

ZIONISM AS ANTI-LIBERAL LIBERALISM. THE CASE OF MUSCLE JUDAISM WITHIN THE CONTEXT OF ANTI-SEMITISM IN THE BOURGEOIS GERMAN SOCIETY

*El sionismo como liberalismo anti-liberal. El caso del judaísmo musculoso en el
contexto del antisemitismo de la sociedad burguesa alemana*

CHRISTOPH KASTEN*

christoph.kasten@googlemail.com

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ABSTRACT:

In this essay I want to understand Fin de siècle political Zionism as a symptom of bourgeois German society and as an answer to the failed promise of Jewish emancipation. On the basis of the juridical emancipation in 1871 in the German *Reich* political Zionism and more specifically Max Nordau's *muscular Judaism* was an ambiguous liberal answer to the failed liberal promise of emancipation. The Zionist self-empowerment was therefore a defensive act against anti-Semitism.

Key words: liberalism; Zionism; Max Nordau; Muscle Judaism; anti-Semitism; Critical Theory; Jewish emancipation.

RESUMEN:

En este ensayo intento analizar el sionismo de finales del siglo XIX como un síntoma de la sociedad burguesa alemana y como una respuesta a la malograda promesa de emancipación judía. Partiendo de la emancipación de los judíos en el *Reich* alemán, con fecha de 1871, el sionismo político y más específicamente el *judaísmo musculoso* de Max Nordau fue una ambigua respuesta liberal a la

* Universität Potsdam/Humboldt Universität zu Berlin

fallida promesa de emancipación. El *self-empowerment* sionista era por tanto una estrategia defensiva contra el antisemitismo.

Palabras clave: liberalismo; sionismo; Max Nordau; judaísmo musculoso; Teoría Crítica; emancipación judía.

1. BACKGROUND: CRITICAL THEORY OF LIBERALISM

In the chapter *Elements of anti-Semitism: Limits of Enlightenment in Dialectic of Enlightenment*, Adorno and Horkheimer point to the ambiguity of the liberal promise of emancipation. On the one hand, the “(...) liberal thesis is true as an idea. It contains an image of the society in which rage would no longer reproduce itself or seek qualities on which to be discharged.”¹ On the other hand although the liberal promise “(...) serves as an apology for the existing order”² since it states that the unity of mankind is already realized. But for Jews, who were still threatened by anti-Semitism also in a state which fulfilled the liberal claim of juridical emancipation this ambiguity became very obvious. From the liberal perspective, which formed the foundations of the Jewish emancipation in question, it was still the Jews who were unwilling to relinquish their Jewish particularity and to fully assimilate into mainstream society: “The mode of life and appearance of the Jews compromise the existing universal by deficient adaptation.”³

Already in 1934, in the third number of the *Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung*, the political philosopher Herbert Marcuse showed that the liberal state and -society are themselves based on irrational concepts and that the formation of the totalitarian state was therefore also a self-transformation of the liberal state.⁴ This insight will be useful also for our contextualization of the Jewish emancipation within the development of liberal society.

“Thus, precisely the rational determination and condition of that ‘generality’ in which the ‘happiness’ of the individual is supposed to be realized is missing. To this extent (and only to this extent) the reproach that liberalism’s talk of general

¹ Max HORKHEIMER y Theodor W. ADORNO, *Dialectic of Enlightenment. Philosophical Fragments*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002, p.138.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Cf. Herbert MARCUSE, “The struggle against liberalism in the totalitarian view of the state”, in: *ibid.: Negations*, London: MayFlyBooks, 2009, p.1-30.

interest or humanity remains caught in pure abstractions is correct. The structure and order of the whole are ultimately left to irrational forces: an accidental ‘harmony’, a ‘natural balance’. The plausibility of liberalist rationalism thus ceases immediately when, with the intensification of social conflict and economic crises, general ‘harmony’ becomes increasingly improbable. At this point liberalist theory must grasp at irrational justifications.”⁵

On the basis of an unfree society the liberal universalism promises a liberated society. That this promise failed becomes obvious when liberalism turns into anti-liberalism. Adorno, Horkheimer and Marcuse describe the dialectics of liberalism⁶ as a process of a rational concept of society that turns into an irrational one because its presumptions are based on irrational assumptions about economy and society as natural categories: “Here, in the center of the liberalist system, society is interpreted through its reduction to ‘nature’ in its harmonizing function: as the evasive justification of a contradictory social order.”⁷ A dialectical understanding of political Zionism needs to place itself into the dialectical and constitutive ambiguity of liberalism. Political Zionism therefore functions as a negative identity of liberalism by negating the liberal promise of Jewish emancipation through assimilation and thus turning itself into a self-empowered liberal project of self-emancipation in a Jewish state.

