In the western world, attitudes towards Jews and Muslims historically stem from the fact that the West is by definition of Christian heritage. Judaism and Islam, the other Abrahamic religions, share with Christianity considerable theological similarities, many of them the result of mutual contact and of the influence on all three of Hellenism. The Christian and Muslim-dominated worlds have been neighbors, with some Christians living among Muslims, some Muslims living among Christians, and Jews living among both. In short, Christians, Muslims, and Jews are closely related by the facts of theology and geography. This should guarantee a certain continuity to the history of the relationship among them, including a continuity in how they imagine one another.

The relationship among Christians, Jews, and Muslims lends itself to different strategic triangulations: Jews and Muslims against Christians, Muslims and Christians against Jews, or Jews and Christians against Muslims. Today the dictates of the Israel-Palestine conflict, with most Muslims on the Palestinian side and most Jews as well as large numbers of Christians on the Israeli, unsurprisingly encourage discourses of a “Judeo-Christian tradition,” a post-World-War II idea born of a combination of Christian guilt about the Holocaust and western, including Jewish, support for the Zionist project. But in earlier times – I am speaking of centuries going back perhaps to the very beginning of Islam – Jews were associated in the Christian mind with Muslims. Certainly, when it comes to the long nineteenth century, a “Judeo-Muslim tradition” would have made at least as much sense to western Christians, including the scholars among them, as a “Judeo-Christian tradition.” One of my goals is to show that it would also have made sense to most western, modernizing, or to use that common misnomer, “assimilated” Jews. It would have made sense, we will see, because it was strategic. “Self-orientalizing” Jews wished to increase the symbolic capital of being Jewish by hitching the Jewish image to that of the Orient. For they took the imagined “Orient” at its face value, as a place of great spiritual, not to say sexual, allure.

1 I owe the thought expressed in this sentence to Susannah Heschel’s intervention at the Workshop on Antisemitism and Islamophobia, University of Oxford, June 15, 2015.
Let us not pretend that scholars have been immune to the overall strategies of the communities they belong to. In the long nineteenth century, many Christian and Jewish scholars in the West emphasized commonalities between Muslims and Jews. Today the reaction by academics of all three heritages tends to be very cautious. Identifying the many historical conjunctions at which the potential for linking Jew and Muslim was NOT realized, some stop there and reject any joint study at all. Those of us who do choose to study representations of Jew and Muslim together certainly have an agenda: recognizing that each has been imagined through similar language and imagery should, we hope, battle mutual intolerance and extremism.

Fortunately, as I hope to show, this personal preference to seek similarities in the western representation of Muslims and Jews is, in spite of many extremely important differences, bolstered by an overwhelming array of facts. When Edward Said mused that orientalism was a “strange, secret sharer of Western anti-Semitism,” he revealed nothing new about the facts. What was new, rather, was that those facts had become a secret. For the evidence that everyone in the West, Jew or gentile, considered Jews to be an oriental people in the long nineteenth century is absolutely overwhelming.

In addition to demonstrating this fact, I would also like to examine some of the lessons the archive may hold for current debates about the notions of race and racialization. When it comes to the notion of the “Semite,” but also more generally, “race” and “nation” are in my view too readily equated by some scholars. In fact, it may be profitable to keep them apart, at least in our case, and even to introduce an intermediate term, the “pan-nation.” “Semite,” like “Aryan,” are pan-national groupings based on linguistic kinship relations uncovered by that shock troops of long-nineteenth-century scholarship, the philologists. Thus, after a description of the facts, I will argue for the inclusion in debates on racialization of a clear distinction between nation and race, and of the pan-nation in between.

**Moorish Style Synagogues**

To look at those facts, let us begin with September 5, 1844, when the cheerful congregants of the Israeliite House of God in Hamburg gathered to consecrate their newly built temple. Together, men and women, boys and girls, intoned a

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hymn specially composed for the occasion. *Ost und Westen, schön verbunden*, they sang, “East and West, beautifully united.” ³

Undoubtedly, many of these Jewish citizens knew of the *West-East Diwan*, wherein the widely adored Wolfgang Goethe, inspired by the Persian poet Hafez, included the following verse,

> Gottes ist der Orient!
> Gottes ist der Occident!
> Nord- und südliches Gelände
> Ruht im Frieden seiner Hände.

