

Chapter Title: Antisemitism and the Power of Abstraction: From Political Economy to Critical Theory

Chapter Author(s): WERNER BONEFELD

Book Title: Antisemitism and the Constitution of Sociology

Book Editor(s): MARCEL STOETZLER

Published by: University of Nebraska Press

Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt1d9nnbd.16>

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at <https://about.jstor.org/terms>



JSTOR

University of Nebraska Press is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *Antisemitism and the Constitution of Sociology*

Antisemitism and the Power of Abstraction

From Political Economy to Critical Theory

WERNER BONEFELD

The Nazi ideologue Arthur Rosenberg formulated the essence of modern antisemitism succinctly when he portrayed it as an attack on communism, Bolshevism, and “Jewish capitalism,” by which he and his fellow antisemites, then and now, understand a capitalism not of productive labor and industry but of parasites: money and finance, speculators and bankers.¹

There is of course a difference between the antisemitism that culminated in Auschwitz and the antisemitism of the post-1945 world. However, whether antisemitism persists because of or despite Auschwitz is ultimately an idle question. The terms *despite* and *because* give credence to the notion that Auschwitz, this factory of death, destroyed antisemitism too. In a differing but connected perspective antisemitism is viewed as a phenomenon of the past that merely casts its shadow on the present but has itself no longer any real existence in it. In this perspective overt expressions of antisemitism are deemed ugly merely as pathological aberrations within an otherwise civilized world. Those viewing antisemitism in this way often either belittle and dismiss its critique as an expression of “European guilt,” or they reject it as an expression of bad faith—a camouflage for insulating Israel from criticism.²

The chapter argues that modern antisemitism is the “rumour about the Jews” as incarnation of hated forms of capitalism, which implies that antisemitism expresses resistance to capitalism. This chapter expounds this deadly notion. The following section examines some contemporary expressions of antisemitism, while the third and fourth sections explore Adorno’s and Horkheimer’s as well as Postone’s conception of Nazi antisemitism.³

Radicalism and the Elements of Antisemitism: After Auschwitz

The projection of the Jew as the external enemy within, as communist, financier, speculator, and banker, remains potent to this day. For example, the former prime minister of Malaysia, Mahathir Mohamad, assessed the root causes of Malaysia's financial collapse in 1997 by stating, "I say openly, these people are racists. They are not happy to see us prosper. They say we grow too fast, they plan to make us poor. We are not making enemies with other people but others are making enemies with us."⁴ What is meant by "we," and who are "they"? "The Jews," he says, are not happy to see Muslims progress; "they have promoted socialism, communism, human rights and democracy so that persecuting them would appear to be wrong, so they may enjoy equal rights with others. With these they have now gained control of the most powerful and they . . . have become a world power." They "rule the world by proxy." Mahathir Mohamad's stance, including his idea that the crisis of 1997 was a Jewish "plot,"⁵ does indeed appear, as the *Financial Times* (October 23, 2003) rightly suggested, to have taken its cue from *The International Jew*, a book commissioned by Henry Ford in the 1920s. In its structure, the conception of "speculators" as the external enemy within bent on destroying relations of the national harmony of interest belongs to modern antisemitism. It summons the idea of finance and speculators as merchants of greed and, counterposed to this, espouses the idea of an otherwise "healthy," "industrious," and peaceful national community that arises from the "soil," furnishes the homeland with indestructible force and permanence, and is united by characteristics of race and the bond of blood.

Then there is Pat Buchanan's defense of supposed American values and virtues that he sees to be in crisis because of the nefarious effects of "critical theory," for which he holds "those trouble making Communist Jews" responsible.⁶ Intelligence based on reason and critical judgment appears here as a powerfully destructive force that is ascribed to the cunning "Jew." Antisemitism projects the Other as rootless. Instead of having roots in nature, this Other is deemed to be lacking in nature. The "Jew" has no concrete roots and is thus "unnatural": his roots are in books. Instead, then, of being rooted in the supposed values of the nation, its soil and tradition, the Jew is possessed of a rootless intelligence and cunning that is destructive of tradition and organic social matter. The Jew seems

to come from nowhere; he is a cosmopolitan, rootless, forever wandering in a borderless world. "Antisemitism is the rumour about the Jews."⁷ They are seen to stand behind phenomena. Ascribed to this rootless Other is an immensely powerful, intangible, international conspiracy.⁸ It cannot be defined concretely; it is an abstract, invisible power, which hides in such contradictory phenomena as communism and (hated forms of) capitalism, or in any case, universal, abstract values.

Then there is the anti-imperialist Left. As one of its more critical and distinctive thinkers, Perry Anderson argued, "Entrenched in business, government and media, American Zionism has since the sixties acquired a firm grip on the levers of public opinion and official policy towards Israel, that has weakened only on the rarest of occasions."⁹ The Jews, then, have not only conquered Palestine; they have also taken control of America, or as James Petras sees it, the current effort of "U.S. empire building" is shaped by "Zionist empire builders."¹⁰ For Anderson, Israel is a Jewish state, its nationalist triumphs are Jewish triumphs, and its economy is a Jewish economy, making Israel a "rentier state" that is kept by the United States as its imperialist bridgehead in the Middle East.

