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**The Origins of Modern Antisemitism:  
A Case Study of the Jews in England 1881-1920**

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The memory of Adolf Hitler's rise to power and the Third Reich's extermination of six million Jews did not penetrate humanity's collective consciousness until the capture and trial of Adolf Eichmann in 1961. Covering Eichmann's trial for *The New Yorker*, political philosopher Hannah Arendt evaluated the defendant in a manner which offered her readers neither the closure nor the catharsis they undoubtedly would have preferred. As Bettina Stangneth notes of the controversy spurred by her intellectual detachment, "Arendt chose the method of understanding that she was familiar with: repeatedly reading Eichmann's words and conducting a detailed analysis of the person speaking and writing, on the assumption that someone speaks and writes only when they want to be understood... No other book on Adolf Eichmann—and perhaps on National Socialism as a whole—has occasioned more debate".<sup>1</sup> To the disappointment of many, Arendt remained fascinated by Eichmann as an unremarkable character—a man who did not seem to possess the insatiable lust for Jewish blood the world assumed he did. Rather than harboring exceptional capacity for evil, she argued the defendant was able to follow Hitler's orders to commit systematic murder by choosing to surrender the power to think for himself. The disturbing banality of Eichmann's testimony reflected his choice not to question the Third Reich's policies. Instead, he judged his actions against them using a self-proclaimed method of "Kantian" reason, oblivious to his replacement of Natural Law with Nazi law<sup>2</sup>. For Arendt, in a world where evil had become ordinary, Eichmann's choice not to think for himself was the ultimate crime against humanity.

Arendt's assessment of Eichmann reflected her belief in reason as essential to our faculties of judgment—our ability to discern right from wrong. And while Arendt's analyses tended to focus on Jews in the French and German political imagination, her understanding of antisemitism

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<sup>1</sup> Bettina Stangneth *Eichmann Before Jerusalem: The Unexamined Life of a Mass Murderer*. 16-17

<sup>2</sup> Arendt, Hannah. *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil*. 136

remains instructive for our examination of Jews in modern England. Like Arendt, British liberal intellectuals and politicians were captivated by the idea that Jewish toleration was not simply a question of “morality” but of rationality. In other words, tolerating Jews was moral *because* it was rational. Operating within a Kantian framework herself, Arendt traces antisemitism along Europe’s political strays from reason over time and, consequentially, from humanity’s commitment to the inalienable Rights of Man<sup>3</sup>. With the rise of ideologies such as nationalism and imperialism, coupled with the refugee catastrophe of World War I, came the inevitable rise of antisemitism.

Despite her complex analysis of European geopolitics, Arendt does not absolve Jews of an allegedly significant role in this crisis, even holding them largely accountable for their own persecution: “The so-called scapegoat... does not simply cease to be co-responsible because it became the victim of the world’s injustice and cruelty.”<sup>4</sup> And while Arendt assigns “co-responsibility” to Jews and non-Jews alike, she describes Jews as playing an exceptional part, eschewing the claim that “the scapegoat might have been anyone else.”<sup>5</sup> In rationalizing her judgment of Jews’ culpability, Arendt describes them as a wealthy, oppressive, and apathetic group: “Antisemitism reached its climax when Jews had similarly lost their public functions and their influence, and were left with nothing but their wealth... Wealth which does not exploit lacks even the relationship which exists between exploiter and exploited; aloofness without policy does not imply even the minimum concern of the oppressor for the oppressed<sup>6</sup>.”

For Arendt, while elitist apathy afflicted all groups, Jews embodied it: “[A]ll economic statistics prove that German Jews belonged not to the German people, but at most to its

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<sup>3</sup> Hanna Arendt. *The Origins of Totalitarianism*. 298

<sup>4</sup> Ibid. 6

<sup>5</sup> Ibid. 7

<sup>6</sup> Ibid. 5

bourgeoisie.” Never mind, David Nirenberg notes, that the statistics Arendt often used as evidence for such statements were gleaned from the archives of the Third Reich. He writes, “[T]he ease with which she was willing to assume that Judaism was especially bound to money, her insistence on the ‘co-responsibility’ of the Jews for the economic order within which they function: these were among the a priori ideological commitments that structured her selection and interpretation of ‘facts’ about the Jews.”<sup>7</sup>

As we see with Arendt, and as we will see time and again in late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century liberal political discourses in England, Jews are often judged more harshly than their non-Jewish counterparts and given greater share of the burden in preventing antisemitism. And yet even more significant is that such conclusions were justified by intellectuals and politicians from within a framework of rational political thought. Political toleration of and prejudices against Jews were no longer framed within the context of religion and Christian Scripture, but rather from within a context of “reason”. Liberal thinkers also believed that reason, not Christianity, would be the intellectual mechanism through which Jews would ultimately join their Protestant English counterparts in proper realization of the “self”.<sup>8</sup> It was precisely liberals’ belief in the inherent rationality of their moral, ethnic, and religious prejudices against Jews which allowed them to flourish undetected in modern British politics.

The purpose of this thesis is to thus trace back “anti-Jewish” ideas and prejudices to their historical and liberal political origins, using late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century England as a case study— an era and region which is often portrayed by scholars as being exceptionally tolerant of

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<sup>7</sup> David Nirenberg. *Anti-Judaism: The Western Tradition*. 463

<sup>8</sup> Saba Mahmood. *The Politics of Piety*. 11 Mahmood writes, “Liberalism’s unique contribution is to link the notion of self-realization with individual autonomy, wherein the process of realizing oneself is equated with the ability to realize the desires of one’s ‘true will.’”

Jews and Judaism. The findings of this essay will examine various historiographies of Jews and antisemitism, particularly liberal discourses in England between 1881 and 1920 among non-Jewish intellectuals and politicians about Jews, as well as some Jews' responses to them, on the subjects of tolerance, immigration, national liberal education, and the rights of the state. The conclusion will begin to explore why liberal discourses such as these are often overlooked in scholars' locating of modern antisemitism's origins.

The exposing of hidden prejudices within liberal political history is not new to academic scholarship, of course. Indeed, postcolonial scholarship was developed precisely for this reason—to illuminate the Euroethnocentrism embedded in liberal political thought and scholarship<sup>9</sup>. Rendering judgment against non-Christian and non-Western groups has become increasingly viewed as problematic in mainstream academic discourses since it posits European values as being morally and culturally superior, thereby perpetuating prejudice against groups marginalized as “Other”. While postcolonial critiques of liberal politics will be particularly helpful in our analysis of Jews in liberal English politics, the purpose of the following literature review is to illuminate unacknowledged prejudices and assumptions about Jews and Jewish identity which remain common within *both* liberal and postcolonial scholarship. In doing so, it argues that postcolonial scholars' assumption that they remain, unlike liberal scholars, morally and culturally *unbiased* in studying oppression produces the same problem it identifies in liberal scholarship: The production of research which is neither aware of the moral claims on which it rests, nor of the consequences those claim's biases on the research itself.

With regards to scholarship on modern antisemitism this thesis contemplates the following questions: What are the various moral and cultural values which inform scholars' understanding

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<sup>9</sup> Saba Mahmood. *Religious Difference in a Secular Age*. 10-11

of oppression and how have those values shaped common historical narratives around antisemitism specifically? Indeed, “oppression” is not a scientific concept but rather a value-based one. As Leo Strauss so aptly observes “it is impossible to study social phenomena, i.e., all important social phenomena, without making value judgements.”<sup>10</sup> Linda Zerilli speaks to this inevitability of judgment as well in her critique of postcolonial scholarship and its impact on the subjects we study. She writes, “[We] need to make judgments about cultural and political practices not always our own and, where appropriate, declare them [‘bad’] and refuse them our political support... it is difficult to imagine how political judgments could be formed that would not reproduce that bias”.<sup>11</sup> In other words, both postcolonial scholars and liberal scholars must employ moral hierarchies from which to judge certain groups and political movements. In denying moral biases and claiming “neutrality” or “objectivity”, scholars only work to further conceal the ethics, political ideals, and social norms that inform their understanding of power and oppression.

While liberal and postcolonial scholars often disagree on which condemnations and even violence against Jewish groups deserve to be labeled as antisemitic, scholars from both schools of thought assume the right to render judgment on the actions and beliefs espoused by Jews across space and time, as well as the actions and beliefs of non-Jews towards them. And although this thesis neither denies the necessity of judgment nor its importance in the study of antisemitism, it remains critical of the liberal political philosophies which underly common beliefs and judgements of Jews within both liberal and postcolonial scholarship to this day. Indeed, it ultimately argues that these political philosophies and the religious-political worldviews which inform them (to be discussed further in the conclusion) are “anti-Jewish” in

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<sup>10</sup> Leo Strauss. “What is Political Philosophy?” 349

<sup>11</sup> Linda Zerilli. “Towards a Feminist Theory of Judgment.” 286

that they view significant aspects of Jewish identity as antithetical to social progress and worked to suppress them throughout the modern era. In executing such a critique, this essay inevitably presumes the value and legitimacy of a “pro-Jewish” historical narrative from which these prejudices can come to light. It also does not seek to instead locate “true” equality within the Jewish imagination of truth and justice, but rather questions the fundamental viability of equality as a social and political ideal all together.