God’s is the East!
God’s is the West!
Northerly and southerly lands
Rest peacefully in His hands. ⁴

“God’s is the West, God’s is the East” is a paraphrased passage from the Qur’an. The *surat al-Baqarah* adds, “Wherever you go, the presence of God is there.” ⁵ Goethe attaches to this theological message a special geopolitical and cultural meaning. Goethe’s *Diwan* is an example of the desire to unite Orient and Occident, meaning the lands of Islam and of Christianity, but also the ancient spirituality of the East and the modern civilization of the West. This was a romantic goal that would later expand further east to include the spiritual traditions of first Hindu, Buddhist, and Zoroastrian India and then, lastly, of Chinese and Japanese mystic Buddhism.

In 1844, it was this ideal that the Hamburg Jews were responding to in their own, specifically Jewish, way. Whether or not they individually remembered Goethe’s work, they like many other Germans shared in its spirit. Beautifully binding together East and West was something that many people, Jewish or not, thought that Jews could do.

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⁵ *Surat al-Baqra* (“The Cow”), Quran 2:115.
Was this self-orientalization? Yes, it was – as long as we accept that Jews were orientalized by others before they were orientalized by themselves; and as long as we keep in mind that this self-orientalization, like orientalization in general, was often felt to be praise rather than denigration. Self-orientalization was not in any way the same thing as self-hatred. The Hamburg Jews imagined their East-West hybridity with pride.

They were certainly not alone. A good decade before the Israeliite Temple was built in Hamburg, it appears that the Bavarian government ordered that new synagogues in the Kingdom be built in an oriental style. By the nineteen sixties, so-called Moorish Style synagogues stood throughout most of the modernizing Jewish world, in liberal and what we would now call modern Orthodox German-speaking communities in and outside Germany and Austria, including the United States. Soon the German-speakers were to be imitated by forward-looking Jews from England to Russia.

The Cincinnati synagogue known as the Rabbi Wise Temple today, built in 1862, is still believed to have the tallest minarets in the United States. Its large entrance door is reminiscent of great mosques like that of Isfahan. It is worth noting that the synagogues of Moorish Spain were not well known at the time, and to the extent that Moorish buildings inspired the so-called Moorish style synagogues, the prime example was the Alhambra of Grenada. But there were no minarets or, to refer to another common feature of these synagogues, no domes, in either Muslim or Jewish Spain. In fact, Spain was not the inspiration for Moorish-style synagogues. Contemporary documents seldom refer to the so-called Golden Age of the Jews in Spain but much more often refer to the perceived kinship between Jews and Arabs. In fact, the style was originally more often referred to as “Arabian” rather than “Moorish.”

Characteristic is the commentary by Ludwig Förster, the architect of the much imitated Dohany Street Synagogue in Budapest and a slightly earlier attempt in Vienna Leopoldstadt. Regarding the Viennese synagogue, completed in 1858, Förster said that architects must “choose, when building and Israeliite Temple, those architectural forms that have been used by oriental ethnic groups that are related to the Israeliite people, and in particular the Arabs, and thereby in general to allow the introduction of only such modifications that are occasioned by the climate and by new discoveries in the art of building.” Förster was a Viennese architec...
gentile, and his sentiment was often shared by the non-Jewish building authorities. In 1872, the Accademia dell’Arte of Florence after researching German precedents more or less forced the local Jews to build their large new tempio israelitico in an “Arab style.” However, Jewish communities often agreed quite happily. The number of Jewish architects building Moorish style synagogues increased steadily. One was Marco Treves, the main architect of the Florence tempio, who would also build the Moorish style synagogue of Vercelli.