Originally, as Immanuel Wallerstein has argued, orthodox Marxism was hostile to the concept of national liberation and "quite suspicious of all talk about the rights of peoples, which they associated with middle-class nationalist movements." It was only at the Baku Congress in 1920 that the emphasis on class struggle "was quietly shelved in favour of the tactical priority of anti-imperialism, a theme around which the 3rd International hoped to build a political alliance between largely European Communist parties and at least those of the national liberation movements . . . that were more radical." After Baku anti-imperialist struggles were "given the label of 'revolutionary' activity."¹¹ The seminal text that informed this displacement of class struggle for general human emancipation onto anti-imperialist struggle for national liberation is Stalin's *Marxism and the National Question*, written in 1913. Defining a nation as a "historically evolved, stable community of language, territory, economic life, and psychological make-up manifested in a community of culture," he declared that "it is sufficient for a single one of these characteristics to be absent and the nation ceases to be a nation."¹² The Great Purges, as Leon Trotsky commented as early as 1937, espoused antisemitic demagoguery to such an extent against the Marxists of internationalist persua-

sion that it almost amounted to a science. In the Soviet understanding of class struggle as anti-imperialist national liberation, the Jew appeared in many disguises—liberal, freemason, social democrat, Trotskyist, fascist, or Zionist—but regardless of its projected image, he embodied everything that was defined as capitalist, imperialist, Western, and above all non-Russian.¹³

What makes a state Jewish? For Marx the state was the political form of bourgeois society; crudely put, the purpose of capital is to make profit, and the state is the political expression of this purpose. He thus saw the state as the executive committee of the bourgeoisie. Max Weber argued that the state cannot be defined by its functions, let alone imagined national characteristics, but solely by its means: the legitimate use of physical violence. He conceived of the modern state as a machine. The great theorist of the autonomy of the state, Thomas Hobbes, conceived of it as the result of a social contract that allowed the warring social interests to flourish on the basis of mutual protection. His state appeared akin to a mortal God. Adam Smith defined the state as a market-enabling power; it polices the law-abiding conduct between the private interests to secure the relations of perfect liberty, where each pursues her own ends in a context in which everybody is obliged to all, but nobody is absolutely dependent upon anybody in particular. For the economy to be free, the state needs to be strong, as market police. None of these approaches defines the state in terms of the supposed or imagined national characteristics of a homogenized people. Such forging of national identity is a political task. Indeed the flip side of anti-imperialism is the demand for national liberation, national autonomy, and national self-determination—a mere abstraction of a classless, imagined community that is rendered effective by political power, not posited by nature. The identification of a people in terms of assumed national characteristics tends to rebound politically. It rejects universal values in favor of “difference,” be it national, local, tribal, or merely parochial. If difference “has become the hallmark of theoretical anti-reason, ‘the Other’ has become the hallmark of practical anti-reason.”¹⁴ The Other provides the excuse for a damaged life and as such a scapegoat and becomes the object of resentment. Perry Anderson is therefore absolutely right when he argues that the potential of violence against the Other is intrinsic to nationalism; one would wish that Anderson’s anti-imperialist stance be conscious of this insight.¹⁵

The mounting scale and sheer extent of contemporary antisemitism especially in the Middle East has blurred any distinction between the critique of the state of Israel and the concrete human beings that sustain Israel in their social relations. The anti-imperialist Left tends to dismiss Islamist antisemitism as a mere epiphenomenon of justified anger at Israel and U.S. imperialism and seeks to work in alliance with the “respectable Islamic clergy” in order to “radicalise the anti-capitalist movement by giving it an anti-imperialist edge.”¹⁶ Symptomatic here is the call for solidarity with the Muslim Brotherhood by *International Socialism*: “We say we have to work with the Muslim Brotherhood over specific issues [Palestine or Iraq].”¹⁷ Against this Slavoj Žižek has argued that there should be no attempt to “‘understand’ Arab anti-Semitism . . . as a ‘natural’ reaction to the sad plight of the Palestinians.” It has to be resisted “unconditionally.” To “understand” Islamic antisemitism as a “justified” expression of anger against imperialism is to claim, by implication, that antisemitism articulates resistance to capitalism. Similarly there should be no attempt to “understand” the measures of the state of Israel “as a ‘natural’ reaction against the background of the Holocaust.”¹⁸ Such understanding accepts the utilization of the barbarism of the Holocaust as a legitimation for military and state action. Every state seeks to justify its policies by exploiting the past for its own legitimacy.¹⁹ Such utilization of the past does not redeem the dead. Following Benjamin, redemption entails the recovery of the past in contemporary struggle for human dignity, which is both singular and universal, indivisible and priceless.²⁰ It is associated with refuseniks, heretics, dissenters, and dissidents, not the good offices of the state.

