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JEWS, COSMOPOLITANISM AND POLITICAL THOUGHT

## Marxism, cosmopolitanism and 'the' Jews

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### ABSTRACT

Marxists have had a complex and contentious relationship to the question of both cosmopolitanism and antisemitism. The difficulties and problems they have encountered with each may, however, be related. They can be traced back to a repeated failure to take seriously Marx's initial critique of contemporary antisemites and his simultaneous adoption of a cosmopolitan approach to politics which set him apart from many of his peers. Rather than confronting antisemitism, many Marxists adopted the view that it contained some kind of rational kernel, whilst drifting towards an accommodation with forms of nationalism. Having ignored and largely failed to respond to the mortal threat that a radicalized antisemitism posed for Jews, the self-proclaimed Marxists ruling the Soviet Union then accused Jews of being both nationalists (of the wrong, Zionist sort) and cosmopolitans (now a term of abuse). There is, however, an alternative tradition that may be recovered, albeit on the margins of the Marxist movement, in the later work especially of Horkheimer and Adorno, and in some parallel way also of Hannah Arendt, that sees antisemitism from a cosmopolitan perspective as an inherently reactionary political force which (as it became genocidal) came to threaten both Jews and humanity at large.

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## Introduction

Marxists have long had a complex and contentious relationship to the question of both cosmopolitanism and antisemitism. The difficulties and problems they have encountered with each (and indeed created on occasion) may, however, be related.

With respect to cosmopolitanism, there has been over time a widespread (though not universal) failure to transcend the limitations of what at perhaps the deepest level, following Ulrich Beck and (more critically) Daniel Chernilo, we might now see as a kind of methodological nationalism, in which the nation-state is taken as the primary frame of reference.<sup>1</sup> Many Marxists (though not all) came to a growing accommodation to at least certain kinds of nationalism, and some ended up even explicitly rejecting cosmopolitanism itself as a set of overarching values and commitments.

With respect to antisemitism, there has been a widespread failure to take sufficiently seriously its increasingly destructive and reactionary character in the modern world. The threat posed to Jews by the Nazis in particular was not recognized by most Marxists as it was

emerging. As that threat was realized in the Holocaust, there was only a weak and limited response from the organized Marxist movement. After the event, an ominous inversion took place, in what was seen by many to be the centre of that movement, which has ironically appeared to give a further and perverse twist to the history of antisemitism.

These are more than parallel developments. They have common roots which may be traced back to a widespread (though again not universal) failure to sustain and develop what was distinctive about Marx's original endeavours in the 1840s: his profound insights at a formative historical moment into the need for a politics that challenged the dominant ways in which the so-called 'national question' was coming to be framed (which occluded what is reactionary about nationalism as an ideology) and the need on the other to think much more deeply about the so-called 'Jewish Question' (a framing of the issue which similarly occluded what is reactionary about antisemitism).

This hiatus was to have extremely grave consequences both for Jews and for humanity as a whole to the degree to which Jews had become the cosmopolitan subject *par excellence*. Spread out across nation-states, they were to become the most (though not the only) vulnerable group as nationalism developed in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Identified everywhere, to a greater or lesser extent, by nationalists as a problem for the imagined nation, Jews ended up losing what had only recently been granted (at best) - their rights as citizens, their right to have rights and, in the Holocaust, their human status, which was the distinctive focus of Marx's original arguments.

From a cosmopolitan perspective, the failure by Marxists to develop a coherent and sustained response to a radicalized antisemitism was particularly significant. The Marxist movement was, for over a century, potentially the main organized vehicle for a *radical* cosmopolitan politics, in a world order comprised of competing nation-states, each pursuing their own national interests, within the framework established at the Treaty of Westphalia in 1648 which proscribed states from intervening in the internal affairs of other states. In this context, the international solidarity which underpinned the creation of first the Second and then the Third Internationals, both largely dominated by Marxist ideas and movements, could have provided one of the few mechanisms for organising solidarity with the victims of the violence of modern states not only across borders (in the case of wars between states) but within them, when (in the case of genocide) they targeted minority groups for destruction.

A fundamental principle underpinning the creation of each of these organisations in the first place was a cosmopolitan one: of solidarity between members of an international working class. In its Marxist formulation, the proletariat was conceived of as a universal class, swelling in size to the point at which it would encompass all of humanity. Its cosmopolitanism was of what James Ingram has recently defined as a bottom-up and non-statist kind, even if this was modified to some extent when the Soviet Union came into existence.<sup>2</sup> At the most basic level which, as David Held argues<sup>3</sup>, is where cosmopolitan solidarity begins, what the principle implied was that the International(s) would come to the aid of those most urgently in need, and prioritize rescue and refuge to those most acutely at risk, those who lacked any nation-state of their own to which they could flee – Jews certainly, and arguably also Roma and Sinti, although the Nazis perhaps exhibited slightly less destructive certainty in the latter case. Even those who could flee to other states were not guaranteed protection where they were granted (at best) a reluctant temporary refuge. Even here, as Derrida has recently reminded us, recalling Hannah Arendt's experience and observation, Jews were

again acutely vulnerable to policing agencies which treated them at best with suspicion and at worst later collaborated eagerly with the Nazis in their renewed persecution.<sup>4</sup>

In such circumstances, only an organized non-state and radical cosmopolitan movement could have offered the unqualified aid that was so desperately needed. That aid would have had to be grounded in a more extensive notion of a right to hospitality than that advanced even by the most liberal cosmopolitans. As a radical form of cosmopolitanism, it would have to go beyond in particular, as Derrida has argued<sup>5</sup>, Kant's explicit restriction to a fundamentally temporary right of visitation, in this case because those threatened by the Nazis could not go back to what could never again be 'home'. But Derrida's own reference point, the global city as the most relevant and viable site of cosmopolitan solidarity today, is in a way indicative itself of the legacy of the International(s)' failure, to the extent that the Marxist movement was never confined to cities alone.