In reality these synagogues were very modern and western in terms of construction technique and overall structure. The oriental elements were confined to decoration. Indeed the oriental style often served to surreptitiously import church-like elements, a process that Orthodox Jews and some Christians heavily objected to. The Cincinnati as well as the Budapest temples like many other, less famous ones, had two minarets, not one like most mosques. The two towers were reminiscent of the two steeples common on larger churches. The domes, introduced ostensibly on an Arabian model, happened to be slightly Orientalized versions of church cupolas. There was stained glass and an organ, played on Shabbat preferably by a renowned gentile musician. But the liturgical music developed for cantor and organ by Jewish composers often emphasized, or even invented, elements in the Jewish musical tradition that resembled the elements of the chants of the East. This marriage of East and West expressed perfectly the idea of Jews as an oriental people, cousins of Arabs, which – while always contested – captured the imagination of many Jews in the long nineteenth century.

How did the modern, even so-called assimilated Ashkenazi Jews of the long nineteenth century come to be seen as racial cousins of the Arabs, the people of Muhammad and Islam? Why did they accept this ascription and were proud of it? Why does all this seem odd today? And what would be the best analytical or theoretical framework to account for it?

8 Reale Accademia delle Arti del Disegno in Firenze to the President of the Council of the Israe
tellite Community of Firenze, December 5, 1872. Archives of the Jewish Community of Florence.

9 See, Kalmar, “The Israelite Temple of Florence.”
Terminology

To answer these questions, let us begin with some terminology and a note on language and geography.

The Orient in this context is essentially Muslim-dominated North Africa and West Asia. This heartland of Islam was long the focus of what Europeans and Americans meant by the Orient. So when we speak of orientalizing the Jews we mean likening them to Muslims.

The long nineteenth century, as Eric Hobsbawm delimited it, lasted from 1789 to 1914, but of course he was not suggesting that these dates marked sharp transitions. The orientalization of the Jews began, much earlier, though as I shall soon have a chance to show, Jewish self-orientalization almost fits into the Hobsbawmian boundaries, though the archive requires an extension to 1933 or may be even 1948.

The dominant language of both the orientalization and the self-orientalization of the Jews was German. This has to do with the nature of German orientalist scholarship, which as Suzanne Marchand showed had a strong theological preoccupation with the Bible seen as an oriental document. It also has to do with the leading position that German-speaking Jews occupied in the liberal and Reform movements of the long nineteenth century. When I say German-speaking, I am not thinking only of Germany. In Budapest many and in Prague almost all Jews spoke German as their first language, and most of those who migrated to America from there reckoned themselves German Jews. But even in St. Petersburg and Odessa, in Warsaw and in Moscow, acculturated Jews spoke German as an important second language. They looked down upon the Yiddish spoken by many of the Orthodox and Hassidic Jews, who were referred to as Ostjuden, meaning “Eastern Jews.” Most of the Ostjuden lived in the European East, in the Russian Empire including Russian-ruled Poland, and in eastern Austria-Hungary. But Ostjude was more of a cultural than a geographic term. Yiddish speaking, Orthodox Jews were referred to as Ostjuden even in the West. In English Franz Boas, the German-born father of American anthropology, translated the term as “East European Hebrews,” and considered them a distinctive physical type, separate from western Jews like himself.

The paradox that is very important to remember is that it was western, modernizing Jews who often became enthusiastic about their racial affinity with the Orient. The more insular Ostjuden either never heard of the concept or opposed its expressions. As for the “real” oriental Jews, that is the Jews of the Orient, of North Africa and West Asia, orientalization did not significantly impact them in the long nineteenth century. It did become relevant once many mizrahim or ori-
Orientalizing the Jews

It is almost a truism today, yet it is only partly true, that the Orient represented to the long nineteenth century West the essential Other. It is also only partly true that, as Gil Anidjar showed, Jews and Arabs (the latter being an ethnic metonym for Muslims) are varieties of a common figure of the Christian West’s enemy. Otherness and animosity are not the only relations that define the imaginative construction of the Orient, or of Jews and Muslims, in the West. In the long nineteenth century, Christian theologians and philologists imagined Judaism as an oriental religion, and this judgment was accepted by their Jewish colleagues as well as by the general Jewish and gentile public. Christianity itself was therefore seen, through its Jewish origins, as a religion with oriental roots. The Orient was not only the Other but also the Mother of Christianity.