Islamic fundamentalism can be seen as a reaction against the “heavy artillery” of global capital to create a world after its own image. Against this it espouses the quest for authenticity, seeking to preserve through the purification of imagined ancestral conditions and traditions existing social structures, repeating with deadly and deafening force the “paradigmatic Fascist gesture” that seeks a “capitalism without capitalism.”²¹ The fight against “westoxication,” as Khomeini had called the ideas of liberalism, democracy, socialism, and communism, involves the depiction of Israel as an imperialist bridgehead of “Jewish” capitalist counterinsurgency, fueling the hatred of Israel as a “Jewish” state. The attribute “Jewish” in this phrase does not refer to concrete human beings, be it Ariel Sha-

ron or Karl Marx, Albert Einstein or Emma Goldman, Rosa Luxemburg or Leon Trotsky, Michael Neumann or Esther Rosenberg. It disregards social distinctions, be they of class, gender, or ethnicity, and instead assumes everybody to be of the same invariant nationalized type, whether they are anarchists, communists, refuseniks, capitalists or workers, conservatives, religious fanatics, warmongers, peace lovers, beggars, or just plain and boring average Joes.²² Instead of recognizing contradictions, distinctions, antagonisms, struggles, and conflicts, it projects onto a nationalized people those abstract, reason-defying, imagined “qualities” on which antisemitism rests, substituting the critique of existing social relations for totalitarian conceptions of the national friend and the national foe. Within this relationship reason is suspended and thought is led to the further, equally irrational belief that the enemy of my enemy is my friend. Socialism, though, is the alternative to barbarism, its determinate negation; it is not its derivative. That also means, however, that the only way to fight resurgent antisemitism is not to preach liberal tolerance, which, say, accepts that nobody, neither woman nor man, should be stoned to death, but represses this principle in relation to the adopted Other: liberalism’s civilized humanity is in fact inhuman toward people it secretly regards as uncivilized. It befriends the “respectable clerics” and political warlords in wonderment, gazing without thought.²³

In Marx’s *On the Jewish Question* and the writings of the Frankfurt School, the category “Jew” is a social metaphor that focuses anticapitalist resentment from the standpoint of capitalism. In contrast, however, to Perry Anderson’s affirmative categorization, Marx and the Frankfurt School approached the “Jewish question” through the lens of the critique of the fetishism of bourgeois relations of production.²⁴ Expanding on Marx’s critical question, “Why does this content [human social relations] assume that form [the form of capital]?” it asks, Why does the bourgeois critique of capitalism assume the form of antisemitism?²⁵ In contrast, the affirmative use of the category “Jew” rationalizes antisemitism as a manifestation of hated forms of capitalism, and through this rationalization is complicit in the “rumour about the Jews.” Such complicity participates in the paradigmatic fascist gesture of an anticapitalism that seeks a capitalism without capitalism.

Ulrike Meinhof articulated succinctly this rationalization of antisemitism as hatred of capitalism when she said, “Auschwitz meant that six

million Jews were killed, and thrown on the waste-heap of Europe, for what they were: money Jews. Finance capital and the banks, the hard core of the system of imperialism and capitalism, had turned the hatred of men against money and exploitation, and against the Jews. . . . Anti-Semitism is really a hatred of capitalism.”²⁶ In her view, then, “antisemitism is in its essence anti-capitalist.”²⁷ Given the omnipresence of this idea in left antisemitism, what do antisemites attack when they claim to attack capitalism? The following sections explore this with reference to Nazi antisemitism.²⁸

On the Time of Abstraction

Antisemitism does not “need” Jews. The “Jew” has powers attributed to it that cannot be defined concretely. It is an abstraction that excludes nobody. Anyone can be considered a Jew. The concept “Jew” knows no individuality, cannot be a man or a woman, and cannot be seen as a worker or beggar; the word *Jew* relates to a nonperson, an abstraction. “The Jew is one whom other men consider a Jew.”²⁹ For antisemitism to rage, the existence of “Jews” is neither incidental nor required. “Antisemitism tends to occur only as part of an interchangeable program,” the basis of which is the “universal reduction of all specific energy to the one, same abstract form of labor, from the battlefield to the studio.”³⁰ Antisemitism belongs to a social world in which sense and significance are sacrificed in favor of compliance with the norms and rules of a political and economic reality that poses sameness, ritualized repetition, and subjectified economic things as forms of human existence. Time is money, said Benjamin Franklin. And we might add that therefore money is time. “The economy of time: to this all economy ultimately reduces itself.”³¹ If, therefore, everything is reduced to time, an abstract time, divisible into equal, homogeneous, and constant units that move on relentlessly from unit to unit, and that though dissociated from concrete human activities, measures these whatever their content, then “*man is nothing; he is, at the most, time’s carcase.*”³² Time is of the essence. Everything else is a waste of time. Indifferent to social content and human purposes, such time is interested only in two things: “How much?” and “How long did it take?”³³ The mere existence of difference, a difference that signals happiness beyond life as a mere personification of labor-time, fosters the blind resentment and anger that antisemitism focuses and exploits

but does not itself produce. "The thought of happiness without power is unbearable because it would then be true happiness."³⁴

Antisemitism differentiates between "society" and "national community." Society is identified as "Jewish," whereas community is modeled as a counterworld to society. Community is seen as constituted by nature, and nature is seen to be at risk because of "evil" abstract social forces. The attributes given by the antisemite to Jews include mobility, intangibility, rootlessness and conspiracy against the—mythical and mythologized—values of the imagined community of an honest and hard-working people. The presumed "well-being" of this community is seen to be at the mercy of evil powers: intellectual thought, abstract rules and laws, and the disintegrating forces of communism and finance capital. Both communism and finance capital are seen as uprooting powers and as manifestations of reason. Reason stands rejected because of its infectious desire to go to the root of things, and the root of things can only be Man in her social relations. Reason is the weapon of critique. It challenges conditions where Man is degraded to a mere economic resource. For antisemitism independence of thought and the ability to think freely without fear is abhorrent. It detests the idea that "Man is the highest being for Man [*Mensch*]."³⁵ Instead it seeks deliverance through the furious affirmation of its own madness. The antisemites' portrayal of the Jew as evil personified is in fact their own self-portrait. "Madness is the substitute for the dream that humanity could organize its world humanely, a dream that a man-made world is stubbornly rejecting."³⁶