2. INTRODUCTION

The following essay concentrates on how Max Nordau’s concept of the *muscular Jew*, a term that he introduced into the Zionist debate at the Fin de siècle, functioned as a liberal attempt of Jewish self-emancipation within the ambiguous context of the German liberal-bourgeois society that was deeply steeped in anti-Semitism. The concept of *muscle Judaism* is itself an abstract category and reveals its liberal roots in the identitary self-empowerment as subjugation under an abstract concept. It is therefore a mode of subjectification which is self-empowerment as self-subjugation. In contrast to other interpretations, which see this self-empowerment as an

⁵ Ibid. p. 12.

⁶ For the concept of liberalism within Critical Theory see Helmut Dubiel, “Liberalismus und Liberalität in der »eindimensionalen Gesellschaft«”, in: K. Hansen (Ed.), *Frankfurter Schule und Liberalismus*, Baden-Baden: Nomos, 1981, p.103-114.

⁷ Herbert MARCUSE, “The struggle against liberalism in the totalitarian view of the state”, op. cit. p. 8.

act of liberal positive identity (in accordance with similar phenomena of that time), it is understood here first of all as an act of self-defense.⁸

Since for political Zionism anti-Semitism was a clear indicator that even the most diligently liberal societies would fail to emancipate the Jews into the state (from a legal perspective the Jewish emancipation in Germany was achieved in 1871), there arose modes of Jewish self-empowerment that explicitly presented themselves as situated outside the liberalist image of an egalitarian society. One of these concepts was *muscular Judaism*, which functioned as an attempt to undermine the stereotypical anti-Semitic depiction of the Jewish male body as a symbol of the Jew's incapability to create a political body at all. For instance, the Zionist sports movement used the picture of the effeminate Jewish male, a self-depiction that derived from the anti-Semitic stereotype of the Jewish body, to establish a new concept of male Zionist Jewishness. What I hope to demonstrate is how anti-Semitism as a violent force had a huge impact on the shape of Zionist identity. For the famous cultural critic, physician and political Zionist Max Nordau⁹, Zionism as a Jewish identity and political force was not an end in itself, but the only possible answer towards the anti-Semitic threat in the modern world.¹⁰ In 1897 he wrote in the Zionist newspaper *Die Welt*: "Even if it would be true that Jews today are not a people among others, the mere fact that anti-Semitism exists would be a sufficient reason for them to become a people."¹¹ It is therefore necessary to consider anti-Semitic Jewish body images and to show the connection between anti-Semitism and the debates about effeminate male Jews. In the next step I will show which body pictures were dominant in the Zionist movement and how Nordau's

⁸ See Todd Samuel PRESNER, "'Clear Heads, Solid Stomachs, and Hard Muscles': Max Nordau and the Aesthetics of Jewish Regeneration", in *Modernism/Modernity*; 10,2, 2003, p. 269-296; Daniel WILDMANN, "Der Körper im Körper. Jüdische Turner und jüdische Turnvereine im Deutschen Kaiserreich 1898-1914", in: Haber/Petry/Wildmann: *Jüdische Identität und Nation*, Köln: Böhlau, 2006, p. 50-86; Michael STANISLAWSKI, *Zionism and the Fin de siècle. Cosmopolitanism and Nationalism from Nordau to Jabotinsky*, Berkeley-Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2001. See here especially the chapter on Nordau's Zionism (p. 74-97).

⁹ For a comprehensive presentation of Nordau's work and biography see Christoph SCHULTE, *Psychopathologie des Fin de siècle. Der Kulturkritiker, Arzt und Zionist Max Nordau*, Frankfurt a. M.: Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag, 1997. Also: Petra ZUDRELL, *Der Kulturkritiker und Schriftsteller Max Nordau. Zwischen Zionismus, Deutschland und Judentum*, Würzburg: Königshausen & Neuman, 2003.

¹⁰ See Christoph SCHULTE, *Psychopathologie des Fin de siècle*, op. cit., p. 265 ff., 271 ff. Schulte makes clear that Nordau's political Zionism is a consequence of the persistence of anti-Semitism also within western societies. Especially the Dreyfus affair had a huge impact on Nordau's politicization.

¹¹ Max NORDAU, Ein Tempelstreit, in: *Die Welt*, Nr. 2 (June 11th, 1897). (translation of the author).

muscular Judaism became the identification point for the Zionist gymnastic movement.

I want to suggest that Nordau's Zionism was an attempt to positively overcome anti-Semitism and therefore functioned as a *logic of negative identity* for the Zionist gymnastic movement. I will therefore briefly reconstruct the history of the Jewish gymnastic movement and emphasize the role of Zionism. The growing anti-Semitism and the anti-Semitic critique of the Jewish emancipation from authors like Wilhelm Marr, influenced the Zionist critique of the Jewish assimilation and of the liberal idea of emancipation in the diaspora.

The question to be raised is whether Zionism could therefore be understood as both anti-liberal and liberal at the same time? On the one hand, I want to suggest that it was liberalism's own internal inimicality to assimilation that Zionism made visible and that this exposing of liberalism to its own contradictory constitution formed the basis of Zionism's critique of liberalism. On the other hand, Zionism incorporated the very ideas of liberalism itself. From this ambiguous perspective I want to understand Zionism as anti-liberal liberalism.