None of this is to say that a different response would have been successful in saving anything like a majority of Jews from their fate. Clearly many other factors, far beyond the reach and responsibility of the Marxist movement, have to be taken into account in thinking about who could have come to the aid of Jews. But what is striking is how little reflection there has been on this issue from this perspective. Only a few thinkers working (at best) on the margins of the Marxist movement (notably Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno, and to some extent Hannah Arendt) have devoted significant effort, in the light of the catastrophe that had occurred, to retrieving some elements of the cosmopolitan way of responding to the antisemitism tradition that Marx himself inaugurated. However marginal and limited, these efforts may nevertheless, as I suggest in the concluding sections of this chapter, point to some continuing relevance for this tradition, as antisemitism continues to mutate and to threaten both Jews and humanity in the modern world.

### **Marx's early critique of nationalism**

Marx's cosmopolitan critique of nationalism has of course to be placed, like his response to antisemitism, in its historical context. The 1840s might be characterized as both the high point and the turning point of liberal nationalism. In the decades that had followed the French Revolution, most progressive thinkers and movements believed, as the early French revolutionaries had done, that democracy and nationalism went hand in hand, that (as Sieyès had famously put it in 1789) the terms 'people' and 'nation' were 'synonymous'.

As far as the Jews were concerned, they had been included in the nation by French revolutionaries but only as individuals and only on certain conditions. As Clermont-Tonnerre famously put it in his speech advocating their emancipation, 'the Jews should be denied everything as a nation but granted everything as individuals', words which are ambiguous in both meaning and effect. From one liberal perspective, they could be interpreted to mean that Jews were required to abandon their traditional status as a 'nation within the nation'. Alternatively and more radically, however, they could mean that Jews should henceforth abandon any sense of collective identity at all and be subsumed within a homogenized nation.

This ambiguity was not accidental or purely contingent on that political context. Liberalism has not provided an unambiguously secure basis for confronting antisemitism, for a variety of reasons, which are largely beyond the scope of this paper, but which involve at the political level the manifold connections which developed throughout the nineteenth

and twentieth centuries between liberalism and nationalism, and at the social level (insofar as this can be considered separately from the political) repeatedly expressed concerns about how even a liberal nation can be held together without a shared national culture, all too often not seen to include those who continued to think of themselves in some way or other as Jews.<sup>6</sup> At the dawn of modern liberalism in the Enlightenment, there was already a dominant view shared by many (though not all) thinkers that there was something inherently problematic about the maintenance in the modern world of a specifically Jewish identity. Just as many Enlightenment thinkers made all organized religion the object of criticism but treated Judaism with disproportionately more scorn and contempt, there lurked (beneath the new-found revolutionary toleration for Jews) an assumption on the part of both moderates and radicals that Jews would in return give up being Jewish altogether, because this particular identity was especially archaic and worthless.<sup>7</sup> As Pierre Birnbaum has shown in the case of the renowned emancipationist Abbé Gregoire, such assumptions were normally shared even by the most articulate and consistent advocates of Jewish emancipation in the new Republic.<sup>8</sup>

Marx criticized both assumptions: that the people and the nation were the same thing, and that Jews should be the object of particular suspicion. And he did so in the same period and on the same cosmopolitan lines, lines that have not been followed (though they could be) by most subsequent Marxists.

As Gilbert Achcar has recently argued, a cosmopolitan thread runs throughout Marx and Engels' work and it was particularly striking at the time he was developing his critique of Bruno Bauer, who came in for particular criticism specifically for his German chauvinism in *The German Ideology*.<sup>9</sup> Achcar argues that Marx's cosmopolitanism was distinct from prevailing conceptions which were, variously, philosophical, institutional, juridical or economic. It formed a core part of his historical materialist approach to history and politics which here, as elsewhere, involved a critique (rather than dismissal) of hitherto partial and one-sided conceptions.

A cosmopolitan perspective lay at the heart, in particular, of his conception of the proletariat as a universal class as 'the bearer', as Achcar puts it, 'of a global communist future', one which could not be fought for within the narrow and distorting confines of a nationalist frame of reference. On the one hand, Marx and Engels argued that 'working people have no country ... the nationality of the worker is neither French, nor English, nor German, it is labour, free slavery, self-huckstering. His government is neither French, nor English, nor German, nor English, it is capital.'<sup>10</sup> At the same time, they claimed that 'the great mass of the proletarians are, by their nature, free from national prejudice and their whole disposition and movement is essentially *humanitarian, anti-nationalist*.'<sup>11</sup>

This may have been an overly optimistic assessment of the state of working-class consciousness at the moment in time but it formed only one part of a sophisticated and discriminating critique of nationalism as a form of politics, grounded as Erica Benner has argued, 'in a normative conception of the *human* community'.<sup>12</sup> This normative conception was fundamentally cosmopolitan, concerned not with what divided the international working class but with what was shared both materially and culturally. Above all, Marx's primary concern was to encourage solidarity across national boundaries, a solidarity which he believed was imperilled by the appeal of rival nationalisms.

This danger became particularly clear in the 1848 revolutions. Rather than uniting in a common struggle against the forces of reaction, German nationalists opted, as Langeswiehe

has noted, 'to cooperate with counterrevolution to advance their interests against other nations'<sup>13</sup>, rejecting out of hand the right of national self-determination, which they claimed for themselves, being applied to Danes, Poles, Italians or Czechs. Opposition to such divisive nationalism in 1848 came only from that internationalist part of the Left which was led by Marx himself.<sup>14</sup>

Within the organized Marxist movement, this critical stance was largely abandoned as various attempts were made to distinguish between different kinds of nationalism, some supposedly progressive, others reactionary. The most politically significant of these efforts was made by Lenin, who argued that there was a critical difference between the nationalism of the oppressor and the nationalism of the oppressed. Lenin's argument was largely instrumental in the first instance, put forward in the hope that Marxists might somehow be able to utilize nationalist resistance to Tsarist imperial rule. The task of developing what was initially a purely instrumental tactic into a more general position was, perhaps not insignificantly, entrusted to Joseph Stalin, the least theoretically equipped of all the Marxist revolutionaries, who contrived a set of rigid criteria, or 'mathematical formulae' as Enzo Traverso puts it<sup>15</sup>, one of whose signal consequences was to repeat the old refrain that Jews in particular could not form a nation.