At this point it should be noted that the concept of “antisemitism” will not be used in this essay as a catch-all term for all “irrational” beliefs towards Jews and Judaism”<sup>12</sup>. Rather, it argues that the term antisemitism is more accurately described as representing only those specific types of prejudices and restrictions against Jews’ autonomy which are perceived as being problematic from the perspective of the scholar or group of scholars in question. Social and political discourses which reinforced Jews’ racial and religious inferiority, but which are not judged as being unethical, therefore remain outside scholars’ purview. Modern nation-states and liberal political movements perpetuated many prejudices and restrictions against Jews’ autonomy in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century, yet not all are considered by scholars today to be antisemitic.

Scholarship of modern antisemitism commonly assumes that liberalism’s influence in modern nation-states – or developing nation-states – worked to eliminate pre-existing sociopolitical hierarchies between Jews and non-Jews in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century and increased religious toleration of Judaism. This assumption is particularly salient to narratives of England’s treatment towards its Jewish population. Albert Lindemann’s discussion of Jews in England attributes, for example, unwarranted levels of pro-Jewish feeling to British politicians

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<sup>12</sup> Nirenberg, 577. See Nirenberg’s note on defining antisemitism

and thinkers. He writes, “Many prominent English citizens looked upon the Jews as one of the superior races... Lord Balfour [described Jews] as ‘the most talented race since the Greeks of the fifth century’”.<sup>13</sup> What Lindemann fails to consider, however, is if Englishmen such as Balfour indeed believed that Jews were the most talented race since the Greeks then it begs the question of why it was the Jews, and not Englishmen, who had to be educated in a new language, culture, and ethos in the state and social Anglicization projects.

In contrast to the humility Lindemann ascribes to Protestant Englishmen, Lindemann describes European Jews as possessing an exceptional sense of superiority that historically precluded them from achieving the social and political maturity of their non-Jewish counterparts— an analysis which reaffirms Arendt’s earlier examination of Jews’ political aloofness. According to Lindemann, this unique sense of racial ethnocentricity permeates much of Jewish history, with a sudden (and depressing) moment of self-introspection in the modern era.

Jews in late ancient times and in the Middle Ages found it easy to harbor a sense of superiority to the non-Jews among whom they lived, since Jews were a literate people of ancient civilization residing among peoples often only half-civilized. But that comfortable and sustaining assumption of superiority became ever more tenuous with the advances of European civilization in the modern period, from the eighteenth to twentieth centuries. Increasingly, informed, sensitive Jewish observers began to feel that Jews were being left behind, that somehow Jewish culture had frozen at the premodern stage, while Gentiles were moving ahead to a higher state of civilization. And for the large numbers of Jews who came to modern European civilization by way of the eastern European shtetl (“little town”) the anxiety-filled transition from a sense of superiority to the Goyim to a sense of inferiority occurred with great abruptness<sup>14</sup>.

Similar to Lindemann’s judgment of Jews and non-Jews in Europe, Todd Endelman’s analysis of Jews in modern England exaggerates both the degree of “pro-Judeewish” sentiment

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<sup>13</sup> Albert Lindemann, *Esau’s Tears: Modern Anti-Semitism and the Rise of the Jews*. 247

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 13



in politics as well as the degree of the baseless “anxiety” Jews felt among non-Jews. He writes, “[The] political pressures that caused Jews in Germany to denationalize Judaism in the hope of gaining full emancipation were absent. There was no public clamor that Jews renounce particularistic rituals and doctrines in order to be integrated into society... Though [Anglo-Jewry was] disinclined themselves to accept the full discipline of [Orthodox Judaism], they nonetheless expected their synagogues and communal functionaries to do so. Eager to strengthen their social position, they saw in Orthodox Judaism a parallel to the venerable, tradition-minded Church of England.”<sup>15</sup> Endelman later undermines these claims, however, in describing both the Anglo-Jewish establishment and the British state’s attempts vis-à-vis compulsory public education to indoctrinate children of orthodox Jewish immigrants with precisely this denationalized sense of Jewish identity necessary for their naturalization: “Children and adolescents, in particular, were objects of anglicization schemes, since they were considered more malleable than their parents, who clung stubbornly, it was believed, to old-world habits and attitudes... Although nominally Orthodox and under the supervision of the chief rabbi, these schools placed more emphasis on transforming their students into little Englishmen and -women than into observant, learned Jews. The schools worked especially hard to eradicate the use of Yiddish, which was regarded as a major stumbling block to anglicization.” Given the anti-Jewish nature of the state’s assimilation projects, it is perhaps not surprising that British Jews pushed for the “Christianization” of their synagogues.<sup>16</sup>

Disentangling scholar’s pre-existing assumptions regarding English liberalism’s toleration of “Jewish difference” is essential to revealing the broader social and political hierarchies within which Jews actually lived. It is here that postcolonial critiques of liberal

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 115

<sup>16</sup> Todd Endelman. *The Jews of Britain*. 174-175

political thought can be particularly instructive in helping us trace the religious values and cultural sensibilities which rationalized Jews' inferior religious and racial status within British liberal politics and thought<sup>17</sup>. In her analysis of Coptic Christians in modern Egypt, Saba Mahmood argues that the “separation of church and state”, for example, reinforces prejudices against non-normative religious groups and incites interreligious group strife. She thus disabuses us of the assumption that sectarianism in Egypt stems from the enduring political influence of Islam rather than the hierarchies and prejudices intrinsic to any secular nation-state:

“political secularism... entails the reordering and remaking of religious life and interconfessional relations in accord with specific norms, themselves foreign to the life of the religious and peoples it organizes... The two dimensions of political secularism—its regulatory impulse and its promise of freedom—are thoroughly intertwined, each necessary to the enactment of the other... To suggest that secular liberal politics is never free of religion threatens the hope that in the face of irredeemable religious strife there can be a neutral arbiter who can adjudicate the conflict by stepping outside the fray”.<sup>18</sup>

If the interest of the liberal state is to protect citizens' civil liberties, then the supervision and restriction of “problematic” groups and religious minorities is necessary to its governance. Not surprisingly, as Mahmood notes, liberal scholars are more invested in curtailing Islam's influence on liberal social norms, whilst attributing the “enlightened quality” of others to their Christian origins<sup>19</sup>.

The degree to which a group or religious minority is perceived to be “unenlightened” by scholars and political theorists is shaped by the degree to which those groups are perceived to suppress the “true will” of its own members.<sup>20</sup> Those which suppress their agency – also known as nonliberal or illiberal groups – are seen as a constant potential threat to the autonomy of those

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<sup>17</sup> Saba Mahmood. *Religious Difference in a Secular Age*. 21

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 38-40

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 8. See quote by Jürgen Habermas

<sup>20</sup> Mahmood, 11

who do not subscribe to them. The “secularization” of public spaces and institutions therefore entails preventing certain groups from adulterating the “world they share in common” with those who exhibit greater levels of agency and who, in their genuine expressions of the “self”, deserve state support and protection. Conversely, those who subscribe to “oppressive” groups must learn to operate in a society which avoids legitimizing, and even tries to obstruct, their attempts to live autonomously. Mahmood’s analysis of the “mosque movement” in Egypt speaks to the difficulties religious Muslim women experienced, for example, in trying to navigate secular spaces<sup>21</sup>. “When these women met as a group their discussions often focused on two challenges they constantly had to face in their attempts to maintain a pious lifestyle. One was learning to live amicably with people—both colleagues and immediate kin—who constantly placed them in situations that were far from optimal for the realization of piety in day-to-day life. The second challenge was in the internal struggle they had to engage in within themselves in a world that constantly beckoned them to behave in unpius ways.”<sup>22</sup>

Depending on the era and region, liberal political thought has engendered and employed a diverse array of political conceptions and strategies for dealing with illiberal groups. In her examination of religious and racial discrimination against Arab Muslims in France, Joan Wallach Scott traces state attempts to achieve “equality” vis-à-vis the “politics of sameness”. The political ideal of equality in French political theory has led, Scott explains, to policies which justify the suppression of diversity in France in hopes of its eventual eradication. In contrast to multiculturalist politics, French republicanism achieves equality “by making one’s social, religious, ethnic, and other origins irrelevant in the public sphere; it is an abstract individual that

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<sup>21</sup> Their attachment to religious “extremism” diminished their perceived lack of agency among secular Muslims.