3. THE AMBIGUITY OF JEWISH EMANCIPATION AND "BÜRGERLICHE VERBESSERUNG"

The special case of German liberalism and bourgeois society, in contrast to other liberal developments in Europe and the United States, expressed itself from the beginning of the 19th century, as a result of the anti-Napoleon reaction, as organic nationalism. Fichte's philosophy of natural spirit and the expression of this philosophy in the widely used German terms *Volk* and *Nation* are central for this development as directed against the universal values of enlightenment and the Jewish emancipation.¹² The shift from the question of Jewish emancipation to the so called *Jewish question*, in the course of the 19th century, can be seen as its result. Not just for anti-Semites, but also for Zionists, the *Jewish question* became the initial position for their reflections.¹³ The emancipation of the nation replaced the emancipation of the individual.

¹² See Johann Gottlieb FICHTE, *Reden an die deutsche Nation*, Hamburg: Meiner, 2008.

¹³ Cf : Detlev CLAUSSEN, "Vom Judenhass zum Antisemitismus", in: *ibid.: Aspekte der Alltagsreligion*, Frankfurt a. M.: Neue Kritik, 2000, p. 76 FN 17.

The alliance between *liberal* and *Jewish* was from its beginning problematic in Germany.¹⁴ The bourgeois promise of emancipation was bound to the pressure to assimilate into the mainstream society.¹⁵ The conditions for the Jewish emancipation included presupposed normative and moral demands. The demands of the so called *moralische Verbesserung* (moral improvement), which was defined by enlightened princes and civil servants and who were planning on forcing their educational program upon all subjects, were ultimately forced only upon the Jewish minority.¹⁶

Also in Fin de siècle German society the Jew appeared as a mere object to be taken up by the states' problematic educational policy (states which had not undergone the more general revolutionary emancipation that had happened in other regions of Europe). "Within the process of Jewish emancipation, the Jews cannot liberate themselves as fighting subjects, but they become objects of liberation. There was no acknowledgement. Emancipation turned into the force of assimilation into an unfree society."¹⁷

The liberal idea of emancipation of the Jews was first formulated by Christian Wilhelm Dohm in 1781 and became the source of the intellectual emancipation movement. As a German civil servant he first of all believed in the strong and rational state, which alone can guarantee the *moral improvement* of the Jews in a process of education (*Erziehung*). Within this *educational process* the Jews were expected to relinquish their *Jewish particularity*.¹⁸ This understanding of the state as an educator led to the problematic identification of emancipation with gradual education of the Jews in the German context. Civil servants like Dohm were the agents of the emancipation movement and in this early stage of the Jewish emancipation, which lasted from 1780 until 1815, emancipation was granted by the state and not, unlike the development in France, a product of an emancipatory

¹⁴ Cf. Werner E. MOSSE, "German Jewry and liberalism", in Friedrich-Naumann-Stiftung, Leo Baeck Institute (ed.): *Das deutsche Judentum und der Liberalismus*, Königswinter: Comdok-Verlagsabteilung, 1986, p. 22.

¹⁵ Cf. Detlev CLAUSSEN, "Vom Judenhass zum Antisemitismus", op. cit. p. 68

¹⁶ Cf. Simone LÄSSIG, *Jüdische Wege ins Bürgertum*, Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2004, p. 32 f.

¹⁷ Detlev CLAUSSEN, *Grenzen der Aufklärung*, Frankfurt a. M.: Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag, 2005, p. 52. (translation of the author).

¹⁸ See Hans-Joachim SALECKER, *Der Liberalismus und die Erfahrung der Differenz. Über die Bedingungen der Integration der Juden in Deutschland*, Berlin: Philo, 1999. And here especially the chapter Die Anfänge der Judenemanzipation: Christian Wilhelm von Dohm (p. 98-122).

revolution.¹⁹ It was Napoleon who first installed civil rights for Jews in the constitution of German areas he conquered. German political liberalism was an ally for the Jewish emancipation project but this liberalism could only partly and within a history of ruptures succeeded to implement civil rights for Jews. Therefore, German liberalism was associated with the Jewish emancipation, although the movement was not devoid of anti-Jewish resentments itself.²⁰ With the formation of the political anti-Semitic movement at the end of the 1870's the identification of liberalism and Jewish emancipation became even stronger. Especially, the economic crisis, the so called *Gründerkrach*, of the newly established German Reich in 1873 was a trigger for anti-Semites like the protestant curd chaplain und politician Adolf Stoecker and the journalist and politician Otto Glagau to formulate their anti-Semitism in terms of critique of political liberalism. In contrast to the so called Jewish Question of the emancipation period that dealt with the possibility and impossibility of the Jews to assimilate into a Christian society, the political anti-Semites of the German *Kaiserreich* transformed the *Jewish Question* into the delusional demand of the emancipation of Christian society from the Jewish control of that society. The term anti-Semitism had an abstract quality that made it possible to subsume all kinds of political demands under it.²¹ This abstract quality enabled the anti-Semite Otto Glagau to identify the *Jewish Question* with what was at the time popularly called the "Social Question." He made a possible solution for the *Social Question* of poverty dependent on the solution of the *Jewish Question*.²²