Not all Marxists, however, were prepared to abandon Marx's cosmopolitan standpoint, most notably Rosa Luxemburg, whose opposition to nationalism has often been far too casually dismissed as abstract and unrealistic. For her, like Marx, nationalism was essentially a category of bourgeois ideology; it was reactionary economically and politically; it divided workers across national boundaries by invoking the primacy of reified national identities over all other identities; where nationalists were successful in shaping the terms of national self-determination, it would only lead to new states oppressing the minorities in their midst.<sup>16</sup> Although antisemitism was not Luxemburg's own primary focus, this (as Anita Shelton has argued) was bound to have especially serious consequences for Jews, since they were a minority everywhere.<sup>17</sup>

The potential violence of nationalist ideology was realized in Luxemburg's lifetime on an extreme and unprecedented scale in the First World War, against which she called (albeit in vain) for the cosmopolitan solidarity of an international working-class movement. Only this, she believed, could save humanity from what she presciently defined as the threat of a general 'reversion to barbarism'.<sup>18</sup> Luxemburg's reference to barbarism was not purely rhetorical but drew explicitly on a suggestion made earlier by Engels that at some point the direction of history itself ('world history' is the term she used) might be at stake. If the proletariat did not rise to the challenge as an international class, a global war could bring about catastrophe for humanity itself.

If we extend Luxemburg's intuition to encompass both world wars<sup>19</sup>, it could be argued that her cosmopolitan approach enabled her to have greater insight than many other Marxists at the time into the more profound consequences of the triumph of nationalism as the empires, which had dominated Europe for so long, fragmented. Where other Marxists followed Lenin into an uncritical support for the right of nations to self-determination, Luxemburg argued that this could all too easily be used to justify the claims of post-imperial nationalist elites who successfully achieved state power to oppress minorities within their own borders who were deemed to belong to other 'nations', or (in the case of the Jews) to no nation at all.<sup>20</sup>

## Antisemitism and the 'Jewish Question'

Luxemburg was also rare, however, among Marxists of her generation in taking seriously Marx's understanding of the Jewish Question and in particular his critique of what we can now see as the proto-antisemitism of Bruno Bauer. Marx's response to Bauer appeared in the form of two seminal essays 'On the Jewish Question', published in 1843, in which he developed crucial elements of his own conception of human emancipation more generally. These essays, which were Marx's only sustained and focused writings on this issue, have been the subject of sustained debate for many years, between those who find in them (and in some of his later, more occasional remarks) damning evidence of antisemitism and those who seek to exculpate Marx from any such charge. Pierre Birnbaum has provided a substantial review of this debate, summarising the arguments on both sides. It may well be, as Birnbaum himself concludes, that Marx's essays and many of his subsequent comments are riddled with antisemitic expressions and tropes.<sup>21</sup> But there would have been nothing new or distinctive about any of this. What was new about Marx's critique of Bauer was that he challenged directly, and from a cosmopolitan perspective, the assumptions of the majority of even the most progressive Enlightenment thinkers that there was something uniquely problematic about Jews.

Where Bauer had argued, in what was by now a familiar vein, that Jews should only be given citizenship rights if they gave up being Jews, Marx strongly disagreed, insisting that it was fundamentally wrong to make such a demand, to single out Jews and Judaism and that Jews were as entitled to full rights in the political state as anyone else. The problem was not Jews or Judaism but the political state and a notion of human emancipation that was confined only to the political sphere. As Robert Fine has argued, this was a radical move on Marx's part.<sup>22</sup> It broke with what he has called 'the whole perspective of the Jewish question', one that saw the continued existence of Jews as a problem for an otherwise purportedly civil society or, in this context, purportedly unified nation. It could only be a 'Jewish Question' if the Jews were seen as the problem in the first place. Marx transformed the terms of this 'question'. If Jews did not have rights, then the problem was the society from which they were excluded. This is a cosmopolitan perspective because it assumes that all human beings have rights, by virtue of their common and equal human status, and that if there is a society which excludes them, there is a problem with that society, not with those who are denied rights. (This is not of course to say that Marx's own conception of rights is adequate, as he famously observed that 'not one of the so-called rights of man go beyond egoistic man'. But his argument does not imply that such rights are irrelevant but rather that they need to be further developed and extended universally and unconditionally, in this context to Jews).

As Lars Fischer has shown, Luxemburg was a signal exception in grounding her approach to antisemitism in Marx's critique of Bauer.<sup>23</sup> Most Marxists in the German Social Democratic Party, the largest and leading Marxist organisation in the Second International, were far more prone to adopt Bauer's construction of a 'Jewish Question', either out of ignorance or misunderstanding (wilful or otherwise). The general tendency was to be critical of Jews for not being willing to relinquish their collective identity in the struggle for general emancipation, and to treat 'philosemitism' as a bigger problem than antisemitism inasmuch as it denied a supposed Jewish harmfulness. As antisemitism became an increasingly significant political movement, albeit with ebbs and flows and mixed fortunes<sup>24</sup>, one of the leaders of the SPD, August Bebel, called it 'the socialism of fools'. Bebel's adoption of this formulation<sup>25</sup>

was obviously critical, but it could be taken to mean that antisemitism had some kind of rational kernel, that the hostility antisemites felt towards Jews was understandable but mis-directed, and that antisemitism contained some kind of progressive energy that needed to be harnessed. To put it another way, even if it were the socialism of fools, it could be seen as some kind of socialism.

Marxism of course was not a monolith and glimpses of a more cosmopolitan approach can be found at the same time in the writings not only of Luxemburg but also of Trotsky, both of whom offered a more serious understanding of the destructive character of modern antisemitism. In the heat of the 1905 revolution, for example, Trotsky argued that so far from antisemites being won over to the socialist cause, as the 'rational kernel' approach would suggest, they played a pivotal role in the mobilisation of counter-revolutionary forces.<sup>26</sup>

A critical aspect of Marx's critique of Bauer, which unorthodox Marxists struggled to recover and develop, was his recognition that antisemitism had much less to do with what Jews were doing or not doing than with how 'the Jews' were imagined. Modern antisemites had come to see the world through a lens crafted by the 'Jewish Question': in a world of nation-states, they constructed 'the Jews' as an imaginary collectivity that was a problem for – and explained the problems of – what, following Benedict Anderson's pioneering work, we now understand as an also imagined nation.<sup>27</sup> The problem for Marxists was on the one hand that, in regressing to Bauer's perspective, they came to assume that there was a Jewish question for such a society which needed solving; and on the other that, in abandoning cosmopolitan presuppositions, they were left with no secure basis on which to respond to a form of antisemitism which went beyond (even if it started within) a national frame of reference. At a critical moment, these parallel developments within Marxism would make it increasingly difficult to mount an effective challenge to the idea that the 'Jewish Question' was one for each national society and for each nation-state to solve.