Christians often respected their oriental heritage but saw it as superseded by the coming of Christ. They saw both Jews and Muslims as stubbornly clinging to an oriental version of monotheism. It is this attitude that made it possible for Christians at different times in the three religions’ history to imagine Islam as a throwback to Judaism and, in the long nineteenth century, to imagine Jews as racial relatives of Muslim Arabs.

We find some parallels in the artistic representation of male biblical Jews and living Muslims at least as early as thirteenth century Tuscan art. Both were depicted wearing a specific kind of head scarf. This was replaced in the late fourteenth century, as the power of the Ottoman Turks became palpable in Europe, with a turban on the Turkish model. This convention spread throughout Latin

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Christendom. It can still be seen followed in some church art and nativity scenes today.12

Renaissance scholars were interested in both Hebrew and Arabic philosophical texts, although their focus was often on translations of and commentaries on ancient Greek philosophy. The understanding of the Bible as an oriental text did not develop substantially until the seventeenth century, when it became common in centers of learning such as Oxford and Leiden. The Leiden Arabist Albert Schultens counseled the use of the Arabic language for elucidating biblical Hebrew.

In England, the term “orientalism” appears to have been invented in the context of researching the poetic imagination of the Hebrews, which was thought not only to have created the language of the Bible, but also influenced that of the ancient Greeks. To my knowledge, the first occurrence of the term “orientalism” in English was the Essay on Pope’s Odyssey published in 1726, by Joseph Spence (1699–1768). This is how one of Spence’s characters comments on a sentence from Homer:

“Of the sun being perished out of Heaven, and of darkness rushing over the Earth!” (...) This whole prophetical vision ... is the True Sublime; and in particular, gives us an higher Orientalism than we meet with in any other part of Homer’s writings.

Spence bases his comments here on the then common assumption that Homer knew the Bible. Later in the eighteenth century biblical criticism that resorted to the philology of non-Hebrew languages of the Orient included the work of Robert Lowth in England. Lowth collaborated with scholars at the University of Göttingen, such as Johann David Michaelis.

Michaelis in turn was the teacher of Johann Gottfried Eichhorn, who is credited with being one of the founders of the so-called new biblical criticism. The philologists who belonged to this school were often trained in Arabic as well as Hebrew.

The philologers were in dialogue with the philosophers. Among the latter, Georg Hegel is the most worthy of mention. Hegel’s monumental Philosophy of History was based on a reading of a vast corpus of philological work. To Hegel Judaism and Islam were both typical religions of the western Orient, forming a transition from the more purely oriental religions of India and China to the Chris-

tian West.\textsuperscript{13} Hegel’s Islam cannot be understood without Hegel’s Judaism, as it was to him only a late mutation of the Jewish religious principle. To Hegel the Jewish mission was exhausted with the incarnation of Christ. Judaism should have disappeared at that point. But not only did it not disappear; its religious principle even produced a delayed reaction, an anomalous upsurge of \textit{Begeisterung}, a belated swan song of energy, and that was Islam.

Hegel’s technical analysis need not detain us here. Suffice it to note that Judaism and Islam represented to him a highly developed form of religion, but not as high as Christianity. He called both Judaism and Islam “Arabian” religions and judged that the Arabian – later to be called Semitic – \textit{Geist} or spirit was not capable of proceeding to the next stage. Protestant Christianity, the end of the history of religions, could only be produced by the Germanic \textit{Volksgeist} or ethnic/national/racial spirit.

Although Hegel’s scheme is clearly a partially secular equivalent of Christian supersessionism, it is probably a mistake to think that he meant to disparage Jews and Muslims. His final stage of religion crucially depended on the helping hand of the “Arabian” spirit to bring it to fruition. This was probably thought by Hegel to be a great merit.

Appreciation of the value of ancient Israel could not fail to have consequences for attitudes towards living Jews. Hegel was a supporter of legal equality for Jews. The movement for Jewish emancipation was initiated by gentile thinkers, such as Wilhelm Dohm, who agreed that living Jews were currently a morally corrupt lot, given to usury and communal selfishness, but recognized the noble character of ancient Israel. They believed that doing away with the legal disabilities of the modern Jews could return them to that former state of glory. Jewish emancipation was, in other words, a project of national restoration. Some even favored accomplishing that end by restoring a Jewish state; that is, by returning the Jews to the Orient, a long standing dream among some streaks of Protestantism.