<sup>22</sup> Mahmood, 156

one becomes a French citizen... The norms of the culture, of course, are anything but abstract... Abstraction allows individuals to be conceived as the same (as universal), but sameness is measured in terms of concrete ways of being (as Frenchness).”<sup>23</sup>

One way in which nation-states and liberal democracies have historically tried to achieve equality is through a mandatory national liberal education—an institution which, as we will see, played a key role in the English state’s ethnic and religious assimilation of its Jewish populations through the enactment of the Forster Act in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. In a parallel history of France, Scott explains the history of the Ferry laws in which children were required to attend school with a secular curriculum enforced by teachers, not nuns or priests. “From the perspective of minister of education; the goal of its pedagogy was to instill a common republican political identity in children from a diversity of backgrounds... A shared language, culture, and ideological formation—and so a nation one and indivisible—was to be the outcome of the educational process.<sup>24</sup>” Throughout her analysis, Scott also speaks to the inseparable relationship between race and religion in questions such as education and assimilation. “The logic ran this way: Muslims suffer from their religious beliefs, but these beliefs tell you something about the propensity of Arabs to decadence. Here was the paradox of the civilizing mission, and it persists to this day: the stated goal was to civilize (to assimilate) those who finally could not be civilized.<sup>25</sup>”

While these theoretical models remain instructive for this essay, postcolonial scholars often fall curiously short in applying them to their full extent to Jews in the history of modern nation-states. Postcolonial scholarship frequently ignores, for example, historical discourses of race and

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<sup>23</sup> Joan Wallach Scott. *The Politics of The Veil*. 13

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 99

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 46-47

racism within modern nation-states from their analysis when it comes to Jews. Jews are instead limited to discourses on religious difference alone in modern nation-states whether in the Maghreb, the Middle East, or Western Europe. The relegation of Jews' identity solely to the realm of religion has had a profound and increasing influence on the manner in which "Jewish history" is understood and studied across the social sciences, with compounding implications for the study of Jews in British liberal politics. In eliminating discussion of the political and socioeconomic power imbalances sustained by "normative" non-Jewish groups over Jews in 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century liberal politics, a familiar narrative on the origins of antisemitism begins to form which inculcates nationalism, imperialism, and as we saw with Arendt, Jewish wealth and exploitation.

Despite Mahmood's analysis of Egypt's developing nation-state, the full implications of her critique are applied not to Jews but to Coptic Christian population alone. Far from discussing imbalances of power between Jews and Egyptian liberal-national politics, Mahmood portrays Egypt's Jews as being on equal terms with its British oppressors in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Under British rule, she writes, "Egyptian Jewry was regarded as a local *ta'ifa*, was part of the economic elite, and was a key player in the drafting of the first constitution of Egypt in 1923." She goes so far as to maintain that antisemitism did not exist to any meaningful degree in Egyptian politics and society until 1948 with the establishment of the State of Israel. Only then did "Egyptian Jews [come under attack] and started to emigrate."<sup>26</sup> Similar to Arendt's analysis of German Jews, Mahmood traces the origins of modern antisemitism in Egypt not to her critique of the modern nation-state or Egyptian nationalism but to the Jews themselves vis-à-vis Jewish nationalism.

In eliminating ethnic identity and racism from postcolonial discourses, Jewish "nationhood" is only ever examined within the context of political Zionism. The conception of

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<sup>26</sup> Mahmood. 60

Jews' peoplehood is thus falsely conceived as a 19<sup>th</sup> century "European" political project supported not only financially but ideologically by the British Empire. Scholars thus free themselves from studying the threat of race Jews posed within British liberal politics long before the question of Zionism became of interest. State policies which sought to suppress both religious and ethnic aspects of Jewish identity are thus removed from their historical analyses of modern antisemitism.

Far from restricting their autonomy and "power", Jews are described in Ussama Makdisi's analysis as the British Empire's protégé in spreading colonialism and racism. According to Makdisi, racial demarcations between "Jew" and "non-Jew" were either politically meaningless or nonexistent in developing Arab nation-states until its promotion by Britain and European Jews. He writes, "British-backed Zionism obsessively and aggressively demarcated Jew from non-Jew... the British mandate yoked itself from the outset to the ambitious Zionist fantasy of Jewish redemption and rebirth".<sup>27</sup> Similarly, Jews in Arab countries are described as having no concept or memory of a national Jewish identity. As the promise of ethnic unity and "coexistence" between Muslims, Christians, and Jews remains central to Makdisi's ecumenical frame, the existence of a pre-existing Jewish national identity would pose an inconvenient problem to the project of Arab nation-building. If Jews exhibited distinct ethnic characteristics, their prioritization of Arab nationhood over Jewish nationhood would require the suppression of the latter in service to the former.

Echoing Mahmood's analysis, Arab Jews lived free from religious and racial antisemitism in nation-building projects according to Makidisi. With regard to antisemitic violence in Iraq he writes, "The Farhud had no obvious connection to the history of Eastern

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<sup>27</sup> Ussama Makdisi. *Age of Coexistence*. 171

Europe, and the blatant anti-Jewishness of the rioters was manifestly not tied to a wider anti-Jewish culture or to a state-building project that had excluded Jews”. He then describes the seamlessness with which Iraqi Jews assimilated into enlightened Arab society, despite the prejudices and hatred this integration had provoked among Europeans. “If anything,” he writes, “the Baghdadi Jewish community had been among the most integrated Jewish communities in the region”. He gives the example of Elie Kedourie, an Iraqi Jew who “recognized how the salvific promise of the Jewish state answered specific European questions and was not at all resonant with the lived experiences of the Jewish populations of the Mashriq—particularly the Iraqi Jews of Baghdad.<sup>28</sup>”

Similar to liberal scholarship’ portrayal of Jews in liberal European polities, Jewish assimilation into Arab society is synonymous in postcolonial scholarship with social and political equality between Jews and non-Jews and a significant reduction of antisemitism. How liberal-national projects managed to re-educate and transform Jews from embodying a “particularistic”, underdeveloped understanding of the self (as a Jew) to a “universal” understanding of the self (as an Arab Jew) remains unaccounted for. Despite the success postcolonial scholarship has achieved in revealing liberal scholars’ biases in certain historical narratives, the assumption that Jews enjoyed enormous wealth, acceptance, and well-being in “tolerant” polities remains fundamental to both liberal and postcolonial analyses of modern antisemitism.

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 198

Scholarship regarding Jews in modern England frequently assume Jews exercised significant autonomy in their integration into liberal British politics and society in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Consequentially, scholarship frames Jewish assimilation in modern England as one of Jews' social, behavioral, and intellectual transformation which took place organically in its contact with and exposure to liberal society. On the contrary, although many Jews did assimilate eagerly and without the direct intervention of British institutions, Jewish assimilation cannot be properly understood without acknowledging and examining the liberal policies and social campaigns which sought to enforce assimilation to the point where Jews would no longer be Jews, but rather Englishmen who happened to be Jewish.

The purpose of this thesis is to therefore unravel and examine liberal policies and discourses which deliberated on Jews' successful integration, as well as the ethnoreligious aspects of Jewish identity perceived as being the greatest obstacle to their naturalization. Liberal political ideals did not eliminate hierarchies between the British state and the Jew but rather strove to reinforce them vis-à-vis modern political projects. While not always explicitly mentioned in Parliamentary discussions of liberal policies and reforms, immigrant Jews were particularly affected by state liberalization policies aimed at the "universalization" of all ethnic and religious minorities. Policies which were heavily monitored by state committees and, within the Jewish community specifically, by the state-sanctioned Anglo-Jewish establishment. It was through these efforts that the British state was able to achieve extensive reform of its immigrant Jewish population.

To strengthen their social integration and conformity, Jews were forced and entreated to supplant their ethnoreligious identity with a "universal" Jewish identity compatible with the English nation-state concept. This would ostensibly allow Jews to achieve an enlightened understanding of the self while still maintaining a distinct religious identity, however abstracted.



With great success, liberal policies and social campaigns worked to suppress problematic aspects of Jewish identity, such as the use of Jewish languages, daily prayer rituals which reinforced Jews' connection to *Eretz Yisrael* and *Am Yisrael*, and other imagined “Jewish” character traits such as tribalism, an obsession with money, and other “evils of the flesh”.