### **Failing to respond to Nazi antisemitism**

These twin developments set severe limits in particular on how the organized Marxist movement was to respond to the radicalisation of antisemitism by the Nazis. For what is striking is how reluctant Marxists, whether they were Social Democrats or Communists, were to confront antisemitism as such, to make it any kind of priority. This was true both before the Nazis came to power and in the underground and resistance when they had done so.

Inside Germany, the Social Democrats, as Donald Niewyk has shown, did not appear to think that Nazi antisemitism was either deeply held or serious, and decided that it did not call for specific rebuttal, rarely taking direct action on this issue.<sup>28</sup> After the seizure of power, the underground was instructed not to prioritize the issue, on the grounds that it would make the work of the wider resistance more difficult, recognition at least implicitly that antisemitism was more popular than they originally estimated. Klaus Mann, son of the great novelist Thomas and one of the most vigorous left-wing opponents of the Nazis, though not himself a member of the Social Democratic Party, spoke for many on the non-Communist Left when he argued (as late as 1941) that 'antisemitism has already played too predominant a part in our propaganda ... it is a dangerous mistake to overemphasize this one particular angle.'<sup>29</sup> No specific propaganda was ever produced to challenge Nazi arguments and, as Bankier argues, the Party's attitude appears to have been a compound of distrust, resentment and fear that it would be over-identified with the Jews.



If the Social Democrats had nevertheless made some effort to cultivate good relations with the Jewish community, the Communists had a rather more problematic record. In the various twists and turns of Communist politics, there were repeated episodes in which the Party itself flirted with antisemitic discourse. In 1923 for example the acknowledged leader of the Left in the Party at the time, Ruth Fischer, made an (in)famous speech in July 1923 to students urging them 'to crush the Jewish capitalists, and hang them from the lamp posts', although she then went on to urge them to hang other capitalists too.<sup>30</sup> In the early 1930s, the Party (in another effort to appeal directly to Nazi followers and supporters) produced leaflets depicting Hitler (of all people) in league with Jewish capitalists.<sup>31</sup> As with the Social Democrats, in the underground no efforts were made to confront antisemitism.<sup>32</sup> It was not until *Kristallnacht* that the Party's paper *Die Rote Fahne* finally gave the issue any prominence, but by the time of that state-sponsored violence, Jews had already been systematically removed from the German economy, polity and society.

German Marxists were of course not alone in failing to respond to the growing threat of Nazi antisemitism. The cosmopolitan resources in the writings of Marx and on the margins of the Marxist movement were not drawn upon almost anywhere on the organized Left when they were most needed, as the Nazi assault moved beyond the borders of the German nation-state to encompass Jews across Europe and beyond. The problem now facing Jews, however, had to be confronted from a cosmopolitan perspective, because the threat they faced from Nazi antisemitism was to their human status, to their membership of humanity itself. Nazi antisemitism had what Saul Friedlander has called a 'redemptive' character.<sup>33</sup> It articulated from the outset a picture of 'the Jews' as less than fully human and as a profound danger not just to Germany but to every nation, to Europe, to the Aryan race, and to humanity itself. Only through the elimination of 'the Jews' could Germany, or any nation, or Europe, or the Aryan race or even humanity itself be redeemed, be made whole and strong again. Nazi antisemitism was fundamentally a global project. It was nurtured inside one nation-state, drawing on existing traditions that held that Jews were not and could never be fully German<sup>34</sup> and developing new mechanisms which (re)bonded a nation from which Jews were now systematically excluded, not least through exemplary acts of violence.<sup>35</sup> That project was then broadened, in the process mobilising significant other nationalist forces especially in Eastern Europe in support of a genocidal project<sup>36</sup>, which aimed to eliminate 'the Jews' from the world and excise them not just from every nation but from humanity itself.

All too often, resistance to this assault was circumscribed within a national frame of reference which could not make what was happening to Jews such a priority. In France, for example, where significant numbers of Jews had migrated before the war, fleeing anti-semitism not just in Germany but from nationalist elites and movements further East, a distinction was first made between French and 'other', 'foreign' Jews to whom the French nation had no fundamental commitment. When the French state itself began its enthusiastic collaboration with the Nazis and began attacking French Jews too, much of the damage had been done because no priority had been given on the Left to solidarity with Jews and opposition to antisemitism as such. Even when French Jews were being deported to the camps, Communists in the Resistance refused to make antisemitism a major issue. No propaganda was produced which highlighted what was being done to the Jews in France or indeed elsewhere. The Communist section of the underground press (although of course it was not unique in this) effectively organized what Blatman and Poznanski have called

a 'total silence ... even when an antisemitic propaganda campaign was launched and even when it directly targeted the resistance ... [T]hroughout the occupation, the resistance spared no effort to prove that its members had not signed up to the goal of defending the Jews.'<sup>37</sup>

None of this is to ignore the heroism of individual rescuers of individual Jews or the courageous actions of small groups, like the Baum group in Germany.<sup>38</sup> What Karen Monroe has called 'the hand of compassion' was offered by many remarkable individuals and some communities to Jews in extremely demanding conditions.<sup>39</sup> But it is difficult to discern any common political factor in what we know of such cases, which do not appear to have been confined in any significant way to individuals on the Left. If there is a politics which was shared, it may well have been at least implicitly cosmopolitan, and on occasion explicitly so, inasmuch as it involved a solidarity with Jews precisely because they were seen first and foremost as fellow human beings. But such a cosmopolitanism did not inform the strategic response of the organized Marxist movement anywhere at this time.

### **The Soviet response: from downplaying antisemitism to the simultaneous charge of 'Zionism' and 'cosmopolitanism'**

The strategic response of most Marxists, organized as they largely were in Communist parties was not of course devised locally. It was designed and directed from the Soviet Union, a state whose interests and commitments by definition were supposed to transcend those of the nation-state. Here the refusal to take antisemitism seriously was to have particularly disastrous consequences in the short term and alarmingly perverse ones in the longer term.