Antisemitism manifests a perverted urge for equality. It seeks an equality that derives from membership in a national community, a community of *Volksgenossen*. This equality is defined by the mythical "property" of land and soil based on the bond of blood. The fetish of blood and soil is itself rooted in the capital fetish, where the concrete in the form of use-value obtains only in and through the abstract in the form of exchange-value. Antisemitism construes blood, soil, and also machinery as concrete counterprinciples of the abstract. The abstract is personified in the category "Jew."³⁷ For the apologists of market liberalism, the reference to the invisible hand operates like an explanatory refuge. It explains everything with reference to the Invisible. "Starvation is God's way of punishing those who have too little faith in capitalism."³⁸ For the antisemites, however, the power of the invisible can be explained: the Jew is its

personification and biologized existence. It transforms discontent with social conditions into a conformist rebellion against the projected personification of capitalism.

The nationalist conception of equality defines society as the Other, a parasite whose objective is deemed to oppress, undermine, and pervert the “natural community” through the “disintegrating” force of the abstract and intangible values of—bourgeois—civilization. The category “Jew” is seen to personify abstract thought and abstract equality, including its incarnation, money. The Volksgenosse, then, is seen as somebody who resists “Jewish” abstract values and instead upholds some sort of natural equality. Their “equality” as Jews obtains as a construct, to which belong all those who deviate from the conception of the Volksgenosse, that is, mythical concrete matter. The myth of the Jew is confronted with the myth of the original possession of soil, elevating nationalism’s “regressive equality” to a liberating action.³⁹ The Volksgenosse sees himself as a son of nature and thus as a natural being. He sees his natural destiny in the liberation of the national community from allegedly rootless, abstract values, demanding their naturalization so that everything is returned to “nature.” In short, the Volksgenosse portrays himself as rooted in blood and ancestral tradition to defend his own faith in the immorality of madness through the collective approval of anger. This anger is directed toward civilization’s supposed victory over nature, a victory that is seen as condemning the Volksgenosse to sweat, toil, and physical effort, whereas the Other is seen to live a life as banker and speculator. This the Volksgenosse aspires for himself. The Volksgenosse speculates in death and banks the extracted gold teeth.

The efficient organization and the cold, dispassionate execution of the deed is mirrored by its disregard for individuality: corpses all look the same when counting the results, and nothing distinguishes a number from a number except the difference in quantity—the measure of success. The mere existence of distinction is a provocation. Judgment is suspended. Everybody is numbered and assessed for use. “The morbid aspect of anti-Semitism is not projective behaviour as such, but the absence from it of reflection.”⁴⁰ Auschwitz, then, stands for the “stubbornness” of the principle of not only “abstraction” but also “abstractification.” The abstraction “Jew” is also *made* abstract: all that can be used (concretely) is used, like teeth, hair, skin; labor-power; finally, the abstract remainder

is destroyed: the invisible hand of the market, identified as the power of the “Jew,” is transformed into smoke.

Antisemitism: Finance and Industry

Nazi antisemitism is different from the antisemitism of the old Christian world. This does not mean that it did not exploit Christian antisemitism. Christian antisemitism constructed “the Jew” as an abstract social power: “the Jew” stands accused as the assassin of Jesus; those apparently descending from the assassins of Jesus are thus persecuted as the descendants of murderers. In modern antisemitism the Jew was chosen because of the “religious horror the latter has always inspired.”⁴¹ In the Christian world the “Jew” was also a social-economic construct. The one who was forced to fulfill the vital and hated economic function of trafficking in money was called a Jew. The economic curse that this social role entailed reinforced the religious curse.

Modern antisemitism uses and exploits these historical constructions and transforms them: the Jew stands accused and is persecuted for following unproductive activities. His image is that of an intellectual and banker. “Bankers and intellectuals, money and mind, the exponents of circulation, form the impossible ideal of those who have been maimed by domination, an image used by domination to perpetuate itself.”⁴² In this context the mythologized possession of the soil and of ancestral tradition based on the bond of blood is counterposed to the possession of universal, abstract phenomena. The terms “*abstract, rationalist, intellectual* . . . take a pejorative sense; it could not be otherwise, since the anti-Semite lays claim to a concrete and irrational possession of the values of the nation.”⁴³ The abstract values themselves are biologized, and the abstract is identified as “Jew.” Thus both the concrete and the abstract are biologized, one through the possession of land (the concrete as rooted in nature, blood, and tradition) and the other through the possession of “poison” (the abstract as the rootless power of intelligence and money). The myth of national unity is counterposed to the myth of the Jew. Jewry is seen to stand behind the urban world of crime, prostitution, and vulgar, materialist culture. Tradition is counterposed to reasoning, intelligence, and self-reflection, and the nationalist conception of community, economy, and labor is counterposed to the abstract forces of international finance and communism.⁴⁴ The Volksgenossen are thus equal in blindness. “Anti-

Semitic behaviour is generated in situations where blinded men robbed of their subjectivity are set loose as subjects.”⁴⁵ While reason subsists in and through the critique of social relations, the Volksgenosse has faith only in the efficiently unleashed terror that robs the alleged personifications of capitalism of everything they have—cloth, shoes, teeth, hair, skin, life—and even the dead will not be safe from torture. The collection of gold teeth from those murdered, the collection of hair from those to be killed, and the overseeing of the slave labor of those allowed to walk on their knees for no more than another day requires only effective organization. “How much?” “How long did it take?” Time is of the essence.