Modern anti-Semitism was a symptom of the failed attempt of the bourgeois emancipation of the Jews since they were identified with the ruptures of the process of economic modernization.²³ The crisis of liberalism in Wilhelminian Germany was a crisis of bourgeois society which led to Bismarck's political break with

¹⁹ Reinhard RÜRUP, "Judenemanzipation und bürgerliche Gesellschaft in Deutschland", in: *Ibid., Emanzipation und Antisemitismus. Studien zur »Judenfrage« der bürgerlichen Gesellschaft*, Frankfurt a. M.: Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag, 1987, p. 16 ff.

²⁰ For the ambivalent relationship between the Jewish emancipation and German political liberalism see *ibid.*: p. 29 ff. and also Hans Joachim SALECKER, *Der Liberalismus und die Erfahrung der Differenz*, op. cit.

²¹ Reinhard RÜRUP, "Judenemanzipation und bürgerliche Gesellschaft in Deutschland", op. cit. p. 130 ff; Shulamit VOLKOV, "Antisemitism as a Cultural Code", in: *Leo Baeck Yearbook (1978) 23 (1)*, p. 26 ff.

²² Shulamit VOLKOV, "Antisemitism as a Cultural Code", op. cit., p. 40 f.; Moshe ZIMMERMANN, *Die »Judenfrage« als »die soziale Frage« - Zur Kontinuität und Stellenwert des Antisemitismus vor und nach dem Nationalsozialismus*, in *ibid.: Deutsch-jüdische Vergangenheit: Der Judenhaß als Herausforderung*, Paderborn: Schöningh, 2005, p. 289 - 301.

²³ Cf. Detlev CLAUSSEN, "Vom Judenhass zum Antisemitismus", op. cit., p. 74.

the liberal party and their election defeat in the late 1870's at the same time as political anti-Semitism took shape. Political anti-Semitism was the radical expression of this crisis of the liberal society. It was a development resulting from liberalism's tendency to present itself as an already post-emancipatory concept (see comment on Adorno and Horkheimer above). But historically liberalism and its ideal were constituted by social conditions of unfreedom. The crisis resulting from this contradiction conditioned the formation of the German *Reich*. But the emancipation process was in itself problematic and deeply shaped by the ruptures of the economic crisis. The Historian Reinhard Rürup defined three sets of problems that were inherent to the Jewish emancipation in Germany: first: it was a gradual process of emancipation which lasted approximately one hundred years, second: each German state had its own development with different approaches towards a solution, third: the process of the emancipation of the Jews took place in a non- or just partly emancipated society.²⁴ The Wilhelminian society was divided into an emancipatory and an anti-Semitic culture, in which Anti-Semitism became a *cultural code*.²⁵ On the ground of this ambivalent situation, political Zionism understood itself as a mode of forming a particularly Jewish subjectivity.

4. CONTEXT AND HISTORY OF THE JEWISH GYMNAS TIC MOVEMENT

The Jewish gymnastic movement must be seen in the context of 19th century German *Lebensreformbewegung* (life reform movement), which can be characterized as reactionary and antimodernist. An example of the German life reform movement is the so called *Körperkulturbewegung* (body culture movement) and especially the sport- and gymnastic movement which founded itself in accordance with the principles of the father of the German sports movement, Friedrich Ludwig Jahn. In the German Empire, a national-chauvinist attitude, one which became a prominent form self-expression of the German bourgeois society, was cultivated in different forms of male societies. The foundation of Jewish male societies was a reaction to the anti-Semitic expulsion of Jews from these societies in general. In 1896

²⁴ Cf. Reinhard RÜRUP, "Judenemanzipation und bürgerliche Gesellschaft in Deutschland", *op. cit.*, p. 37 ff., 116 ff.

²⁵ Cf. Shulamit VOLKOV, "Antisemitism as a *Cultural Code*", *op. cit.*, p. 45.

for example, Jews were expelled from student fraternities²⁶; in 1901, the *Deutsche Turnerschaft*, the umbrella organization of German gymnastic clubs, introduced a so-called *Arierparagraphen* (Aryan Paragraph) in Austrian areas that forbade Jews from participating in these clubs.²⁷