It must be noted at this point that England undoubtedly approached the Jewish Question with greater flexibility than countries such as Germany or France. Anglo-Jewry was not required to entirely forsake the Jewish religion or even their bond to their co-religionists around the world as Jews in other countries had been. Indeed, Jews were offered support and protection by the British state on multiple occasions, as well as through the millet system in the British commonwealth<sup>29</sup>. In the mid-1800s, Lord Palmerston fought hard to win the support of the House of Commons when he threatened war against Greece for the persecution of Don Pacifico, a Jewish British citizen, and his family. Respected Jewish nobleman such as Sir Moses Montefiore fought for the protection of Jews globally and provided British citizenship to those requesting in North African countries with the full support of the British Empire behind them. In the 1880s and 1890s, Jewish leadership openly engaged in funding campaigns on behalf of their persecuted brethren in Russia, as did their liberal, non-Jewish counterparts. From the late 19<sup>th</sup> century to the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup>, certain liberal Members of Parliament passionately protested the conservative party's repeated attempts to pass the Aliens Act— a universal immigration bill aimed at stemming the increase in Jewish refugees from Romania, Poland, and Russia.<sup>30</sup>

Liberal support for Jewish causes was predicated on the assumption that Jewish insular and unenlightened culture was a result of imposed historical oppression and could thus be

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<sup>30</sup> Endelman, *The Jews of Britain*, 79-123

overcome. With access to the right social environment and education, Jewish individuals would behave as rationally – and perhaps with greater intellect – as any other enlightened Englishman. When the violent pogroms of Russia began in 1881, liberal politicians and figureheads expressed genuine sympathy towards the persecuted Jews of Eastern Europe. In a display of solidarity with their British Jewish colleagues, prominent leaders attended and spoke at an organized meeting in 1890 at Guildhall to discuss Russia’s “May Laws” against Jews in detail. The meeting was mocked by England’s ambassador to Russia – a political conservative – who cynically described the gathering in a letter to the Prime Minister, assuring him that the book which had documented its proceedings at length would do nothing but harm if it were to be sent to the Russian Emperor. Conservatives’ belittlement of Guildhall could not match the collective enthusiasm of its participants, however. The beginning half of the meeting was dedicated to describing in detail the persecution of Jews and the antisemitic laws of Russia. The second half of the meeting transcribed the speeches orated by politicians and letters sent in and read aloud. In contrast to the ambassador’s cynicism, the Duke of Westminster’s remarks epitomize a central theme among those who spoke at the Guild Hall meeting—belief in Jews’ ability to redeem themselves when liberated from oppression.

If only allowed a free hand, [the ancient Jewish race] has a way of making its way to the front by painstaking and by honourable methods—no need to speak of the numerous examples in this or in other communities. Surely it would be the interest, as it should be the greatest privilege, of any Russian ruler to take steps to raise and maintain the Jews in an honourable equality with the various other races that go to make up the Empire... It is said that the Jews in Russia are bad citizens. I would venture to say this to the Russian Government: ‘If you continue to crush by your laws, and, by crushing, demoralize a whole people, who, though large in number, are yet in a minority and cannot rise, you have no right to complain of them when so reduced, so stricken, and so demoralized, and to say that they are bad citizens, and therefore, persecute them in consequence more and more. The Jews are just what your laws make them<sup>31</sup>.

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<sup>31</sup> “A Report of the Guildhall Meeting” in *The Persecution of the Jews in Russia*, 83

In a similar sentiment, Francis Buxton, a liberal politician and former Member of Parliament, wrote to *The Times* in 1891 regarding the conservative backlash against Jewish immigration and the antisemitic, nationalist meeting attended by two conservative Members of Parliament. Buxton expressed his disappointment to *The Times* about the lack of outrage expressed towards these provocations. “Surely”, Buxton exclaims, “we must protest against this selfish doctrine of protection, and will not carelessly throw to the winds the great name of England as the [asylum for the oppressed...] a Jew almost invariably begins on the lowest rung of the ladder and steadily and persistently rises; his industry and his prudence ensure his success and offer an example— which might well be followed by many an Englishman”<sup>32</sup>.

Despite the optimistic attitude typical to them, liberal political discourses in England portrayed Jews as a far less developed race as Protestant Englishmen. Certain liberal intellectuals contemplated in rigorous detail the importance of transforming England’s immigrant Jewish population from a distinct ethnic and religious group to a universalized religious body, thereby ensuring the dissolution of the Jewish race entirely. The question of whether such a transformation could take place successfully was posited by Cyril Russell and Harry Samuel Lewis in their book, *The Jew in London*. “So long as the Jews remain an isolated and peculiar people, self-centered in their organization, and fundamentally alien in their ideas and aims, the rapid growth of their community can hardly be regarded with complete satisfaction... It is the object of this essay to inquire how far these peculiarities appear to be a permanent or an

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<sup>32</sup> Francis Buxton, *The Times of London*, August 5, 1891

eradicable nature, and how far do they constitute – or are likely in the future to constitute – an impassable barrier between Jewry and the outer world?<sup>33</sup>

Such a question was essential, as Jews' strange "peculiarities" spoke to the very core of the Jewish Problem. While liberal politicians at times demonstrated public admiration for certain "Jewish" characteristics, Jews' deficiencies were considered grave enough to warrant such fundamental reform of their identity. The sole difference between liberal and conservative politicians was that the former mostly offered temporal explanations for Jews' racial deficiencies and were therefore more likely to defend Jews' ability to overcome them if only provided the proper tools and education conducive to their evolution. By contrast, conservative and nationalists believed that the dissolution of the Jewish race was either impossible or so unlikely that it was not worth the effort. This was most often attributed to their irreversible attachment to their religion or to their immutable inferiority as a race. Neither party demonstrated a willingness to tolerate Jews *as they were*, however.

Not all liberals were as optimistic as Buxton and the Duke of Westminster either. Goldwin Smith of the Liberal Party shared conservatives' doubts about Jewish immigration and integration. Smith did however applaud those Jews who had entirely thrown off the shackles of their racial "tribalism". As he writes, "As to the men of Jewish descent who have put off tribalism altogether, we have only to welcome them as citizens in the fullest sense of the term and to rejoice in any good gifts, peculiar to their stock, which they may bring to the common store..." He was explicit, however, in his concerns regarding trenchant orthodox Jews, who he saw not simply as antithetical to progress within the English nation but to humanity as well. Smith argued that the ethnocentricity of such Jews rendered them incapable of the universal love

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<sup>33</sup> C. Russell and H.S. Lewis, *The Jew in London*, 8-9

for and faith in humanity which came so naturally to Christians. He even goes as far as to say that Jews' ethnic elitism separates them from "all the other races". He writes,

I heartily supported, and, were it needful, would heartily support again, the political enfranchisement of the Jews, though I do not pretend to believe that people who intrench themselves in tribal exclusiveness, refuse intermarriage, and treat the rest of the community as Gentiles, are the very best of candidates for citizenship... But the franchise is a trust, in the exercise of which everyone must expect to be watched, especially those who are liable to any peculiar bias, above all when their allegiance is divided between the nation and some other power or interest... Far be it from Liberals to set up a narrow patriotism as the highest of virtues, or to make an idol of the nation. There is something higher than nationality, something which nationality at present ought to serve, and in which it will ultimately be merged. Mazzini taught us how to think upon that subject. But tribalism is not higher nor more liberal than nationality; it is lower and less liberal; it is the primeval germ of which nationality is the more civilized development. Nor does the narrowest patriot make such a religious idol of his nation as the Jew makes of his tribe. All the other races profess at least allegiance to humanity: they all look forward, however vaguely, to a day of universal brotherhood; they cannot help doing this if they are Christian, and have accepted the ideal of the Christian Church. The Jew alone regards his race as superior to humanity, and looks forward not to its ultimate union with other races, but to its triumph over them all, and to its final ascendancy under the leadership of a tribal Messiah. I mean of course the genuine, or, as the Americans would say with rough picturesqueness, the "hard-shell" Jews. About the position of these alone can there be any question.<sup>34</sup>

Several prominent Jewish intellectuals engaged in debate with Smith, including Dr. Rabbi Hermann Adler and Lucien Wolf, but their rebuttals were, once again, in support of fundamental Jewish reform rather than "pro-Jewish", agreeing that religious and unassimilated Jews were in dire need of improvement. They disagreed with Goldwin only in his argument that humanistic ideals were more difficult for the Jew than for the Christian to grasp. As Smith argued regarding the political enfranchisement of Jews, "[If patriotism] means undivided devotion to the national interest, there is difficulty in seeing how it can be possessed without abatement by the members of a cosmopolitan and wandering race, with a tribal bond, tribal aspirations, and tribal feelings of its own". In his criticism of Smith, Wolf insists Judaism is

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<sup>34</sup> Goldwin Smith, "The Jewish Question", 494-515

neither incompatible with Kantian ethics nor are Jews intellectually less developed than Christians. As he writes,

Judaism holds that the possibilities of human knowledge are limited to the visible world. Mankind is consequently taught that temporal happiness is the goal of existence and the whole aim of action. Liberty is ideal happiness, and its ultimate test is progress; and this ideal is the balance by the conquest of the lower propensities by the higher intellectual faculties. Progress is, in fact, founded on the basis of Natural Law or Justice, and the resultant liberty is the highest achievement in temporal happiness possible within the limits of immutable law. The conclusion I would formulate is that the Jews, by their practical observance of this teaching, have acquired a special adaptability to the conditions of life and a peculiar capacity for making the most of them.