Nazism’s denunciation of capitalism as “Jewish capitalism” thus allowed the relentless development of capitalist enterprise while seemingly rejecting capitalism as a system of finance, money-grabbing speculation, accumulation of parasitic wealth, as a rootless, mobile, intangible annihilator of space through time, undermining concrete enterprise on the altar of money, and so on. The critique of capitalism as “Jewish capitalism” argues that capitalism is in fact nothing more than an unproductive money-making system—a rentier economy that lives off and, in doing so, undermines the presumed national community of creative, industrious individuals, subordinating them to the rootless and therefore ruthless forces of global money, or as Mahathir Mohamad had it, “They are not happy to see us prosper.”

For the antisemites, then, the world appears to be divided between hated forms of capitalism, especially finance and money capital, and concrete nature. The concrete is conceived as immediate, direct, matter for use, and rooted in industry and productive activity. Money, on the other hand, is not only conceived as the root of all evil; it is also judged as rootless and existing not only independently from industrial capital but also over and against the industrial endeavor of the nation: all enterprise is seen to be perverted in the name of money’s continued destructive quest for self-expansion. In this way money and financial capital are identified with capitalism, while industry is perceived as constituting the concrete and creative enterprise of a national community. Between capitalism as monetary accumulation and national community as industrial enterprise, it is money that calls the shots. In this view, industry and enterprise are “made” capitalist by money: money penetrates all expressions of industry and thus perverts and disintegrates community in the name of finance

capital's abstract values. The force and power of Money is seen to undermine the individual as entrepreneur; the creative is perceived in terms of a paternalist direction of use-value production; the rooted in terms of *Volk*; the community in terms of a natural community. For the antisemites, "the Jew" is money personified. Instead of community's natural order of hierarchy and position, money's allegedly artificial and rootless force is judged to make the world go round by uprooting the natural order of the *Volksgenossen*. In this way, then, it is possible for the *Volksgenossen* not only to embrace capitalism but also to declare that the forced labor creates freedom: *Arbeit macht frei*. "They declared that work was not degrading, so as to control the others more rationally. They claimed to be creative workers, but in reality they were still the grasping overlords of former times."⁴⁶ By separating what fundamentally belongs together, that is, production and money, the differentiation between money on the one hand and industry and enterprise on the other amounts to a fetish critique of capital that, by attacking the projected personification of capital, seeks its unfettered expansion by means of terror.

The approval of the *Volksgenosse* as the personification of the concrete, of blood, soil, tradition, and industry, goes hand in hand with the elimination of the cajoling and perverting forces of the abstract—the "cunning Jew" stands condemned as the destructive incarnation of capitalism. In this way the ideology of blood and soil on the one hand and machinery and unfettered industrial expansion on the other are projected as images of a healthy nation that stands ready to purge itself from the perceived perversion of industry by the abstract, universal, rootless, mobile, intangible, international "vampire" of "Jewish capitalism." Extermination is itself an industrial effort of concrete nature and thus industrialized. Extermination manifests "the stubbornness of the life to which one has to conform, and to resign oneself."⁴⁷ As *Volksgenossen* they have all committed the same deed and have thus become truly equal to each other; their efficiently discharged occupation only confirmed what they already knew: that they had lost their individuality as subjects.

Everything is thus changed into pure nature. The abstract was not only personified and biologized; it was also "abstractified." Auschwitz was a factory "to destroy the personification of the abstract. Its organization was that of a fiendish industrial process, the aim of which was to 'liberate' the concrete from the abstract. The first step was to dehumanize, that

is, to strip away the ‘mask’ of humanity, of qualitative specificity, and reveal the Jews for what ‘they really are’—shadows, ciphers, numbered abstraction.” Then followed the process to “eradicate that abstractness, to transform it into smoke, trying in the process to wrest away the last remnants of the concrete material ‘use-values’: clothes, gold, hair, soap.”⁴⁸

Summary: Critical Theory and the Constituted World

Adam Smith was certain in his own mind that capitalism creates the wealth of nations and noted that “the proprietor of stock is properly a citizen of the world, and is not necessarily attached to any particular country. He would be apt to abandon the country in which he was exposed to a vexatious inquisition, in order to be assessed to a burdensome tax, and would remove his stock to some other country where he could either carry on his business, or enjoy his fortune more at his ease.”⁴⁹ David Ricardo concurred, adding that “if a capital is not allowed to get the greatest net revenue that the use of machinery will afford here, it will be carried abroad,” leading to “serious discouragement to the demand for labour.”⁵⁰ He thus also formulated the necessity of capitalist social relations to produce “redundant population.” According to Hegel, the accumulation of wealth renders those who depend on the sale of their labor power for their social reproduction insecure in deteriorating conditions. He concluded that despite the accumulation of wealth, bourgeois society will find it most difficult to keep the dependent masses pacified, and he saw the form of the state as the means of reconciling the social antagonism, containing the dependent masses.⁵¹