The first Jewish gymnastic association in the German Empire was founded in October 1898. That was when the German-Jewish gymnastic movement was born. It understood itself in the tradition of the German sports movement and referred to Friedrich Ludwig Jahn frequently in its magazine *Die Jüdische Turnzeitung*. The distinctiveness of the gymnastic movement in the intellectual German-Jewish context was their self-conception, which was strongly shaped by the idea of the physical regeneration of the Jewish body.²⁸ Their aim was to produce a new Jewish consciousness through physical training, which they understood as a form of regeneration and therefore as a form of collective subjectivity formation for Jews in that historical moment and context. In the beginning they referred to themselves as national-Jewish in order to distance themselves from the first Zionist program, which was formulated at the Zionist congress in Basel in 1898. Viewed in the wider German-Jewish context it becomes clear that the assimilation answer to the Jewish question and the Zionist answer to the Jewish question shared the same theoretical foundation, namely those Liberalist presuppositions which form the conditions of possibility for the Jewish Question in the first place. In the Jewish gymnastic movement, Zionism was conceived first of all as a political movement with territorial aspirations. In 1903 Hermann Jalowicz, one of the founders of the Jewish gymnastic club *Bar Kochba* and head of the Jewish gymnastic movement, showed that there always existed a relationship between Zionism and the Jewish gymnastic movement. In 1904 Max Zirker, who was also one of the founders of the club *Bar Kochba*, wrote an article about the relationship between the *Jüdische Turnerschaft* and Zionism. He made clear that both shared the same theoretical foundation but for tactical reasons they would not openly declare themselves to be a

²⁶ See Monica RÜTHERS, „Von der Ausgrenzung zum Nationalstolz. Weibische Juden und Muskeljuden“, in: H. Haumann (Ed.), *Der Traum von Israel. Die Ursprünge des modernen Zionismus*, Weinheim: Beltz Athenäum, 1998, p. 319 ff.

²⁷Cf. Daniel WILDMANN, *Jüdisches Turnen im Kaiserreich 1898-1914*, p. 69 f.

²⁸ Cf. *ibid.* p. 52, and also *ibid.* p. 66.

Zionist association. But it was not until 1912 that the movement would get closer to the Zionist movement due to the Posener program from 1912.²⁹

5. ANTI-SEMITIC DEBATES ABOUT THE MALE JEWISH BODY AND THE IMPACT ON ZIONIST IDENTITY. MUSCULAR JUDAISM AS A MODE OF SUBJECTIFICATION

Sciences like medicine and anthropology produced an especially wide range of anti-Semitic debates in the Fin de siècle period. Physicians and anthropologist were trying to build a base for already established stereotypes about the Jewish religion, the Jewish male body, the so-called Jewish character and the Jewish race.³⁰

One of the main characteristics of anti-Semitic body images is the comparison to everything that is female. The pathologization of women went hand in hand with the pathologization of the Jews. The American zoologist W. K. Brooks described women as *retarded men*.³¹ The classical anti-Semitic stereotypes of that time, which are connected to the pathologization of women, included: the unfitness of Jews for military service, the femininity of the Jewish language, hysteria, nosebleeding as male menstruation, religious enthusiasm, a weak will (the so called Abulia) and abnormal sexual desires. The anti-Semitic debate about the Jewish body deeply shaped the self-perception of many Jews. Many Jews underwent surgical operations to get rid of their, as they understood it, physically Jewish particularity. An example of this is the German-Jewish surgeon Jacque Joseph, who worked in Berlin in the end of the 19th century and used surgical operations to fix protruding ears and hooked noses of his patients who mentally suffered from their apparent Jewish physiognomy. In an article concerning his work Joseph wrote that his patients felt as if they were relieved from a disease.³² Here, the anti-Semitic depiction had a

²⁹ Cf. Hans Jürgen KÖNIG, „Herr Jud“ sollen sie sagen! Körperertüchtigung am Anfang des Zionismus, Sankt Augustin: Academia Verlag, 1999, p. 173 ff.

³⁰ The historian Klaus Hödl reconstructed these scientific debates in his extensive study on the pathologization of the Jewish body, see Klaus HÖDL, *Die Pathologisierung des Jüdischen Körpers*, Wien: Picus Verlag, 1997; John Efron showed how they influenced the inner-Jewish race debate as a defense against anti-Semitic debates in the Fin de siècle, see John M. Efron, *Defenders of the Race*, Yale: Yale University Press, 2001.

³¹ Cf. Klaus HÖDL: *Die Pathologisierung des Jüdischen Körpers*, op. cit. p. 225.

³² Cf. Sander L. GILMAN, »Die Rasse ist nicht schön« - »Nein, wir sind keine hübsche Rasse«. Der schöne und der hässliche Jude, in: Gilman/Jütte/Kohlbauer-Fritz: »Der schejne Jid«. *Das Bild des jüdischen Körpers» in Mythos und Ritual*, Wien: Picus Verlag, 1998, p. 64 f.

direct and violent influence on the persons concerned, who consequently considered themselves as Jewish and ugly.

Nordau had this experience very much in his mind when he created the concept of muscular Judaism. In August 1898, Max Nordau gave a speech at the second Zionist congress in Basel where he introduced the term *Muskeljudentum* (muscular Judaism) into the Zionist debate.³³ This concept became the foundation of a new Jewish body ideal and predominant in Zionist body culture.