In responding to British antisemitism, Wolf desperately sought to convey Judaism's compatibility with Enlightenment thought, insisting that Judaism, in its most genuine form, was compatible with reason and Natural Law. However, despite Wolf's attempt to prove Jews had acquired this enlightened state on their own, the actions and beliefs of liberal Jews like him demonstrated an undeniable preference for Protestant English culture and society. Indeed, "enlightened" Jews looked much closer in behavior, thought, speech, and appearance to a Protestant Christian than to a traditional Jew. Such an observation is noted positively by Russell and Lewis:

All the children who pass through an elementary school may be said to grow up into 'English Jews'; and in this phrase there is implied almost a world of difference. This, in fact, is one of the central features of the whole Anglo-Jewish question. There appears to be almost a stronger line of severance between the English Jew and foreign Jew than between the English Jew and Gentile. In habits, ideas and religion [the English Jew and foreign Jew] are fundamentally distinct; and when they come much into contact there is even mutual hostility and contempt... The same line is drawn very clearly by public opinion among Gentile population. English Jews I have found to be surprisingly popular. They are pronounced to be good fellows, and 'just like us Christians'... Foreigners, on the other hand, are for the most part, cordially disliked.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> C. Russell and H.S. Lewis. *The Jew in London*. 25

Jewish immigrants from Eastern Europe were far less assimilated than “native born” English Jews who had lived in London for several generations. And while a fair proportion of Jewish immigrants were religiously lax, even the most secular Eastern European Jews expressed disdain for sociopolitical movements which called for them to renounce their ethnic-national heritage as Jews<sup>36</sup>. For these reasons, the Jewish immigration crisis in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century posed a real and imminent threat to the unofficial yet binding social contract established between Anglo-Jewry and British state and society. Although British Jews were not expected to assimilate as aggressively as Jews in other European countries, undertaking the assimilation of Jewish immigrants was an immense and generations-long project. And while native British Jews were respected for their efforts to liberalize their co-religionists, the sheer rapidity with which Eastern European Jews seemed to be settling in England in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century unleashed a deep and sustained anxiety within the Anglo-Jewish establishment.

Even as they supported and tended to Jewish refugees, Anglo-Jewry expressed profound concern for the growing number of Jewish immigrants. As Todd Endelman writes, “[They] gave Anglo-Jewry, once again, a foreign-born, lower-class cast, which disappeared only in the mid-twentieth century... their behavior rubbed against the comfortable grain of native Jewish patterns, creating intracommunal friction”.<sup>37</sup> Native-born Jews worried that the conduct of foreign Jews would damage their hard-earned reputation and lead the general public to believe Jewish integration as a modern project had failed on account of the Jews themselves. When juxtaposed with non-Jewish liberal politicians who displayed optimism and sympathy for their plight, Anglo-Jewry’s response to immigration seems utterly cold and cynical in comparison.

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<sup>36</sup> Endelman, 176

<sup>37</sup> Endelman. See Chapter 4 on Native versus foreign Jews. 127-180

To understand this cynicism, however, the relationship between Jews and the English state must be placed within its broader hierarchal context. The British Jewish establishment was not empowered to act as an autonomous religious body— Anglo-Jewry was expected to act, and took great pride in acting, on behalf of the state’s interests alone. It carried the burden of supporting and acculturating the avalanche of Jewish immigrants settling in London and, as such, carried the risk of its potential failures. Anglo-Jewry was neither naïve nor enthusiastic about this responsibility and the inevitable increase in hostility Jewish immigration would cause in the general public and in government. From this perspective, it is not difficult to see why British Jews often displayed opposition to immigration and even attempted to dissuade Russian Jews from settling in England<sup>38</sup>. Such a position was indeed taken by various Anglo-Jewish institutions, such as the Board of Guardians for the Relief of the Jewish Poor:

The prevailing idea that a great scheme of emigration was in progress, cause considerable unrest even among foreigners of various nationalities already resident in London. There was a rapid increase in the number of cases applying in the usual way to the Board for relief... The presence of these immigrants in the over-crowded East End, where on occasions even the necessary sleeping accommodation was lacking, created a position of danger and anxiety both for the sufferers and the community in general... It is an outrage against the dictates of common sense and humanity, that such a senseless and hopeless movement should have ever been directed towards these shores; and the responsibility is heavy of those who encouraged and assisted it.<sup>39</sup>

Anglo-Jewry largely failed to deter immigration to England and ultimately played a significant role in raising funds for relief and arranging acculturation programs for foreign Jews. Indeed, the British state remained at the helm of the decision of whether or not to permit the Russian Jew’s into its borders and liberal politicians prevented anti-Alien legislation from passing

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<sup>38</sup> Some liberal Jews were outspoken in their support for Jewish immigration, however, as we will see soon with Herbert Samuel, a member of the Liberal Party.

<sup>39</sup> 42<sup>nd</sup> Report of the Board of Guardians for the Relief of the Jewish Poor, 17-19



in the House Commons until 1905. In Parliamentary debates on the Alien Act, members of parliament debated the familiar question of Jews' assimilability and the potential threat or benefit they posed to English society. There were impressive moments in these Parliamentary debates in which left-wing politicians accused conservatives of antisemitism and exposed their use of false statistics regarding Jewish criminality and pauperism. However, it was an unspoken assumption that Jewish immigration and assimilation was indeed a question of concern in which the behaviors and habits of foreign Jews had to be judged against the freedom and wellbeing of England's citizens.

Judging the compatibility of a group or race involved assessing traits such as "character", "spirit", and potential for "absorbing ideas". Aside from questions of crime and poverty, the question of Jewish immigration hinged on how successfully Jews could, if given the chance, improve themselves and come to "share the sentiments of the nation".<sup>40</sup> Herbert Samuel leveled a passionate defense of Jews in this regard. A Jewish member of the Liberal Party, Samuel argued that despite exhibiting "certain vices and defects" and lacking a certain degree of "nobility of character", Jews were more than capable of integrating into English society. "It is universally agreed" he insisted, "that the Jewish race are a sober, industrious, domesticated, quick-witted people and easily assimilated".<sup>41</sup> This last claim was repeatedly refuted, however, by members of the Conservative Party. As Samuel Ridley stated, "[He said] that the Jews easily assimilate with the nations in which they go to dwell. There, I think the facts will not bear out the statement... In whatever country they go to they intermarry among their own people, and they do not easily

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<sup>40</sup> *The Parliamentary Debates*, 795

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 731

assimilate the Gentile population. I think this is one of the causes which leads to the great congestion in the overcrowded districts.”<sup>42</sup>

Prime Minister Arthur Balfour shared a similar sentiment in response to the argument made on the successes of American assimilation. Despite the “power American has shown” Balfour began, “of assimilating men of many distinct nationalities and many races and of turning them all by a process of natural alchemy into citizens of the United States, and who as such become heirs and sharers in Anglo-Saxon laws and civilization—that power is marvelous. I do not wish to underrate it. But it has its limits, and none of us can, on calm reflection, seriously say we can ignore the question.”<sup>43</sup>

Although it failed to pass in 1904, the Aliens Act ultimately did pass in 1905 under Prime Minister Balfour. When the Liberal Party came to power shortly after, while there was no attempt to dismantle the bill, it was certainly not enforced to its fullest extent.<sup>44</sup> The British state remained dedicated, however, to providing Jewish immigrants and their families with the institutions through which their racial and religious assimilation could occur. Indeed, perhaps the single most influential force in the integration of Jews was established at the state level, had nothing to do with the activities of Anglo-Jewish institutions, and was passed before the Jewish immigration crisis began. This was the state’s establishment of a sacred liberal institution— national public education. Through the Forster Act of 1870, the state provided all British-born and immigrant children aged five to ten with free elementary schooling, and by 1880 the attendance of these children was required. By 1884, the age of requirement was extended to thirteen.<sup>45</sup> The enforcement of a national, liberal educational system fundamentally transformed Jewish life. While the state

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid. 786

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 795

<sup>44</sup> Endelman, 160

<sup>45</sup> Nigel Middleton, “The Education Act of 1870 As the Start of the Modern Concept of the Child”, 173

enforced and controlled the process, Anglo-Jewry was expected to help ensure the successful acculturation and education of immigrant Jews, particularly through the establishment of local boards which supervised the progress of Jewish children. While the Forster Act may have been established by the House of Commons, non-Jewish members of Parliament certainly did not have to deal directly with the messiness of acculturating foreign Jewish children. Not surprisingly, non-Jewish liberal politicians and intellectuals were generally more optimistic towards Jews' success, while Anglo-Jewry understood all too well what was in store for them. The juxtaposition between non-Jewish liberal optimism and liberal Jewish reticence epitomized the imbalance of power between the state and its Jews and the burden and risks which fell on the latter's shoulders should the project of assimilation fail.

While local school boards were chosen through democratic elections, the vast majority of immigrant Jews spoke only Yiddish and were not familiar whatsoever with these kinds of political processes. State schools significantly curtailed immigrant Jewish parents' autonomy in the raising and educating of children. They were unequipped, to say the least, to turn unassimilated Jewish children into individuals worthy of naturalization. After generations of providing education for their own at home and through informal Jewish schools, or *chederim* (*cheder* for singular), the responsibility of education was finally transferred from Jewish families and communities to the state itself<sup>46</sup>.