Marx developed these insights and showed that the concept of equal rights is in principle a bourgeois concept. “The power which each individual exercises over the activity of others or over social wealth exists in him as the owner of exchange value, of money. The individual carries his social power, as well as his bond with society, in his pocket.”⁵² Against the bourgeois concept of formal equality, he argued that communism rests on the equality of individual human needs. Adorno and Horkheimer argued that antisemitism articulates a senseless, barbaric rejection of capitalism that makes anticapitalism useful for capitalism. “The rulers are only safe as long as the people they rule turn their longed-for goals into hated forms of evil.” Antisemitism channels discontent with conditions into blind resentment against the projected external enemy within. This rejection of capitalism, then, “is also totalitarian in that it seeks to make

the rebellion of suppressed nature against domination directly useful to domination. This machinery needs the Jews.” That is, “no matter what the Jews as such may be like, their image, as that of the defeated people, has the features to which totalitarian domination must be completely hostile: happiness without power, wages without work, a home without frontiers, religion without myth. These characteristics are hated by the rulers because the ruled secretly long to possess them.”⁵³ Antisemitism urges the mob on to dehumanize, maim, and kill the projected Other; participation in the slaughter suppresses in the exploited themselves the very possibility and idea of happiness and distinction.

The anti-imperialist critique of Israel as the bridgehead of U.S. imperialism in the Middle East and of modern Zionism as the ideology and the far-reaching organizational system and political practice of U.S. capitalism displaces anticapitalist motives on a *false* conflict and encourages friendship with *false* friends. Originally the critique of ideology sought to reveal the necessary perversion of human social practice in its appearance—as relations between things and as a mere human agent of the “logic of things,” be they capital, value, price, money, or nation. Enlightenment was its critical intent. Rendered helpless in the face of abject misery, blinded by desire for action, and shaken by events, it now appears as a mere *Weltanschauung* that, having no principle to call upon, is subject to political calculation and opportunism. Alex Callinicos’s robust defense of Al Qaeda against its description as fascist expresses this well. He rejects this description as “an extraordinary assertion” and then goes on to say that the “Muslim concept of the *ummah*—the community of the faithful—is precisely a transnational one, something that the Al Qaeda network has strictly observed (whatever respects in which its interpretations of Muslim doctrine may differ from those of others), incorporating as it does activists from many different national backgrounds.”⁵⁴ Since for Callinicos, Al Qaeda is transnational by virtue of its strict observance of the *ummah*, he declares that it cannot be described as fascist.⁵⁵ On this definition even national socialism would score well. It too was a transnational movement; its main death squad, the SS, was in fact an international brigade, and its followers adhered strictly to the doctrine of the faithful. The anti-imperialist idea that the enemy of my enemy is my friend is irrational. It accepts barbaric rejections of capitalism as anticapitalist and finds worthwhile the quest for a “capitalism without capitalism.”

This chapter has argued that displaced modes of anticapitalism do not question the character of capitalist social relations; they merely interpret them differently and seek to reconfigure negative human conditions in another way. Antisemitism is the official ideology of a barbaric rejection of capitalism that makes anticapitalism useful for capitalism. It offers an articulation for resentment and anger, and an enemy. Antisemitism is all-embracing—because it comprehends nothing.

Notes

This is a revised version of a paper given at the conference Antisemitism and the Emergence of Sociological Theory, held at the University of Manchester in November 2008. I am grateful to all participants for their comments, and especially to David Seymour, who acted as discussant, and Marcel Stoetzler for his many insightful comments. The usual disclaimers apply.

1. Rosenberg, *Der staatsfeindliche Zionismus*.
2. See, for example, Keaney, review of *Human Dignity*.
3. Horkheimer and Adorno, "Elements of Antisemitism"; Postone, "Anti-Semitism and National Socialism."
4. Quoted in "Malaysia Acts on Market Fall," *Financial Times*, September 4, 1997.
5. Quoted in "Mahathir's Dark Side," *Daily Telegraph* (London), October 24, 2003.
6. Buchanan, *Death of the West*. Buchanan is a former senior advisor to American presidents Nixon, Ford, and Reagan. He is a distinguished conservative thinker.
7. Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, 141.
8. On this, see Postone, "Anti-Semitism and National Socialism."
9. Anderson, "Scurrying towards Bethlehem," 15.
10. Petras, "Empire Building and Rule," 201.
11. Wallerstein, *After Liberalism*, 156, 211.
12. Stalin, *Marxism and the National and Colonial Question*, 8.
13. Leon Trotsky, quoted in Poliakov, *Vom Antizionismus zum Antisemitismus*, 47.
14. Rose, *Judaism and Modernity*, 5.
15. Anderson, "Scurrying towards Bethlehem."
16. Callinicos, "The Grand Strategy of the American Empire."
17. "Egypt," 31. See also Boron, *Empire and Imperialism*, who praises the "patriotic resistance" in Iraq and Afghanistan (9–10) against what he terms a "villainous," "fascistic," and "genocidal" United States (see, e.g., 123). Callinicos, *An Anti-Capitalist Manifesto*, 107, argues that anticapitalism has to "meet the requirements of (at least) justice, efficiency, democracy, and sustainability," and in order to radicalize the anticapitalist movement demands that

moral support is given to anti-imperial “resistance” groups that are openly hostile to the anticapitalist ends he advocates. See Callinicos and Nineham, “At an Impasse?” See also Harman, “Hizbollah and the War Israel Lost.” Devoid of content, radicalism becomes an end in itself. The critique of ideology has itself become an ideology.

