sup>19</sup>

19. For a productive attempt to link these characteristics of modern antisemitism to the commodity form see Postone (1980).

These political and social concerns of the novel are also reflected in its literary form. Against Hegel's scepticism (in his *Ästhetik*, 1842) regarding the possibility of representing bourgeois society in narrative form, Freytag and other theorists of literary Realism in Germany maintain that the apparent fragmentation and alienation of the modern world is not intrinsic to it, but merely the result of a faulty attitude and perception. It is the task of the writer to turn the everyday world of work (understood, first and foremost, as bourgeois economic activity) into the scene and subject of the narrative, revealing the bourgeois world as created by meaningful, morally guided human practice.<sup>20</sup>

Freytag's novel, widely understood at the time as one of the foremost examples of German literary Realism, achieves this goal by presenting the experience of alienation and heteronomy, abstract domination by economic forces and social mediation through commodities and the market, as avoidable consequences of a faulty Jewish attitude rather than a necessary dimension of modern society itself. This is facilitated through the peculiar interplay between the antisemitism and the anti-Jewish racism of the novel: by emphasising the continuities between the assimilated Jews in the capital and their Polish and Lithuanian brethren with caftan and sidelocks, the Jews as agents of abstraction are at the same time depicted as, at heart, superficially disguised archaic Eastern Jews. The 'dark side of modernity' is dehistoricised, revealed as nothing but a contingent consequence of an essentialised Jewish character reaching back through the ages. *Debit and Credit* illustrates that the function of antisemitic world views is not simply to preserve the ethnic purity of the nation state or to stigmatize certain forms of undesirable economic behaviour, but that antisemitism is a mode of reaction to changes in the texture of reality itself, to fragmentation, abstractness and loss of meaning.

### 1.3. Antisemitism and racism

A comparison between the representation of Poles and Jews in Freytag's novel suggests both parallels and differences. Both groups are not defined along religious lines, but according to a form of secular cultural racism that is based on an assumption of more or less immutable characteristics, but predates developed biological racism in the narrow sense. Both groups serve to define German national identity through opposition, and in both cases, the contrast helps to construct an image of the German national

20. The relationship between literary form and historical content is further discussed in Achinger (2007: 291–344, 2011: 382–388).

community as bearer of a positive form of modernity, preserving features of an imaginary *Gemeinschaft* within modern *Gesellschaft*.

At the same time, however, the characteristics of both groups and their function for the national self-image are radically different. While the Poles are an external enemy, located outside the geographical and cultural boundaries of the nation state, the Jews represent the enemy within who undermines those boundaries. The Poles are a visible 'other', whereas the Jews become more dangerous the more assimilated and invisible they become. The power of the Poles is concrete, it is the power of sickles, scythes and cavalry, while the power of the Jews is abstract, they are in league with uncontrollable, impersonal and incomprehensible social forces that lead to social disintegration and universal dependency; they are associated with processes that reduce the sensual richness of the material world to nothing but value, with universal disenchantment. The Jews are thus an 'internal' enemy in a much more fundamental sense than the spatial one: while the Poles come to stand for a feudal past that the project of a 'German' modernity wants to leave behind, the Jews are in league with forces at the heart of modern society itself, it is they who are to blame if the desired harmonious and homely modernity can never truly be realised.

## 2. Complementary projections then and now

By offering us, in the realist fashion, a panoramic image of the bourgeois world as a whole, *Debit and Credit* therefore not only lends itself as a case study for the interrelation of antisemitic and anti-Slavic discourses, but also makes visible how these discourses function to develop and uphold the image of a viable and harmonious national community able to negotiate the threats emanating from modern capitalist society. This case study can also be instructive for an analysis of the relationship of antisemitic and racist imagery today, e.g., in its most prominent and widely discussed version in Western societies, as anti-Muslim racism. Its use is not, however, in constructing simple continuities. Rather, the analysis just presented suggests a number of dimensions with regard to which stereotypical images of Muslims and Jews today might be compared and contrasted both with each other and with older forms of racist projections.

The example of *Debit and Credit* illustrates, first of all, that the unhistorical binary of 'self' and 'other' can neither account for the specific content of the respective stereotypes nor for the radical difference between these contrary figures of the 'enemy'. Furthermore, it suggests that while Bunzl is right in insisting that the functions of both antisemitism and anti-Muslim

racism be taken into consideration, his description is taking one historically specific articulation for the whole. As Freytag's novel illustrates, a specifically modern, secular form of antisemitism existed and was widely accepted well before it was formulated in narrowly racial terms.<sup>21</sup> Furthermore, the example would suggest that even the aim behind later, racist fantasies of purification was not simply an idea of 'ethnic purity', but the attempt to expunge the dark and disintegrating forces at the heart of capitalist modernity itself. This, rather than solely the spread of racial theory, also accounts in part for the intensification of antisemitic discourses and their party-political institutionalisation in the early 1870s. After all, 1873 saw the so-called *Gründerkrach*, a profound economic crisis that started with the crash of the Vienna stock exchange and resulted in the Long Depression in most of Europe and the USA. This crisis made it painfully clear that the lives of millions depended on global economic processes that were hard to understand and even harder to control, and this experience is an explicit and central point of reference for the antisemitic rhetoric of the time (e.g., Treitschke 1896 [1879]: 24f.). The invocation of the nation is just one of the many forms that the desire for a community that can protect the individual from these forces can take, and racial biology is only one of the pseudo-rational underpinnings that define those who supposedly represent a threat to this social harmony.