Due to provisions added to the Forster Act regarding religious instruction, Jewish board schools were able to offer a rudimentary religious education was allowed and instruction was given, often by Christian teachers, on the Old Testament and the Hebrew language. Because of the close proximity within which Jews lived in the East End, Christian children were few and far in

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 173-178

between. As such, the religious denomination of the school did not cause as great an uproar as it did, for example, for Irish Catholic families in other districts.<sup>47</sup> However, the public-school education was a monumental change from *cheder* in which Yiddish served as the language of instruction and rigorous study of the Talmud in Aramaic and Hebrew served as the core of the curriculum. The mandatory enrollment of Jewish immigrant children in state schools thus played a powerful role in suppressing major aspects of Jewish ethnic and religious identity and triggered a major decline in the colloquial and liturgical use of Jewish languages. While enrolling children in *chederim* before and after school hours was still a choice parents could potentially make, mandatory enrollment in state schools significantly lessened the number of hours of attendance possible and stigmatized its existence as deleterious to integration.

Public schools in England sought to “improve” immigrant children by transforming Jewish identity from an ethno-religious one to a “universal” religious identity compatible with the English nation-state concept. Children could ostensibly acquire an open-minded and “humanistic” identity by suppressing and eliminating aspects of Jewish identity which kept them “isolated” and “self-centered”.<sup>48</sup> Jews in England exhibited ethnic markers that were unique to Jews alone and thus created a barrier to assimilation that had to be overcome. The use of Jewish languages caused great concern in state schools in particular.<sup>49</sup> Hebrew and Aramaic were liturgical languages preserved for prayer (Hebrew), for the study of the Torah and Talmud (both Hebrew and Aramaic), as well as for scholarship and correspondences between scholars. Colloquial Jewish languages were written in Hebrew script and comprised of a hybrid of Hebrew and local regional languages and dialects depending on where Jews lived at the time the languages developed<sup>50</sup>. These include

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<sup>47</sup> David Englander, *A Documentary History of Jewish Immigrants*, 235-237

<sup>48</sup> The terms “isolated” and “self-centered” refer to the book by Lewis and Samuel quoted on page 18.

<sup>49</sup> Todd Endelman. *The Jews of Britain*. 174-175. Or refer to quote from Endelman provided on page 8.

<sup>50</sup> Lily Kahn and Aaron Rubin, *Handbook of Jewish languages*, 3. “The common feature of all of these Jewish languages is a Hebrew lexical component, stemming from the fact that all of these diverse Jewish communities shared the use of Hebrew as a

languages such as Yiddish, Ladino, and Judeo-Arabic, with each having their own subdialects (i.e. Russian Yiddish versus Polish Yiddish). In the East End of London, most Jewish immigrants spoke Yiddish.

In addition to their use of Jewish languages, Jews were marked by a shared sense of national belonging and identity as *Am Yisroel* (the nation of Israel), a shared regional attachment to *Eretz Yisroel* (the land of Israel), a shared ancestral legacy, the practice of *kashrut* (Jewish dietary laws), and observance of other *mitzvot* (religious commandments), which dictated all aspects of life from marriage, to dress and appearance, to prayer. To name a few— the Sabbath, the laws of *niddah* (family purity laws), and the daily ritual of *tefillin* (phylacteries). These beliefs and practices were embedded in daily Jewish life and reinforced Jews’ connection to one another, to the land of Israel, and to God. In other words, the ethnic and religious aspects of Jewish identity were interwoven and inextricable from one another.<sup>51</sup> In its best efforts to “de-Judaize” Jewish identity and preserve only certain religious aspects of the faith and practice, state schools employed a meticulous strategy of supplanting the “particularistic” aspects of Jewish identity with the “particulars” of liberal universalism.

Ensuring the success of such a project required the collaboration of a national and local network of politicians, school boards, government commissions, social workers and activists, physicians, principals, and educators. Through the Forster Act’s mandatory allocation of School Boards, local boards were appointed to manage school operations, oversee cleanliness and

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written and liturgical language. In addition, many of these Jewish languages exhibit phonological, morphological, and syntactic features that distinguish them from their non-Jewish counterparts.”

<sup>51</sup> Steven Cohen, “Religion and Ethnicity: Jewish Identity Trends in the United States” 101. “Historically, the religious and ethnic dimensions of Jewish identity have been closely interwoven. In fact, so closely bound are they, that the traditional Jewish lexicon hardly distinguishes between the two concepts. Jewish religious practice, by definition, was observed exclusively by the Jewish people, and notion of Jewish peoplehood, nation, and community were suffused with faith in the Jewish God, the practice of Jewish (religious) law, and the study of ancient religious texts. Indeed, the Bible enjoins Jews to be a “holy people,” fusing, in one succinct phrase, the modern western concepts of religion and ethnicity.

punctuality, and supervise the progress and development of the children. The Jews who were elected and resided on the board were well-educated, wealthy, and part of the existing Anglo-Jewish establishment. The state also appointed Royal Commissions to oversee the progress of Jewish Board Schools specifically. The state and the local board did not discredit the importance of giving the board schools a Jewish character in order to cater to the more traditional immigrant population. Jewish holidays were observed, for example, and the schools were closed in accordance the Jewish calendar.<sup>52</sup>

The state appointed the Royal Commission on Alien Immigration to ensure direct state supervision of progress of Jewish immigrant children. The commission interviewed school headmasters and teachers and the interviews reflected some of the anxiety around the success of this improvement. Questions were posed such as “You do not think these children will become a discredit to the country?”. The commission was particularly concerned with the continued existence of *chederim*. In one particular session in 1903 the following questions are posed to headmaster F.H. Butcher:

“Do you find their attendance at the Chedarim interferes much with you?”  
“Do you know the hours that are kept in the Chedarim now?”  
“You do not know whether complaints were formerly made of the hours being too long in the Chedarim?”  
“You saw no signs of fatigue?”<sup>53</sup>

A letter from Lord Rothschild to his East End Jewish co-religionists reflected the concerns around the traditional *chederim* to preserve *yiddishkeit* and Yiddish. He writes, “[I know how] ardently they desire to see their children brought up in the doctrines of our holy religion, and that they should be properly instructed in Hebrew and in the tenets of our sacred faith. But it has long seemed to me that you may be doing your children harm by the over-zeal which prompts you to

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 226

<sup>53</sup> “Minutes of Evidence before the Royal Commission on Alien Immigration” in *Parliamentary Papers*, 866

send them to the Chedorim for so many hours a day”.<sup>54</sup> Rothschild precedes to detail the various assessment by doctors and inspectors who expressed concern over the students’ appearance of being fatigued, malnourished, and even neglected. “Far be it from me,” he reassured them, “to under-value the religious instruction your children should receive, but I venture to think, that sufficient teaching in this most important subject is given at the free school... I earnestly beg of you, therefore, to take my words to heart and withdraw your children from the Chedorim altogether, or at least reduce the hours during which they attend. They will then grow up healthy and strong, fitted in every way to pursue an honourable career, and with a reasonable prospect of becoming good and worthy English citizens.”<sup>55</sup>

If in Lord Rothschild’s letter it explains that in the Board Schools “a great many hours a week are given to Hebrew reading, translation, Bible history, Hebrew grammar, the observances of the Calendar, and last but not least, to Ethics and the Moral Law”, then what did *chederim* provide for Jewish families that was seen as lacking? Or, more importantly, why were the *chederim* such a common point of debate within in English politics and society when it came to the Jewish Question? The discussion in Russell and Lewis’ book is particularly helpful in this regard, and highlights the problem.

The chief complaints made against the *cheder* are that Yiddish is used as the medium of instruction, that the rooms used are insanitary, and that the hours are too long... It is complained that the use of Yiddish in the *cheder* arrests the process of Anglicisation. Now it is perfectly true that in only a few *chedarim* is instruction given in English... Parents, who themselves speak Yiddish only, like to hear their boys repeat on Saturday what has been learnt during the week. Many of them, too, entertain the prejudice that Hebrew can be better taught through the medium of Yiddish, or even imagine that this jargon has more holiness than English. A prejudice of this kind tends, however, to cure itself...