18. Žižek, *Welcome to the Desert of the Real*, 129.
19. On this, see Tischler, “Time of Reification and Time of Insubordination.”
20. Benjamin, *Illuminations*.
21. Žižek, *Welcome to the Desert of the Real*, 131.
22. I owe this phrase to Marcel Stoetzler.
23. The support given by sections of the Left to Islamist resistance groups is a case in point. Under the guise of anti-imperialism, solidarity is extended to the Muslim Brotherhood, who are openly hostile to socialism and feminism, to the point of murder. Who, then, extends solidarity to the socialists and feminists in, say, Iran, Iraq, Palestine? Another case of mistaken identity can be found in Žižek’s critique of antisemitism, which is ambivalent. He says that in the face of antisemitism one should not “preach liberal tolerance” but try to “express the underlying anti-capitalist motive in a direct, non-displaced way” (*Welcome to the Desert of the Real*, 130). He assumes that antisemitism expresses an anticapitalist motive that needs to be brought out and expressed clearly. He also assumes that the hidden anticapitalist motive is in fact a progressive one, worth fighting for. What, though, really is the anticapitalism of, say, the Muslim Brotherhood? Then there is Judith Butler. When asked by *Online Magazin für Frauen* to clarify her statement that Hamas and the Hezbollah are progressive social movements (<http://radicalarchives.org/2010/03/28/jbutler-on-hamas-hezbollah-israel-lobby/>) she remarks that “groups like Hamas and Hezbollah should be described as left movements. . . . They are ‘left’ in the sense that they oppose colonialism and imperialism” (<http://www.aviva-berlin.de/aviva/Found.php?id=1427323>, accessed July 20, 2010). Since she does not condone the use of violence, she rejects their tactics, but she accepts them nevertheless as members of the global Left because they reject imperialism. Her definition of the Left is indifferent to social ends and contents and includes most unsavory bedfellows, historically as well as contemporary.
24. Marx, “Zur Judenfrage.”
25. Marx, *Das Kapital*, 95.
26. Ulrike Meinhof, quoted in Watson, “Race and the Socialists,” 23. Meinhof was the cofounder of the German Red Army Faction.
27. Ulrike Meinhof, quoted in “Mörder wie die Väter,” *Der Spiegel*, May 10, 2010.
28. In what follows I have freely borrowed from Horkheimer and Adorno, “Elements of Antisemitism” and Postone, “Anti-Semitism and National Socialism.” See also Werner Bonefeld, “Notes on Antisemitism” and “Nationalism and Anti-Semitism in Anti-Globalisation Perspective.”

29. Sartre, *Anti-Semite and Jew*, 69.
30. Horkheimer and Adorno, "Elements of Antisemitism," 207.
31. Marx, *Grundrisse*, 173.
32. Marx, *The Poverty of Philosophy*, 127, emphasis in the original.
33. On different forms of time, from the time of happiness to the time of mourning, and their connection to concrete human events, see Ecclesiastes 3:4. See also Alliez, *Capital Times*. On abstract labor as a temporal category, a category of a time made abstract, see Bonefeld, "Abstract Labour."
34. Adorno and Horkheimer, "Elements of Antisemitism," 172.
35. Marx, "Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Law," 182.
36. Adorno, "What Does Coming to Terms with the Past Mean?" 124.
37. On this, see Postone, "Anti-Semitism and National Socialism."
38. John D. Rockefeller Sr., quoted in Marable, *Race Reform and Rebellion*, 149.
39. Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, 56.
40. Horkheimer and Adorno, "Elements of Antisemitism," 189.
41. Sartre, *Anti-Semite and Jew*, 68.
42. Horkheimer and Adorno, "Elements of Antisemitism," 172.
43. Sartre, *Anti-Semite and Jew*, 109.
44. This point is most clearly brought out by Postone, "Anti-Semitism and National Socialism."
45. Horkheimer and Adorno, "Elements of Antisemitism," 171.
46. Horkheimer and Adorno, "Elements of Antisemitism," 173.
47. Horkheimer and Adorno, "Elements of Antisemitism," 171.
48. Postone, "Anti-Semitism and National Socialism," 313–14.
49. Smith, *The Wealth of Nations*, 848–49.
50. Ricardo, *On the Principles of Political Economy and Taxation*, 39.
51. Hegel, *Philosophy of Right*, 122–29.
52. Marx, *Grundrisse*, 156–57. On money as a social form that expresses exploitation in the form of equivalence, see Bonefeld, "Money, Equality and Exploitation."
53. Horkheimer and Adorno, "Elements of Antisemitism," 199, 185.
54. Callinicos, "The Anti-Capitalist Movement after Genoa and New York," 140.
55. Whether the fascist label is appropriate or not is beside the point. The ticket mentality that attaches labels to things is, however, a concern. It labels things without telling us what they are, and by leaving the thing undisturbed, thought is reduced to mere conviction. It is a well-known fact that in the world of convictions, the social world does not need to be changed. All that needs to be done is to interpret it more favorably. Reality becomes a matter of conviction.