Influenced by Nordau's appeal to create a new Jewish identity based on muscle strength, the first Jewish sports journal *Jüdische Turnzeitung*, founded in 1900, made physical regeneration its theoretical program. It opened its second edition with an article by Max Nordau in which he defined the future program for Jewish-Zionist regeneration.³⁴ It was an attempt to wipe out the stereotypical imagination about the Jewish male body, which was associated with the Eastern European orthodox Jewry. Orthodox Jews were characterized as degenerate due to the stereotype of their weak bodies which resulted from all day long religious studies at the *Yeshiva*, the Jewish orthodox school. There is no shortage in the literature about Jewish body culture of arguments showing how the concept of the muscular Jew was itself a consequence of dominant cultural debates of the Fin de siècle and deeply imbedded in the body culture of the *Lebensreform*-movement.³⁵ But I would like to emphasize how the Zionist debate about the Jewish body is first of all a reaction towards anti-Semitism and the anti-Semitic depiction of the male Jewish body over that more culturalistic interpretation of Jewish body culture as a kind of positive Jewish identity. My claim is that it is more important to consider Jewish body culture and the broader identity of "Jewish" surrounding it as negative phenomena resulting from the destructive work of violent forces.³⁶ In his essay *Reflections on*

³³ Max NORDAU, "II. Kongressrede" (Basel, 28. August 1898), in: Zionistisches Aktionskomitee (ed.): *Max Nordau's Zionitische Schriften*, Köln-Leipzig: Jüdischer Verlag, 1909, p.72.

³⁴ Cf. Max NORDAU, "Muskeljudentum", in: Zionistisches Aktionskomitee (ed.): *Max Nordau's Zionitische Schriften*, op. cit., p. 379-381.

³⁵ See e.g. Todd Samuel PRESNER, *Muscular Judaism: The Jewish Body and the Politics of Regeneration*, New York: Routledge, 2007.

³⁶ Daniel Wildmann emphasizes the role of a "contemporary inner-Jewish culture-critical discourse" that created a Jewish "positive difference" to the non-Jewish environment. In this analysis, anti-Semitism turns into just another expression of cultural mode and forgets that anti-Semitism is deeply imbedded in that society so that cultural expressions and forms of identity must themselves be analyzed on the background of the anti-Semitic society. Cf. Daniel WILDMANN, *Der Körper im Körper*, p. 64 ff. Due to Adorno, identity is itself the "violence of identity-mongering" that "reproduces the contradictions it eliminates". Cf. Theodor W. ADORNO, *Negative Dialectics*, London: Routledge, 1990, p. 142 f.

War and Death from 1915 the founder of psychoanalysis, Sigmund Freud, wrote that “we may indeed assume that the inner compulsion which makes itself felt in the development of man was originally, that is, in the history of mankind, a purely external compulsion.”³⁷ The dialectical scheme that inner- and external compulsions working hand-in-hand can be discerned in debates that happened within the Jewish gymnastic movement. The strong will to create a new Zionist identity through body culture and sports activity was an internalization of the anti-Semitic stereotype of the effeminate Jewish man which the Zionist sports movement had tried to overcome. In contrast to the anti-Semitic solution of the so called Jewish question, which is by definition a negative one and which strives towards annihilation of everything that is Jewish, the Zionist body politics of Max Nordau and the Jewish gymnastic movement on the contrary were an attempt to positively overcome the anti-Semitic stereotype of the Jewish body through “making the weak Jewish body strong again.”³⁸ The adoption of anti-Semitic body images within Zionism reveals the ambiguous situation of Zionism in bourgeois society: On the one hand, Zionist identity was strongly shaped by bourgeois culture and the bourgeois society, and on the other hand it was an attempt to free Jews from suffering under anti-Semitism. From this perspective, Zionism reveals itself as an attempt to establish a Jewish identity beyond the assimilatory and liberal identity of associations like the Central Association of German Citizens of Jewish Faith, (the *Centralverein*) and other liberal and German-Jewish-nationalist organizations. Political Zionism in the tradition of Nordau was an attempt to appropriate political sovereignty over the passive status of suffering under anti-Semitism:

“The aim of Zionism is to bring upon Jews, who are almost everywhere suppressed, slandered and abused, normal life conditions. [...] We do not demand from any Jew who enjoys the luck of belonging to a fatherland, to leave it behind. First of all, Zionism wants to work for those Jews who don´t share this luck, for whom their country of birth is not a fatherland but a prison or a place of banishment and for whom this movement means liberation and salvation – if it succeeds.”³⁹

³⁷ Sigmund FREUD, *Reflections on War and Death*, New York: Moffat, Yard and Company, 1922, p. 23 f.