As long as the Nazi-Soviet alliance held firm, the official policy of the state was to ignore what was being done to the Jews inside German-controlled territory. The border was sealed, although not that effectively, as some Jews did manage to flee East. When the attack on the Soviet Union began in 1941, after two years in which the Jews of German-occupied Poland had been subject to extreme violence, as Ben-Cion Pinchuk has shown, 'there was no plan that took into account the special dangers facing the Jewish population.'<sup>40</sup>

Reporting of what was happening to the Jews now inside Soviet territory was sporadic and inconsistent at best and there were repeated efforts to diminish the scale and intensity of the violence. The first report for example that 52,000 Jews had been murdered at Babi Yar was amended down to a figure of 1000.<sup>41</sup> How much of this was due to rising or resurgent antisemitism inside the Soviet Union in the 1930s has been much debated but what is clear is that there was no desire to prioritize what the Nazis were doing to the Jews.<sup>42</sup>

It was not for another year (a year and a half, that is, after the invasion of the Soviet Union, whose orders explicitly called for the mass killing of Jews) that the Soviet Union allowed itself to be associated with the statement published jointly by all the Allied governments and governments-in-exile on 'the Extermination of the Jewish Population of Europe by Nazi Officials.'<sup>43</sup> As even Altman and Ingerflow (who generally downplay Stalinist antisemitism in this context) have noted: 'Neither from the Soviet state nor from the Party was there a single appeal to underground organisations or the local population to help Soviet Jews.'<sup>44</sup>

The regime repeatedly insisted that the war had little or nothing to do with the Jews. In 1943 a Military Council leader, for example, confidently quoted Stalin as saying that 'some comrades of Jewish descent believe that this war is being fought to save the Jewish nation. These Jews are mistaken. We fight the Great Patriotic War for the salvation, the freedom and the independence of our homeland led by the Great Russian people.'<sup>45</sup> A year later,

as the Red Army in its sweep west was discovering what remained of the extermination camps, the Soviet Extraordinary State Commission to Investigate German-Fascist Crimes was explicitly instructed to avoid stating that the victims of the massacres had been Jews.

It is true that a Jewish anti-Fascist committee had been set up by the Soviet regime in 1942 (alongside four other anti-Fascist committees) with the objective of mobilising support in the West for the Soviet war effort. As its name implies, however, it was not primarily about fighting antisemitism but Fascism, which is not the same thing (a confusion which has wrought some considerable havoc on efforts on the Left to think about and to respond to antisemitism). The JAC did nevertheless do what it could to publicize what the Nazis were doing, with many of its members (even long-standing Party members) seizing the opportunity to speak out directly about what the Nazis were doing to the Jews and often invoking in the process not only their own suppressed identity as Jews but a longer history and sometimes personal experience of antisemitism. One of the JAC's major projects, developed in partnership with the writer Ilya Ehrenburg (another who now felt he had to assert his hitherto suppressed Jewish identity) was a detailed record of Nazi violence published in early 1946 as *The Black Book: The Nazi Crime against the Jewish People*.

But the regime had been vigilant from the outset, spying with its usual paranoid suspicion on the members of the JAC (even though it had vetted and appointed them itself) and recording all actual or potential deviations from Party orthodoxy on the 'Jewish Question' for future use. Drafts of *The Black Book* had already aroused serious concerns, precisely for its emphasis on what had been done to Jews and was hastily withdrawn in late 1947 from publication, on the grounds that it contained 'grave political errors.' All copies were destroyed, along with the type set.<sup>46</sup> With the defeat of the Nazis, the committee had outlived its tactical utility, and noticeably long before the other anti-Fascist committees were closed down, the JAC was targeted. The first victim was its leading activist and spokesman the playwright Solomon Mikhoels, who was mysteriously murdered, on Stalin's personal orders, in fact, in January 1948. The committee was wound up and its leaders, some of them die-hard Stalinists, were arrested, tortured and charged and (almost all) shot.<sup>47</sup>

The two decisive terms of the charges laid against them appear at first sight as bizarrely contradictory. The leaders of the JAC (and then many others too) were charged with Jewish nationalism and Zionism on the one hand, and cosmopolitanism on the other. The apparent contradiction between the two charges was much less important, however, than what connected them: connotations of disloyalty, lack of patriotism, foreignness and, not least, worldwide Jewish conspiracy. Both charges flowed from accommodation to (in this instance, Russian) nationalism and both signified a further abandonment of Marx's cosmopolitan ways of thinking.

The charge of Jewish nationalism rested for its part on a selective nationalism which again claimed to distinguish between progressive and reactionary forms. Since the Jews could not constitute a nation according to Stalin's arbitrary criteria, then no progressive Jewish nationalism could exist. To think or speak otherwise was to threaten the cohesion and unity of the nations amongst whom Jews were dispersed and into which they were supposed to assimilate and disappear. The charge of Zionism demonstrated the supposed disloyalty of the Jews, not only clinging on to an identity they should have long foresworn when they were permitted to become members of the nation, but also implying a solidarity with other Jews which cut across the borders of the nation-state and superseded the primacy of the loyalty which nationalists demanded.

The charge of cosmopolitanism for its part was also premised on the primacy of national loyalty. The phrase ‘rootless cosmopolitan Jew’ was first cousin, as it were, to cognate terms like ‘enemy of the people’ or indeed ‘enemy of the human species’, which had emerged as tensions between democratic and nationalist logics began to come to the fore during the French Revolution.<sup>48</sup> During the Terror, the Jacobins had commonly laid the charge *hostis generis humani* against those they accused not only of counter-revolution, but also of betraying the French nation, whose interests were increasingly elided with those of humanity as a whole. A similar elision now occurred in the Soviet Union, where the particular (primarily Russian) national interests of the state were said to correspond with the interests of the world proletariat, and the interests of the world proletariat in turn to correspond with the interests of humanity in general.

Marx’s sharp critique of the chauvinism lying behind Bauer’s apparent universalism was now buried and indeed the very terms he used were inverted. As one loyal Stalinist put it: ‘Cosmopolitanism is an ideology alien to the workers. Communism has nothing in common with cosmopolitanism.’ Another described cosmopolitanism as ‘a false, senseless, strange and incomprehensible phenomenon’. The cosmopolitan ‘is a corrupt, unfeeling creature, totally unworthy of being called by the holy name of man.’<sup>49</sup>

### Rethinking the question of antisemitism

These charges of course went beyond a further failure to think about antisemitism. They formed the basis of what was itself a distinctive contribution to the post-Holocaust repertoire of antisemitism (by no means confined to the Soviet Union), in which a new set of contradictory charges against Jews replaced the Nazi accusation that Jews were somehow responsible for both capitalism and Communism.