References

Adorno, Theodor. *Minima Moralia: Reflexionen aus dem beschädigten Leben*. Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1951.

- . “What Does Coming to Terms with the Past Mean?” In *Bitburg in Moral and Political Perspective*, edited by G. Harman, 114–29. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986.
- Alliez, Eric. *Capital Times*. London: University of Minnesota Press, 1996.
- Anderson, Benedict. *Imagined Communities*. London: Verso, 1991.
- Anderson, Perry. “Scurrying towards Bethlehem.” *New Left Review*, 2d series, no. 10 (2001): 5–30.
- Benjamin, Walter. *Illuminations*. New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1968.
- Bonefeld, Werner. “Abstract Labour: Against Its Nature and On Its Time.” *Capital and Class* 34.2 (2010): 257–76.
- . “Money, Equality and Exploitation.” In *Global Capital, National State and the Politics of Money*, edited by W. Bonefeld and J. Holloway, 178–209. London: Palgrave, 1996.
- . “Nationalism and Anti-Semitism in Anti-Globalisation Perspective.” In *Human Dignity: Social Autonomy and the Critique of Capitalism*, edited by W. Bonefeld and K. Psychopedis, 147–71. Aldershot UK: Ashgate, 2005.
- . “Notes on Anti-Semitism.” *Common Sense*, no. 21 (1997): 60–76.
- Boron, Atillio. *Empire and Imperialism*. London: Zed Books, 2005.
- Buchanan, Pat. *The Death of the West*. New York: Dunne, 2002.
- Callinicos, Alex. *An Anti-Capitalist Manifesto*. Cambridge UK: Polity, 2003.
- . “The Anti-Capitalist Movement after Genoa and New York.” In *Implicating Empire*, edited by S. Aronowitz and H. Gautney, 133–50. New York: Basic Books, 2003.
- . “The Grand Strategy of the American Empire.” *International Socialism Journal* 97 (2002), pubs.socialistreviewindex.org.uk/isj97/callinicos (accessed July 29, 2010).
- Callinicos, Alex, and Chris Nineham. “At an Impasse? Anti-Capitalism and the Social Forums Today.” *International Socialism* 115 (2007), <http://www.isj.org.uk/index.php4?id=337&issue=115> (accessed May 31, 2013).
- “Egypt: The Pressure Builds Up.” *International Socialism*, no. 106 (2005), <http://www.isj.org.uk/index.php4?id=90&issue=106> (accessed July 29, 2010).
- Harman, Chris. “Hizbollah and the War Israel Lost.” *International Socialism* 112 (2006), <http://www.isj.org.uk/index.php4?id=243&issue=112> (accessed May 31, 2013).
- Hegel, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich. *Philosophy of Right*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967.
- Horkheimer, Max, and Theodor Adorno. “Elements of Antisemitism.” In *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, 168–208. London: Verso, 1989.
- Keaney, Michael. Review of *Human Dignity*. *Review of Radical Political Economics* 39.4 (2007): 606–9.
- Marable, Manning. *Race Reform and Rebellion*. 2d ed. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1991.
- Marx, Karl. *Capital*. Vol. 3. London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1966.

- . "Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Law: Introduction." In *Marx/Engels Collected Works*, 3: 157–87. London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1975.
- . *Grundrisse*. London: Penguin, 1973.
- . *Das Kapital*. Vol. 1. In *Marx-Engels Werke*, vol. 23. Berlin: Dietz, 1962.
- . *The Poverty of Philosophy*. In *Marx/Engels Collected Works*, vol. 6. London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1976.
- . "Zur Judenfrage." In *Marx-Engels Werke*, 1: 347–77. Berlin: Dietz, 1964.
- Petras, James. "Empire Building and Rule: U.S. and Latin America." In *The Politics of Imperialism and Counterstrategies*, edited by P. Chandra, A. Ghosh, and R. Kumar, 197–248. Delhi: Aakar Books, 2004.
- Poliakov, Leon. *Vom Antizionismus zum Anti-Semitismus*. Freiburg: Ça ira, 1992.
- Postone, Moishe. "Anti-Semitism and National Socialism." In *Germans and Jews since the Holocaust: The Changing Situation in West Germany*, edited by A. Rabinbach and J. Zipes, 302–14. New York: Holmes & Meier, 1986.
- Ricardo, David. *On the Principles of Political Economy and Taxation*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995.
- Rose, Gillian. *Judaism and Modernity*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1993.
- Rosenberg, Alfred. *Der staatsfeindliche Zionismus*. Munich: F. Eher Nachfahren, 1938.
- Sartre, Jean-Paul. *Anti-Semite and Jew*. Translated by G. J. Becker. New York: Schocken Books, 1976.
- Smith, Adam. *The Wealth of Nations*. Vol. 2. Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1981.
- Stalin, Josef. *Marxism and the National and Colonial Question*. New York: International Publishers, n.d.
- Tischler, Sergio. "Time of Reification and Time of Insubordination." In *Human Dignity*, edited by W. Bonefeld and K. Psychopedis, 131–43. Aldershot UK: Ashgate, 2005.
- Wallerstein, Immanuel. *After Liberalism*. New York: New Press, 1995.
- Watson, George. "Race and the Socialists." *Encounter*, November 1976, 15–23.
- Žižek, Slavoj. *Welcome to the Desert of the Real*. London: Verso, 2002.