³⁸ Max NORDAU, “Muskeljudentum”, op. cit., p. 379. (translation of the author)

³⁹ Max NORDAU, “Zionismus und Antisemitismus”, in: Zionistisches Aktionskomitee (ed.): *Max Nordau´s Zionitische Schriften*, op. cit., p. 300 f. (translation of the author). In a text called *The psychological causes of anti-Semitism* (translation of the author) Nordau said that anti-Semitism is a

Therefore, the anti-Semitic attribution of the weak Jew was adopted by Zionism and turned into the concept of muscular Judaism. In the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer presented the limits of the liberal emancipation of the Jews as the limits of enlightenment's promise of equality in general. Their criticism of liberalism in the first thesis of the *Elements of anti-Semitism* tries to connect the ambiguity of assimilation that was pursuing the nullification of Jewish particularism with the tendency of bourgeois societies, especially in Germany, to organize themselves as *Volksgemeinschaft*, which is based on anti-Semitism:

“The enlightened self-control with which adapted Jews effaced within themselves the painful scars of domination by others, a kind of second circumcision, made them forsake their own dilapidated community and wholeheartedly embrace the life of the modern bourgeoisie, which was already advancing ineluctably toward a reversion to pure oppression and reorganization into an exclusively racial entity.”⁴⁰

This anti-Semitic threat within the liberal state and bourgeois society was present already in the Fin de siècle Zionists debates about anti-Semitism. I want to argue that, since Fin de siècle political Zionism was fully aware of the destructive power of anti-Semitism, the only solution seemed therefore to gain full sovereignty in a Jewish political entity. The muscular Jew as the new prototype of Jewish subjectivity incorporated anti-Semitic depictions and was constructed against the so-called degenerated image of the diaspora Jew. The Jews in the diaspora were for Nordau the ghetto Jews. Because they were forced to live in the European ghettos their bodies consequently degenerated as Nordau said. For Nordau this development was a consequence of the anti-Semitic policy in most countries. He was convinced that the regeneration of Jewishness as he saw it would be necessary for the physical and spiritual survival of the Jews.⁴¹ Physical education had become a matter of the creation of modern subjectivity already in the end of the 18th century.

psychological peculiarity, which is directed against the Jews as a weak minority (cf. Max NORDAU, “Die psychologischen Ursachen des Antisemitismus”, in: Zionistisches Aktionskomitee (ed.): *Max Nordau's Zionitische Schriften*, op. cit., p. 366 f.). In his famous book *Entartung* (Degeneration) from 1892, Nordau called anti-Semitism a “German hysteria” and a “dangerous form of persecution mania” (translation of the author). Cf. Max NORDAU, *Entartung*, Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 1896, p. 372.

⁴⁰ Max HORKHEIMER / Theodor W. ADORNO: *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, op. cit., p. 138.

⁴¹ See George L. MOSSE, Max NORDAU, “Liberalism and the New Jew”, in: *Journal of Contemporary History* 1992 (27), p. 570 f.

On the one hand, modern urban life was seen as an exhausting danger for the human species that could be counteracted through physical strength, and on the other hand, the program of physical education should make people fit for competition in the new industrial age. In the course of the 19th century, gymnastics became an expression of masculine identity which was itself a representation of the society and the nation.⁴² Nordau's concept of the new Jew followed this liberal program of subjectification and placed it in the context of Jewish history and especially in the history of suffering under anti-Semitism. For Nordau, as an example of political Zionism in the Fin de siècle, the subjectification of the Jews had nothing to do with a Jewish cultural revival but with the solidarity of the Jewish people, especially Eastern European Jews, who were suffering from anti-Semitic persecution. In his book about the interpretation of history Nordau wrote: "The determining factor is the necessity of the present, not the experience of the past."⁴³ Unlike cultural Zionism and later Zionists like Martin Buber, Max Nordau was not interested in a romantic nationalism but preoccupied with the dangers of present society. His conception of Jewish subject formation was therefore a model of Jewish self-emancipation.⁴⁴

6. ZIONISM AS ANTI-LIBERAL LIBERALISM

Political Zionism as a critique of the aspiration of assimilation reveals itself as deeply imbedded within the context of assimilation. Education, activities in associations and the amelioration of personal insufficiency became the conditions for the Jewish emancipation. Zionism as a critique of liberalism must therefore be placed in the tradition of liberalism. Interestingly, there exist intersections between the aspirations of emancipation in the 18th and early 19th and Fin de siècle Zionism. Both are building a nexus of emancipation in their particular time. Whereas the aspiration of emancipation at the end of the 18th century aimed at assimilation into mainstream society, Fin de siècle Zionism aimed at assimilation into a future League of Nations. In both cases, the emancipation had pre-conditions. In the first case it was moral improvement, while in the second case it was physical regeneration. The idea of improvement in the emancipation period was not oriented

⁴² Cf. *ibid.* p. 568 f.

⁴³ Quote *ibid.* p. 572.