The question that arises here however is whether development like this was inevitable or if there was another potential path from Marx that could have been or needs to be developed. Those who think that Marx was himself an antisemite would, of course, have no hesitation in answering in the affirmative to the first hypothesis. Even many of those who are not convinced by this charge would argue that there is nothing in Marxism that provides the basis for an adequate response to the question of antisemitism. But they typically also assert that the reasons for this particular failure lie in a deeper failure – to understand the significance of nationalism and national identity, along with other non-class-based commitments and identities.<sup>50</sup>

The argument here has been different. It is that the adaptation of too many Marxists to nationalism, and the concession to the primacy of national identity, is itself an important reason for this failure. What I also want to suggest, in the concluding part of this article, that what is distinctive in Marx’s own response to antisemitism and in his simultaneous response to nationalism, provides the basis for an alternative approach, which has been largely neglected. This alternative approach moreover was in fact taken up by some very important thinkers working on the margins of the Marxist tradition, or influenced by the cosmopolitan tradition within it, as they were forced to confront the Nazi radicalisation of antisemitism. It was this very radicalisation which forced them into a profound and essentially cosmopolitan rethinking of how antisemitism had developed and what was needed to respond to it.

I refer in particular here to the rethinking undertaken in the 1940s by the leading figures of the Frankfurt School, Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno, as news of the extermination of the Jews began to reach them. Even though their own work in every other respect was far more sophisticated and critical than anything produced at the time by other Marxists, especially those trapped within the dogmas of the Second and Third International, they had shared in the failure to take Nazi antisemitism seriously, and to give it any priority. Despite the fact that all the leading figures in the School were Jews themselves, they did not appear to think for a long time that this was of any relevance to their work as Marxists or that Marxism need concern itself in any significant way with antisemitism.<sup>51</sup> They were not of course alone in this. The universalist commitments which inspired many Jews to commit to the Social Democratic and (perhaps even more so) the Communist movements left little space for thinking about the dangers posed by antisemitism even or perhaps especially to themselves. There was a widespread tendency to think that they would be targeted primarily or exclusively as leftists not as Jews. (This was not true of course for members of the Bund or Marxist Zionists who did place a much greater priority on fighting antisemitism, although in both cases they too were to be disappointed to a greater or lesser extent by the weakness of a cosmopolitan response from their respective non-Jewish comrades).<sup>52</sup>

Horkheimer had produced one of the School's few works on the question only in 1938, five years after the Nazis had come to power, and two years after the Nuremberg laws had stripped Jews of their citizenship. In the course of what was in many respects a somewhat crude and reductionist analysis of the role of Jews in the economy, where they were assigned a central but now apparently doomed historical role as 'agents of circulation', Horkheimer claimed that Nazi antisemitism was only a temporary phenomenon, 'at most ... a safety valve for the younger members of the SA'.<sup>53</sup> This view was widely shared by his colleagues and, as late as 1942, Franz Neumann, who was the School's acknowledged expert on Nazism, insisted in *Behemoth* (his major work on the subject) that Nazi antisemitism was not important in its own right but only the means to another end, a 'spearhead of terror', which could be used or discarded to fit the needs of the day. At the very moment the extermination camps were becoming fully operative, Neumann insisted that 'the Nazis will never allow a complete extermination of the Jews'.<sup>54</sup>

To his considerable credit, Horkheimer then revised his own views and with Adorno rethought his entire approach to the question, an essential component of which was the adoption of a cosmopolitan perspective. It was not just that Horkheimer had come to realize, as he wrote to Marcuse, that 'the problem of antisemitism is much more complicated than I thought'.<sup>55</sup> It was that he now saw it as 'the focal point of injustice ... where the world shows its most horrible face'.<sup>56</sup> 'Whoever accuses the Jews today aims straight at humanity itself. The Jews have become the martyrs of civilisation ... To protect the Jews has come to be a symbol of everything mankind stands for. The Jews have been made what the Nazis always pretended they were – the focal point of world history'.<sup>57</sup>

Adorno emphatically agreed. 'Antisemitism is today really the central injustice, and our form of physiognomy must attend to the world where it shows its face at its most gruesome'.<sup>58</sup> They had now come to think that 'just as it is true that one can only understand antisemitism by examining society, it is becoming equally true that society itself can now only be understood through antisemitism'.<sup>59</sup>

They now devoted considerable attention to the history of antisemitism, first laying out a wide-ranging research agenda for tracing its genealogy going back to the first Crusades<sup>60</sup>

and then going even deeper in their major work of this period, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. The chapter on 'Elements of Antisemitism' formed not only the last section of the work but was, as Dana Villa has argued, the culmination of the overall argument.<sup>61</sup>

There is no space to go into this in any detail but what does bear emphasising here is the cosmopolitan vantage point that Adorno and Horkheimer adopted: that the history of antisemitism is intimately bound up with the history of humanity. What was projected on to the Jews, they argued, could tell us a great deal not about Jews but about tensions and contradictions inside society, about what could and could not be tolerated, about the nature and limits of civilisation, and ultimately how an unprecedented form of barbarism became possible. Going further than Luxemburg, they now saw barbarism not simply as relapse but something worse, something which changed the conditions of human existence and, in this context, the prospects for socialism at least for some time.

A crucial aspect of this argument has to do with difference and particularity, the very problem that lay at the heart of constructions of the so-called 'Jewish Question'. What Adorno and Horkheimer argued connected all the elements was an anxiety and intolerance of that particularity that could take different forms at different times, sometimes religious, sometimes economic, sometimes social, but which were most effectively channelled and institutionally 'embodied' in a nationalist framework.<sup>62</sup>

What they also insisted on was the need for any conception of society to allow for difference within an overall conception of humanity itself. From that perspective, the particular identity of Jews was not a threat or a problem for society (in the modern world, primarily the nation) but the opposite. It was not so much (or only) that they pointed to the contribution that Jews (and indeed Judaism) had made to the development of civilisation, or that every form of antisemitism was fundamentally destructive, but that they saw the particularity principle represented by Jews as a necessary and fundamentally cosmopolitan principle. The attack on Jews was, at root, an attack on diversity.