Focusing on some of the aspects that distinguish the stereotypes of Poles and Jews in Freytag's novel – negative pre-modernity vs. negative dimensions of modernity, external vs. internal enemy in spatial as well as cultural/social terms, visible difference vs. invisibility, concrete vs. abstract power – can help illuminate the continuities and differences with regard to the relationship of antisemitism and anti-Muslim racism today. If, for example, instead of focusing on the aspects of race and the nation state, we look for ways in which Jews are today associated with the undesirable consequences of modernity and with abstract forces that shape, and often destroy, the lives of millions, we need not look far. Surveys confirm that between two and four in five European citizens see Jews in general as politically and in particular economically 'too powerful'.<sup>22</sup> Personalising projections and notions of secret, but immense Jewish power also surface in debates on the Middle East. While much criticism of Israeli politics has nothing to do with antisemitism, some forms of anti-Zionism seem to have very little to do with anything that is actually going on in the region. They represent an irrational excess whose origins should rather be located in the societies that produce them than in those they focus on. This holds for those currents, for example, that echo the tropes of Jewish world-conspiracy, cast the 'Jewish lobby' in the role of

21. For references see footnote 12.

22. For references see footnote 10.

the puppet master of world politics in Europe and the USA, or view the effects of globalisation as a process driven and controlled entirely by the imperialist powers USA and Israel. It might be worth investigating how far the Manichean and essentialist logic of some forms of 'anti-imperialist' discourse, replacing an analysis of social forces and the imperatives and inherent dynamics of capitalism with the idea of powerful hidden actors, is a more up-to-date example of turning intellectual defeat in the face of the theoretical, political and moral complexities of the capitalist world system into a new call to arms against a more visible and comprehensible enemy (cf. Postone 2006).

Understanding racist and antisemitic projections as, amongst other things, a way of dealing with the contradictions and complexities of modernity might also help to make sense of one of the functions of anti-Muslim stereotypes. While much separates today's images of the fanatical Islamist from Freytag's rebellious and lazy Poles,<sup>23</sup> 'the Muslim' can equally be seen as embodiment of a kind of pre-modernity that the West would like to see itself as having overcome. As an intolerant religious fanatic with backwards views of women, gays and sexual liberation, the figure of 'the Muslim' bears all the traits of a cultural stage that Europe would like to have left behind.<sup>24</sup> Just as the Jew serves as a projection screen for features that are an integral part of modern capitalist society itself, the essentialising, culturally racist anti-Muslim stereotype could be seen, amongst other things, as an attempt to externalise and exorcise those features of 'intolerance' that have supposedly been overcome, but are paradoxically perpetuated in this act of projection itself. In both figures, disavowed aspects of Western society past and present are externalised and essentialised.

Their different positions within a conception of 'modernity' that comes to define the European self-image also facilitates a more precise description of Jews and Muslims as internal or external enemies. However, it can be argued that the Muslim 'other' – in contrast to earlier images of the racialised

23. The commonalities should not be underestimated, though. Silverstein (2008: 7) notes that French colonial discourse maintained the 'incompatibility of Islamic civilization with French (Christian-secular) modernity' as well as the 'inveterate laziness' of the Arabs.

24. This point is also made by Werbner (2005: 8); cf. also Goldberg (2006: 346). While it is important to note that these ascriptions can function as key components of a generalising anti-Muslim racism, it is equally important to emphasise that the rise of Islamism represents a real threat to human rights in many countries and migrant communities. The work of writers and activists like Gita Saghal or Pragna Patel demonstrates the possibility, but also the difficulties and complexities of an analysis and politics that forego the easy comfort of simplistic and manichean views, and oppose both anti-Muslim racism and the oppression of women and gay people justified with reference to the Qur'an.

colonial ‘other’, and apparently closer to antisemitic images of the Jew – is an ‘enemy within’, epitomised in the Islamist terrorist who has been brought up in Bradford or studies in Berlin and who can strike out against the society that surrounds him at any moment. Like the Jew, the Islamist is now also said to be part of a world-wide conspiracy that operates in hidden ways. On the other hand, this enemy is ‘within’ merely in a spatial sense – culturally, he still represents the forces of anti-modernity and counter-Enlightenment, as opposed to the hyper-modern Jew who is in league with the negative aspects of this new society. These opposing positions are also reflected in the very different kinds of powers ascribed to the Muslim and the Jew: while the threat of terrorism may be terrifying, the powers of the Muslim terrorist are still concrete and easily comprehensible, they are the threat of physical violence, the power of bombs, knives and guns. Jews, on the other hand, mostly still figure as a powerful group operating behind the scenes, even though the foundation of Israel, as a visible Jewish state that can be located geographically and possesses (and uses) considerable military power, has doubtlessly complicated the picture in ways that cannot be discussed within the limitations of this essay.

The lines of investigation indicated here illustrate, I hope, that it can prove fruitful to engage with the social function and origin of stereotypes and the precise nature of their irrational and projective excess. Doing so helps us to focus on the ways in which these constructions of ‘others’ work in the context of making sense of the world, i.e., making sense of social experience. Even though they work in different ways, antisemitism and anti-Muslim and other forms of racism thus become visible as products of the same society. Neither of them is simply a thing of the past and of no concern for present-day politics, and tackling either demands an understanding and critique of the whole.

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