⁴⁴ Cf. *ibid.* p. 573.

towards a physical improvement, but a moral one, and the historical narrative was a history of progress into the future. From the perspective of the Jewish gymnastic ideology there appeared the idea of a renaissance of ancient models and therefore and orientation towards the past. Nordau also referred to ancient figures in his concept of the new Jew. But unlike most interpretations I argue that these references did not form a romantic irrationalism but rather his imagination of a “liberal utopia”.⁴⁵ Because Nordau’s political Zionism expresses the tension between liberalism and Zionism, I want to suggest understanding it as anti-liberal liberalism. The paradoxical structure of this expression expresses the paradox that constitutes Zionism itself. Nordau’s criticism of liberalism is a dialectical critique. He supports the achievements of the French Revolution and the ideals of the Enlightenment, while simultaneously pointing to its main failure, i.e. its failure to achieve the full emancipation of the Jews and their freedom from anti-Semitism. Nordau’s approach towards Zionism reflects this development and turns it into an enlightenment of the enlightenment through the idea of the self-emancipation of the Jews.⁴⁶ But with this dialectical shift, Nordau’s Zionism remains within the realm of liberalism and is not does not transcend or sublimate it.

In 1923 the political philosopher Leo Strauss published a review of Max Nordau’s Zionist Writings in Martin Buber’s journal *Der Jude*. Strauss argues here that Zionism is itself a product of the period of Jewish assimilation. For Strauss, both are an attempt of what he calls *Entjudung* (de-jewification) of Judaism because they betray the very essence of Judaism. Both are framed by the liberal idea of the Jewish question and the *bürgerliche Verbesserung* of the Jews. Strauss wrote: “Assimilation was denying the existence of the Jewish question – Zionism recognizes it.”⁴⁷ The liberal promise of emancipation failed; Zionism as just another form of assimilation incorporates the roots of the Jewish emancipation. Strauss is right in contextualizing Zionism within the Jewish emancipation and the aspirations of assimilation. What Strauss crucially makes his readers aware of is the dialectical ambiguity of assimilation and Zionism.⁴⁸ But in contrast to Strauss I argue that Zionism is

⁴⁵ Ibid. p. 575.

⁴⁶ Cf. ibid. p. 576.

⁴⁷ Leo STRAUSS, “Der Zionismus bei Nordau”, in: *Der Jude* 1923, Nr. 10, p. 660.

⁴⁸ In a similar way the historian and religious scholar Ernst Ludwig Ehrlich pointed out that Zionism itself was and is a project of the fulfillment of assimilation. The liberal promise failed for Jews especially in Germany because of anti-Semitism. Zionism as Ehrlich understands it is therefore a Jewish attempt of assimilation and self-liberation in the presence of anti-Semitism in Europe and elsewhere. Cf.: Ernst Ludwig EHRlich, *Von Hiob zu Horkheimer*, Berlin: De Gruyter, 2009, p. 282 f.

not simply another form of liberalism but liberal and anti-liberal at the same time. In the preface to the English translation from 1965/1968 to his Spinoza book that was published in German in 1930, Strauss changed his position towards political Zionism as just another contradiction of the liberal society. Although Strauss was no Zionist at that point and followed his own political-philosophical project, he rightly draws attention towards Zionism's latent and intrinsic critical force vis-a-vis the limits of liberalism. But Strauss is using Zionism here to show the necessity of the failure of liberalism. Therefore, Strauss himself takes an irrational point of view:

“To realize that the Jewish problem is insoluble means ever to bear in mind the truth proclaimed by Zionism regarding the limitations of liberalism. Liberalism stands or falls by the distinction between state and society, or by the recognition of a private sphere, protected by the law but impervious to the law, with the understanding that, above all, religion as particular religion belongs to the private sphere. Just as certainly as the liberal state will not “discriminate” against its Jewish citizens, so is it constitutionally unable and even unwilling to prevent “discrimination” against Jews by individuals or groups. To recognize a private sphere in the sense indicated means to permit private “discrimination,” to protect it and thus in fact to foster it. The liberal state cannot provide a solution to the Jewish problem, for such a solution would require a legal prohibition against every kind of “discrimination,” i.e. the abolition of the private sphere, the denial of the difference between state and society, the destruction of the liberal state.”⁴⁹

But is it true that the abolition of discrimination would mean the destruction of the liberal state? Here the anti-liberal political philosophy of Strauss does not recognize the truth that is still imbedded in the liberal idea of mankind. The inner tension and the truth content of liberalism are best expressed in Horkheimer's and Adorno's definition that the “liberal thesis is true as an idea.”⁵⁰ In contrast to Strauss, Nordau's critique of liberalism is not a mere end in itself but his critique is the defensive consequence of the threat of anti-Semitism and therefore his Zionism functions as a negative identity within the liberal context.

⁴⁹ Leo STRAUSS, *Spinoza's critique of religion*, Chicago: University Of Chicago Press, 1997, p. 6.

⁵⁰ Max HORKHEIMER / Theodor W. ADORNO: *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, op cit., p. p. 138.

Zionism as anti-liberal liberalism was a Jewish liberal answer to the growing threat of anti-Semitism in the Fin de siècle period. To understand Zionism as anti-liberal liberalism is to take into consideration the Jewish history surrounding the emergence of Zionism and its complex dialectical relationship with general history and with the threat of anti-Semitism in the 19th century.