## Back to and beyond Marx

This does not take us simply back to Marx but to his starting point. Marx does not develop to any significant extent a cosmopolitan sense of the diversity of humanity, though he was repeatedly critical of efforts to flatten out difference (notably in his Critique of the Gotha Programme), but he does reject any argument that singles out Jewish particularity as a problem. What Adorno and Horkheimer were doing was taking this rejection seriously and trying to think through its implications, both for the Jews and for humanity as a whole. They understood antisemitism in quite a rich and complex way as both an attack on a particular group *and* as an attack on humanity itself. A failure to respond to antisemitism was at the same time a failure to protect humanity, which would be irretrievably damaged by the annihilation of its Jewish element.

The damage was already very great of course. The Holocaust had destroyed a large percentage of Jews in the world, removed a Jewish presence from many nations who were now much more homogeneous than they had been before. It had proved possible to murder large numbers of people through the agency and apparatuses of a modern nation-state, with the willing collaboration of many fellow citizens and the passive compliance of many more. What had been scarcely imagined as a possibility even by the most vehement antisemites had now become a reality.

The Holocaust was a radical event in the history of both antisemitism and humanity which called for a radical response. Since Jews had not been protected within the nation-states across which they had been dispersed, new ways of thinking and new kinds of commitment were necessary which were in Horkheimer and Adorno's minds essentially cosmopolitan, because (like Marx) they were grounded in a normative commitment to the human community.

They were not alone, it has to be said, in coming to this conclusion at this critical time. Hannah Arendt, for all the differences she had with Horkheimer and (especially) Adorno, had been rethinking along similar lines. If she was not working within the Marxist tradition, she was arguably significantly influenced here by one Marxist in particular: Rosa Luxemburg.<sup>63</sup> Like Luxemburg, Arendt had identified a major problem with nationalism, in particular the way in which minorities who were dispersed across nation-states were placed in acute danger by a conception of rights which confined them only to those deemed to be loyal and worthy subjects of homogenising nation-states. Jews were especially vulnerable in this context, attacked as unreliable, as a source of corruption and (because they were supposedly purely self-interested) of division and decomposition.<sup>64</sup>

The solution proposed by Arendt on the one hand and Adorno and Horkheimer on the other was, as Seyla Benhabib has also suggested, fundamentally cosmopolitan<sup>65</sup>, but it was also new. In having to think more deeply about antisemitism, they rethought our understanding of humanity, of the universal, as inherently diverse, as including particularity within it. This rethinking or development of cosmopolitanism was more than conceptual; it also carried with it a clear normative commitment to a solidarity across the boundaries of the nation-state with any group threatened with destruction in whole or in part. Or, to make it more concrete, with genocide, the crime after all that the radicalized antisemitism of the Nazis had visited upon the Jews, a crime which by its very nature required a cosmopolitan response.

Such a response was largely not forthcoming from one of the few sources from which it might have been mounted, the organized Marxist movement which by then had largely (though not completely) turned its back on the cosmopolitan principles originally espoused by Marx and on a (connected) understanding of antisemitism as a mortal threat *both* to Jews *and* to humanity itself. As that threat was realized in the Holocaust, there was some effort to retrieve and develop both these cosmopolitan principles and that understanding of antisemitism, albeit an effort that is by no means complete. To the extent to which antisemitism even after the Holocaust continues to pose a significant threat to Jews and to humanity itself, the history of how those principles and that understanding were both shaped and abandoned remains relevant. Even if the organized Marxist movement may no longer provide the kind of central focus it might once have done, there are still resources which can be quarried from that history for those who seek to develop a more adequate cosmopolitan response to such a threat.

## Notes

1. Beck, "What Is Globalization;" Chernilo, "Social Theory's Methodological Nationalism."
2. Ingram, *Radical Cosmopolitics*. Ingram himself seems to think of this as only a recent development (which perhaps says something about how this tradition has disappeared from view).
3. Held, "Principles of Cosmopolitan Order," 12–13.

4. See the discussion in Derrida, *Cosmopolitanism and Forgiveness*, 15.
5. *Ibid.*, 21.
6. For a thoughtful analysis of how these tensions expressed themselves in nineteenth-century Germany, see Stoetzler, *The State, the Nation and the Jews*. Stoetzler's argument is in many ways a systematic elaboration of insights first propounded by Adorno and Horkheimer, to whose cosmopolitan alternative we return in the concluding section of this article.
7. See in particular the recent study by David Nirenberg, *Anti-Judaism*.
8. Pierre Birnbaum, *Jewish Destinies*, chapter 1, "A Jacobin Regenerator: Abbé Grégoire," 11–30.
9. Achcar, *Marxism*.
10. From their critique of Friedrich List, the leading contemporary exponent of nationalism in economic theory (Marx and Engels 1976, 280). John Hall has tellingly described List as "the Marx of nationalism" (Hall 1998, 31).
11. Marx and Engels, *Communist Manifesto*, 6 (my emphasis).
12. Benner, *Really Existing Nationalisms*, 11 (my emphasis).
13. Langeswiche, "Germany and the National Question."
14. On Marx's distinctive position at this time, see Hughes, *Nationalism and Society*.
15. Traverso, *Marxists and the Jewish Question*, 135.
16. Luxemburg, *The National Question*.
17. Shelton, "Rosa Luxemburg and the National Question."
18. Luxemburg, "The Junius Brochure," 269.
19. This extension is explored more fully in Spencer, "From Rosa Luxemburg."
20. For a good discussion on the homogenising policies of newly independent nation-states after the war, see Brubaker, *Nationalism Reframed*.
21. Birnbaum, *Geography of Hope*.
22. Fine, "Rereading Marx."
23. Fischer, *Socialist Response*.
24. See Pulzer, *Political Antisemitism*.
25. The formulation is often attributed to Bebel but it has been suggested that the term originated not with him but with an Austrian liberal, Ferdinand Kronawetter. See Jack Jacobs, *On Socialists and "the Jewish Question" after Marx*, chapter 2, "Eduard Bernstein: After All. A German Jew." Bebel was himself not entirely happy with the use of the term socialism in this context. In an interview conducted with Hermann Bahr in 1894, he expressed some reservations about this formulation, noting that if some workers encountered Jews as small capitalists, most Jews were themselves, especially in the East, workers or peasants, and that most Germans knew nothing about Jews at all. Hermann Bahr, "Der Antisemitismus- ein internationales interview" in Pias, *Hermann Bahr*. I am grateful to Olaf Kistenmacher for alerting me to this caveat.
26. Norman Geras has highlighted Trotsky's intuitions at this time and linked them to his later prediction in 1938 that, in the event of another war, the Nazis would attempt the annihilation of the Jews, a prediction made by no other political activists or thinker on the Left (or indeed anywhere else) at the time (Geras, *Contract*, 139, 159).
27. Anderson, *Imagined Communities*.
28. Niewyk, *Socialist, Anti-Semite and Jew*.
29. Cited by Bankier, "German Social Democrats and the Jewish Question," 521.
30. Quoted in Daycock, *KPD and NSDAP*. Fischer was not alone in using such language at this time. For further examples, including a speech by Herman Remmele, another prominent KPD figure, attacking Jewish cattle-dealers in Stuttgart in similar terms, see Conan Fischer, *German Communists*, 59–60.
31. On the overlap between Communist and Nazi propaganda on this issue, see Brown, *Weimar Radicals*.
32. The systematic silence of the Communist Party is discussed in some detail in Herf, "German Communism."
33. Friedländer, *The Years of Extermination*.
34. See in particular Schmidt, *The Continuities of German History*.