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<sup>54</sup> Arnold White, *The Modern Jew*, 150-151. Here White is quoting the letter written by Lord Rothschild in his own discussion of the *cheder* in the chapter “The Aloofness of Israel”.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid. 239-240

Russell and Lewis did not agree with the position taken by Lord Rothschild. As discussed, assimilated Jews often exhibited more anxiety towards their unassimilated brethren than liberal non-Jews. However, Russell and Lewis were no different than Lord Rothschild in wanting to see immigrants Jews' completed assimilation. The difference in opinion marked their greater confidence in the school system's ability to assimilate Jewish immigrant children, despite the persistence of *chederim*. As they write, "It stand to reason that the boy brought up in this country, and attending an English school, will grow up an Englishman..."<sup>56</sup>

The public school system immersed Jewish immigrant children in an environment in which Christianity provided a much better framework for citizenship. It is precisely in the public school system that non-Jewish headmasters and teachers could educate Jews in this preferred model and framework. As C.F. Nathan, the non-Jewish schoolmaster of Liverpool Hebrew School writes in his memoir, "The feeling I cherished for this, my one and only 'Non-Christian School' was a most 'Christianlike' feeling. The school opened with a prayer. A desk bell would be rung by the teacher taking the prayer—any one of the Jewish teachers took the prayer with no sign of formality. Hats or caps were donned by the staff and the boys, and the prayer would be said in unison<sup>57</sup>. Such a ritual lies in stark opposition to the traditional prayer service, or *davening*, one would find in *chederim* in the morning, in which pupils recited prayers quietly to themselves for the majority of the service. *Davening* was a staple of Jewish life and in the educating of Jewish children and takes place three times per day. The morning prayer typically lasted forty-five minutes and included three main parts, *Psukei d'Zimrei*, the *Amidah*, and the *Shema* which are all together referred to as *Shacharis*. This was in stark contrast to the school

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<sup>56</sup> C.F. Nathan, *A Schoolmaster Glances Back*, 133-157

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 228



prayer prepared for Jewish immigrant children, of which the entirety of this brief prayer of the Hebrew school is as follows:

Almighty God! We humbly offer unto Thee our praise for all Thy goodness. We thank Thee for the health of body, and of mind, which Thou has mercifully granted us. We thank Thee for the lessons that improve us and for the knowledge we gain from day to day.

Lead us, O God, in Thy ways, so that we may increase in goodness as we increase in knowledge. Keep pure our hearts so that we may think no evil. Guard our lips from falsehood, and our hands from wrong-doing.

Help us, O God, to obey Thy law, and strengthen us to resist temptation.

Help us, O God to do our duty to all about us so that we may work Thy will on the earth, and earn Thy heavenly reward. Amen.

In his comments on this prayer, Nathan notes of only one difference between the Jewish prayer service and the school's— "In our Christian family prayer we ask that we be not led into temptation, whereas in their prayer, the Jews ask for strength to enable them to resist temptation; taking it for granted I suppose, that while they are on this earth, they will always be in temptation."<sup>58</sup> This is far from the only change, however. In the "non-Christian" and "Hebrew" school, the two primary differences in the morning prayer are that it is recited in English, rather than in Hebrew, and that it is entirely void of the extensive amount of prayers which are distinctly Jewish in nature. Often seen as the "cornerstone" of Jewish prayer, the *Shema* is entirely omitted: "Hear, O Israel: Hashem is our God, Hashem, the One and Only", as is the entirety of the *Amidah*, which includes a number of sections which would be problematic for any nation-building project, regardless of the modern state in question. Included in these sections are constant reinforcement and affirmation of a Jewish nation, its spiritual purpose, and its attachment to a distinct language, ancestry, and region. They include prayers such as a blessing of the Jewish forefathers and foremothers, for the redemption of the Jewish nation, for "the ingathering of the exiles" to the Land of Israel, and the rebuilding of Jerusalem and the Davidic

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<sup>58</sup> Ibid., 133-157

Kingdom<sup>59</sup>. Eliminating such daily affirmation of their nationhood, brotherhood, and shared moral duty was a crucial part of England's de-Judaization project.

English culture was perceived as being far more humanistic and universal than Jewish culture. And while these aspects of Jewish identity were perceived as being “tribal” and “particularistic”, the inculcation of “universal” sensibilities, ethics, language, and tastes of liberal English society took no less time, energy, or education than did the inculcation of Jewishness in Jewish children. Like their English counterparts, Jewish immigrant children were introduced in public schools to everything from popular cuisine to popular sports. It was even a priority of the state that young Jewish boys, so used to the rigorous learning schedule of the *cheder*, to be taught the importance of sports in cultivating a fine sense of character and sportsmanship. A notable number of headmasters and teachers perceived the education of Jewish immigrant children to be an overall very successful project. Jewish children were often perceived as being incredibly studious and an asset of the state.

Despite those who perceived the education of Jewish immigrant youth to be a success, as England approached World War I, Jews were far from being perceived by English state and society at large as being loyal individuals worthy of citizenship. Antisemitism rose steadily, with both liberals and conservatives supporting anti-alien legislation during the war years. The frustration with Jews and the rise of antisemitism cannot be easily pinned on any lack of success of assimilation and subsequent shirking of military service, given that a great number of Jewish youth grew up to either volunteer or enlist in the British army without trouble. Within the first few months of World War I, Jews boasted a higher volunteer rate in the country than the general

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<sup>59</sup> “Shacharis for Weekdays.” *The Complete Artscroll Siddur*, 84-120

public. Twenty percent of the 50,000 total Jews to fight World War I volunteered during this time in contrast with about the five to ten percent of the general public.<sup>60</sup>

During the four years of war in England, fifty thousand Jews served in total, or twenty percent of the total Jewish population. This matched the twenty percent of the United Kingdom's population serving. The percentage of Jewish men who were legally obliged to but tried to evade enlistment into the army, whether for political or religious reasons, was both small and immaterial to the war effort at large. However, the urgency with which additional, anti-Jewish immigration policies were desired by the public and the rise in violence against Jews was exponential when compared to the number of "Jewish shirkers". The vast majority of Jews who did not enlist had no legal obligation to as they were not naturalized British citizens. Yet their absence in the army caused, as David Englander notes, "the subject of deepest controversy" despite Jews' equal representation in the military. Jews were accused of "leeching" off Britain's economy while its non-Jewish populations were off fighting. With the state's compulsory conscription policy of 1916, immigrant Jews without citizenship were no longer exempt from enlistment.<sup>61</sup>

Despite widespread protest in England against compulsory service, the issue of Jewish shirkers continued to inspire particularly grave concern in Whitechapel. Balfour's opinion on the matter were summarized in the minutes of a meeting of the War Cabinet in 1918: "M. Litvinoff, the representative of the Bolshevik Government, would undoubtedly exempt all the East End Jews from military service, if he could. This would create an intolerable position in the East End, where these Russian Jews were making large sums of money by supplanting British shopkeepers

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<sup>60</sup> Eleanore Rathbone. *Facts and Falsehoods about the Jews*. 6-7

<sup>61</sup> Englander, 313-315

who had been called up for military service”.<sup>62</sup> In the *Morning Post*, a similar sentiment was shared, “Every legal trick had been tried to leave them free to profiteer out of the calling-up of their British-born neighbours... Not for the first time since the war has the Russian Jews made public display of his hostility to an Empire of whose generous hospitality he avails himself freely”.<sup>63</sup>

Sascha Auerbach attributes this political paranoia and rise in antisemitism to the rise of nationalism during the war. “With the sudden outbreak of war in 1914, patriotic recruitment campaigns and sensationalist press stories emphasizing the ‘barbarism’ of German troops encouraged the London public to draw lines between ‘ally,’ ‘enemy,’ and ‘neutral,’ at the very least, and between ‘British’ and ‘non-British,’ if at all possible... During World War I, an individual’s willingness to serve in the armed forces was often seen by many as a key indicator of loyalty to the nation.”<sup>64</sup> According to Auerbach, Jewish immigrants were among those who were particularly vulnerable to the demands of nationalism “lacking either the time or desire to adapt themselves fully to their new surroundings, [they] were more likely to retain their own language, dress, and habits, and, thus, were more easily identifiable as ‘outsiders’”.<sup>65</sup>

Yet nationalism was not the only political ideology in England which differentiated between “outsiders” and “insiders”. As we have seen throughout this essay’s analysis, liberal political discourses also perpetuated the idea that Jews were outsiders aloof to the struggles, passions, and interests of humanity at large, however much these traits were credited to centuries of imposed isolation. Their Jewish “language, dress, and habits” perpetuated their segregation and precluded their brotherhood with the non-Jewish world. Like nationalism, liberal politics

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<sup>62</sup> “Minutes of a Meeting of the War Cabinet”, January 23, 1918.

<sup>63</sup> Englander, 299

<sup>64</sup> Auerbach. 594-595

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 595

reinforced the boundaries between those who stood for “humanity” and those who stood for their own self-interest.