35. On the remaking of the nation, see Wildt, *Hitler's Volksgemeinschaft*, and on the violence Kühne, *Belonging and Genocide*.
36. On the ways in which the Nazis mobilized and legitimated unprecedented levels of antisemitic violence by other nationalists, see Kallis, *Genocide and Fascism*.
37. Blatman and Poznanski, "Jews and their Social Environment," 201.
38. The scale (and limits) of this resistance is analysed carefully in Cox, *Circles*.
39. Monroe, *The Hand of Compassion*.
40. Pinchuk, "Soviet Policy," 55.
41. Lustiger, *Stalin and the Jews*, 106.
42. The arguments have been carefully rehearsed by Harvey Asher, who concludes that Soviet policy was not so different to that of their Allies in some ways but that it was inflected both by what he calls a "culture of antisemitism" and by Soviet nationality policy in general ("The Soviet Union, the Holocaust and Auschwitz," 44). As Timothy Snyder has reminded us, this had had quite murderous consequences for some years, notably as a crucial factor in the Holodomor in Ukraine (Snyder, *Bloodlands*). As far as Jews were concerned, even if they were not the only victims of Stalin's paranoid suspicions of Ukrainians, Poles and many others, the number of Jews who had been killed because they were Jews by the regime by the end of the 1930s was actually far greater than those killed inside Nazi Germany by that moment in time.
43. Dan Plesch (*America, Hitler and the UN*) has recently brought the significance of this document back to our attention, arguing convincingly that it lay the foundation in many ways for the creation of the United Nations, and that the participation of all the Allies in publicising the document was a major step. But the Soviet Union did not lead from the front on this issue.
44. Quoted in Asher, "Soviet Union," 44.
45. Quoted in Lustiger, *Stalin*, 108.
46. Gitelman, "Politics and the Historiography of the Holocaust," 119.
47. On the appalling treatment of the members of the JAC, see Rubenstein and Naumov, *Stalin's Secret Pogrom*.
48. See the discussion of the different logics in Spencer and Wollman, *Nationalism*, 127–31.
49. Quoted in Pinkus and Frankel, *The Soviet Union and the Jews*, 152, 154.
50. This is Traverso's conclusion for example in *The Marxists and the Jews*.
51. Not all the members of the School of course were Jews, but all its leading members were, and according to Jack Jacobs, those few who were not could, at times, feel themselves somewhat excluded from the inner circle. Adorno's father was Jewish but his mother was not and he does not seem to have been brought up (unlike the others) with any sense of himself as Jewish. He was indeed for a time convinced that he could and should stay in Nazi Germany when all the others had fled. On the other hand, he turned out to be more alert to the dangers facing than the others and played a decisive role in helping Horkheimer reorient his entire approach and together to place antisemitism at the centre of their concerns. See Jacobs, *The Frankfurt School, Jewish Lives and Antisemitism*, especially 2–3, and 54–60.
52. The Polish Bund was part of the Socialist International, to which the German Social Democrats, whose difficulties we have briefly rehearsed, also belonged. The most significant Marxist Zionist group to consider in this context was probably Hashomer Hatzair, which sought (with growing difficulty) to combine Zionism with support for the Soviet Union, with mounting difficulty. On Hashomer Hatzair's efforts to deal with some of the contradictions here, see Kollat, "Marxist Zionism."
53. Horkheimer, "The Jews and Europe," 92.
54. Neumann, *Behemoth*, 125.
55. Horkheimer, *Gesammelte Schriften*, 17: 463–4.
56. Cited in Rabinbach, *The Cunning of Unreason*, 53.
57. Horkheimer, *A Life in Letters*, 223.
58. Quoted in Wiggershaus, *Frankfurt School*, 309.
59. Quoted in *ibid.*, 690.
60. Horkheimer and Adorno, "A Research Project on Anti-Semitism."
61. Villa, "Arendt, Adorno and Auschwitz," 24.

62. Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, 176.
63. On the connection with Luxemburg in this respect in particular, see Spencer, *Luxemburg, Arendt*. Arendt's biographer, Elisabeth Young-Bruehl has also noted the importance of this connection in *Hannah Arendt: For Love of the World*, 399.
64. Some of the projections onto Jews which Arendt identified here match and indeed may be best understood by the categories Horkheimer and Adorno deployed in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. These are discussed in very interesting ways by Carolyn Dean in her careful reflections on how difficult it was for intellectuals on the Left as much as the right to acknowledge the specificity of what had happened to the Jews. See her *Aversion and Erasure*, especially the concluding section.
65. Benhabib, "From 'The Dialectic of Enlightenment' to 'The Origins of Totalitarianism.'"

## Notes on contributor

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