During the war years, Jewish groups who were perceived as unsuccessful in their assimilation drew profound and repeated condemnation from non-Jews and assimilated Jews alike. Constituting an minute percentage of those evading enlistment, religious Jews (or Orthodox Jews) were met with little sympathy in the district tribunals established for the deliberation of military exemption requests. The burden of proving the inherent rationality of one’s need for religious exemption fell on those seeking its request, with orthodox Jews’ pleas frequently rejected. Their arguments for exemption were perceived not only as insincere, but as inconsistent with Jewish philosophy, at least in the eyes of the British tribunals. In one particular case of an orthodox Jew’s request, a passage from the Old Testament was read aloud by a member of the tribunal which affirmed “God’s expectation” that Jews engage in battle when necessary. In other case, the request was met with the question, “Do you mean to tell the Tribunal that all the Jews who have joined the Army are going to the lower regions because they have not carried out the Jewish faith?”<sup>66</sup>

While immigrant Jews could find solidarity and support amongst one another, the greater Anglo-Jewish establishment passionately sided with the state and publicly censured those who did not. One of the greatest objections among the immigration population to enlistment – most of whom were neither orthodox nor fully assimilated – was their refusal to participate in a war effort allied with the violently anti-Jewish Russian Empire. Such a position was not reason enough to request exemption from Anglo-Jewry’s perspective, however, and several liberal Jews went to considerable lengths to show it. While Lucien Wolf was at one point the most outspoken

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<sup>66</sup> *Observer*, April 1, 1916, 3.

critic of the Russian Empire's treatment of Jews, he expressed deep regret in being the founder of an anti-Russian newspaper in England during the war given the newfound urgency of the alliance between the British and Russian Empire and ceased its publication. Much of the damage had already been done in liberal Jews' pre-war critiques of the Anglo-Russo alliance, however, which only deepened their unease. While many had been openly critical of this alliance, Anglo-Jewry could not afford to take the risks of dissension. In 1917, Wolf attempted to reaffirm Jewish loyalty to Britain to Alfred Balfour, now the new foreign secretary: "We trusted that there would be no dissonance between the interests of the Allies in the war and the interests of the Jews, but we realized that if such a dissonance arose it was our duty to subordinate Jewish interests to the interests of our native country and of its allies".<sup>67</sup>

Other liberal Jews took to publicly condemning Jewish "Conscientious Objectors" – the legal term for those who protested conscription on moral and religious grounds. An article published in the *Jewish Chronicle* read, 'The Jews are a peaceful people, their ideals are ideals of peace, and their history is strewn with the stern lesson of the calamities that follow in the wake of war. But the vast majority of them realize that to submit to the reign of Teutonic force would be to bring not peace but a sword...'<sup>68</sup> Home Secretary, Herbert Samuel stated that, 'Everything that is Jewish, even the fine Jewish ideal of peace...points the finger of scorn, derision and contempt at the Jewish C.O.'<sup>69</sup>

Throughout the war, Jews were increasingly at risk of being perceived as concerned with their own self-interests. In response to Israel Zangwill's objection to the Anglo-Russo alliance on Jewish grounds, an op-ed in *The Times* launched the following critique: "Mr. Israel Zangwill

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<sup>67</sup> Mark Levine, "Anglo-Jewish Foreign Policy in Crisis", 186

<sup>68</sup> *The Jewish Chronicle*, January 28, 1916

<sup>69</sup> Hebert Samuel, *The Jewish Chronicle*, November 19, 1915

informs us in *The Times* of yesterday that, because of Jewish disabilities in Russia, “the Entente with Russia was too high a price to pay, even for safety against the German peril.” Most of us are willing to believe that the majority of British Jews are (unlike Mr. Zangwill) first Englishmen and then Hebrews. But utterances such as his make it necessary to recall that, in the Press of Europe and America, Jewish influence means German influence... What right has Mr. Zangwill to lecture us and to talk lightly of “the German peril” – which is no peril to him or to his people—when England alone in the world has given, at the expense of her working classes and of her ratepayers, a reckless hospitality to the Russian Jews, whose interests he puts above those of the British race!”<sup>70</sup>

When the British Empire severed ties with Russia after the Bolshevik Revolution in 1916, Russian Jews who had not yet been naturalized within England suddenly became enemy aliens. About one thousand Jews were repatriated to Russia and never heard from again. It was Jews’ betrayal to the empire through their loyalty to the Bolshevik Revolution that now triggered hostility and even violence against them. Optimism towards Jewish immigration diminished, and greater anti-Alien immigration was passed in one day with bipartisan support in 1914, with additional provisions passed in 1918, 1919, and 1920<sup>71</sup> and by 1920, Russian Jews were effectively barred from entering England. Jews required a profound amount of time, energy, and resources from state and society. In times of ease and prosperity, welcoming Jews into the country was laudable. In the war years, it was irresponsible.

The question of Zionist politics’ influence on England’s Jews also became a growing matter of concern. The Anglo-Jewish establishment believed Jews could not have England’s best

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<sup>70</sup> J.K.C. Bodley, *The Times*, August 21, 1914

<sup>71</sup> Endelman, 190-191

interest at heart if their political priorities during the war lied in establishing their own homeland. More importantly, Zionism's influence begged the question, would the Jews of England ever be able to overcome their internal struggle with their identity? British Jews became increasingly frustrated with young Jews in the East End who, not yet fully assimilated, were drawn to the politics of Jewish nationalism. There was also gradual growing support in British politics towards the idea of a Jewish state in the Middle East. Zionist political thinkers in Europe, such as Chaim Weizmann, had undoubtedly made an appealing case to British politicians on the imperial advantages of having a British-sponsored Jewish homeland as a political ally in the Middle East. In a geographically strategic location, the State of Israel would further ensure British access to the Suez Canal and thus to India.

In light of these negotiations, and the divisiveness among England's Jewish population, many within the Anglo-Jewish establishment believed Zionism would inflict irreparable damage and reverse decades of effort and resources dedicated to Jewish integration. In a letter to *The Times*, the Conjoint Committee of the Board of Deputies of British Jews and the Anglo-Jewish Association publicly declared their opposition to Zionism, positing that "Jewish nationhood" was obsolete, anachronistic term which no longer characterized the lived experiences of modern Jews with the "Jewish religion being the only test of a Jew".<sup>72</sup> Such beliefs were a testimony to the English state's success in de-nationalizing Judaism and Jewish identity. On the other hand, such statements were proof among many in the East End that Jews could not live freely in countries which sought to deny them their identity as *Am Yisroel*, or the nation of Israel. Interestingly, Zionism in England took on somewhat of a more religious nature, unlike in other European

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<sup>72</sup> "The Future of the Jews." *The Times*. May 29, 1917



countries where the secularization of Jewish nationhood remained central. In England, however, the establishment of the State of Israel appealed to orthodox and non-orthodox Jews alike.<sup>73</sup>

Before the onset of war, the social and spiritual immaturity of Jewish immigrants could be solved through compulsory childhood education. With its onset, and increasing anxiety over allocation of resources and energy, greater boundaries were necessary to avoid burdening an already overtaxed state with more Jews. Like their conservative counterparts, liberal politicians reified the right of the state to define the parameters and limits of tolerance towards Jews depending on the needs and well-being of society at any given moment. And in times of peace and prosperity, it was liberal values, not Jewish ones, that shaped Jews' education and integration. Engaged in a perpetual internal struggle with their own identity and history, Jews were more susceptible to illiberal beliefs and ethnocentric behaviors.

Unlike Protestant Englishmen who had every advantage of birth, Jews were made acutely aware of the stained legacy and history they inherited. Despite the passionate rhetoric of tolerance, unfettered Judaism was a danger to civil society— the cultivation of liberal values, behaviors, and sensibilities in Jews unequivocally demanded their rigorous de-Judaization. This de-Judaization was essential to individual cultivation of the self, as well as to the well-being of society as a whole. Obsessed with tribalism and the mundane, Jews had to be educated in the cultivation of love and “spirit”.<sup>74</sup> Not unlike Christianity, liberal political thought positioned Jews as being farther away from the human ideal than Christians. As David Nirenberg writes, “It is one of the great ironies of the Enlightenment (and so far as I know, not previously noted) that

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<sup>73</sup> Lewis and Samuel, *The Jew in London*, 108-109

<sup>74</sup> David Nirenberg, *Anti-Judaism: The Western Tradition*. 56.

all its most famous treatises on toleration and freedom of thought depended on separating Judaism from Christianity, and isolating the former in an archaic and execrable past”.<sup>75</sup>

Herein lies the paradox of liberal political thought: That the realization of equality between Jews and non-Jews necessitated the former’s subjugation to the latter in morality and in politics. This inextricable tension between the necessity of regulation for the realization of freedom; of inequality for the realization of equality, vexes political theorists and social scientists to this day, whether liberal or postcolonial. How can multicultural states and societies achieve equality between diverse groups of people whose practices and beliefs are not equally ethical? As Mahmood reminds us, “One of the greatest difficulties in conceiving of liberal secularism as something other than the principle of state neutrality toward religion is that it puts into peril the possibility of civil and political equality.” Without the potential for neutrality, certain ethnic and religious groups will inevitably be judged more favorably than others and given greater autonomy regardless of how “secularized” a liberal state has ostensibly become. Until this inescapable reality is reckoned with, scholars and political philosophers will continue to deny the existence of inequality in the political projects to which they are most devoted.

The purpose of this essay was to illuminate a historical narrative within European Jewish history which has been largely overlooked by scholars precisely because of this paradox. In doing so, it strove to illustrate the inequality liberalism reinforced between Jews and “normative” non-Jewish groups. In maintaining the illusion of equality, scholars inevitably inflate the privileges and status Jews enjoyed within liberal polities in the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century and avoid implicating groups perceived as “genuinely” tolerant in the rise of antisemitism. The lack of willingness to wholeheartedly admit to the inequality between Jews and non-Jews in these

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<sup>75</sup> Ibid., 357

politics implicates liberal and postcolonial scholars alike. Indeed, the profession of tolerance in politics and in scholarship remains the hallmark of Western political thought.

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