Not everyone, however, was necessarily appreciative about oriental character, whether seen in Arabs or Jews. The dubious merit of formulating the features of a common Semitic spirit belonged to the French orientalist, writer, and philosopher, Ernest Renan. Ever fond of contrarian opinions, Renan shocked Christians and Jews alike by suggesting that the Semites, whom he called by that name, were unimaginative people incapable of creating genuine mythology. Monotheism was the product of the desert where Renan, probably thinking of Muhammad more

than of Moses, thought that Semitic religion originated. Rich myths are not born in such a stark environment, but in the forests inhabited by multiple gods.

Although Renan eventually insisted that living Jews were no longer to be equated with their ancient forebears, his attack on the philosemitic link between oriental religion and modern Judaism was enough for leading Jewish scholars like Haim Steinthal and Daniel Chwolson¹⁴ to react with shock and to polemicize vehemently.

Jewish Self-Orientalization

Many, though certainly not all, Jews – such as the worshippers gathered in Moorish style synagogues – responded to the gentile orientalization of themselves by espousing it themselves, and by protecting the symbolic capital of the “good” Orient against criticisms such as Renan’s. Their response was strategic. In the eighteen-seventies, the West’s imperial project was clearly running into resistance by the natives, including many Muslims and Arabs. In tandem, the always ambiguous and contested image of the Orient was increasingly acquiring pronounced negative characteristics, opposing the backward Orient to the progressive West (it is this period that Said’s work focused on). Jews had been seduced into self-orientalization when orientalism still appeared, at least on the surface, to be admiring towards the East. As negative elements which later became more obvious, self-orientalization required a defensive twist of the Jews. It made them into vocal defenders of the imagined Orient as the equal of the West.

It was in the earlier, more pro-oriental mood of the early and mid nineteenth century that Jewish attachment to the Orient was famously articulated by Benjamin Disraeli. He was not only a brilliantly successful politician and Queen Victoria’s favorite Prime Minister, but also a prolific and widely read author. Technically and perhaps in his own way religiously, it is true, Disraeli was not a Jew but a Christian, since he had been taken to the baptismal font by his parents when he was still a young boy. But he freely referred to himself as a Jew, as did his contemporaries. There is a famous apocryphal story that, when in 1835 O’Connell, the powerful Irish parliamentarian, attacked his Jewish ancestry, Disraeli replied without hesitation: “Yes, I am a Jew, and when the ancestors of the right honor-

able gentleman were brutal savages in an unknown island, mine were priests in the temple of Solomon.” Though it may be untrue, the episode accords well with the spirit of Disraeli’s novels such as *Tancred*, published in 1847, where he wrote of “some flat-nosed Frank, full of bustle and puffed-up with self-conceit (a race spawned perhaps in the morasses of some Northern forest hardly yet cleared.)” The *chutzpah* is ratcheted up as he, in contrast, speaks of the Jews.

Disraeli’s proud self-orientalization was probably aided by the fact that he was of Sephardi rather than Ashkenazi descent. His appearance only added to the exotic impression he made on the average Englishman: he had large dark eyes and his hair fell about his olive-colored face in large black, un-English curls. “A little black Jew, and a very Arab one,” the phrase Jacques Derrida would use to describe himself, also applied to Disraeli. If the Jew in general was, in the western imagination, almost white but not quite, Disraeli was even less white than the rest.

But it was not only the Sephardim but all Jews that he describes in *Tancred* as an “Arabian tribe,” while the Arabs are “only Jews upon horseback.” Together, Arab and Jew are depicted as a favored race destined to receive divine revelation. When a character in *Tancred* says, with the author’s obvious approval, that “God never spoke except to an Arab,” he means of course that Moses, the Prophets of Israel, Jesus, and Mohammed were all Arabs. Disraeli fancied himself a descendant of what, certainly in God’s mind, was the world’s best stock.

As I have mentioned, however, not all Jews and not all Gentiles took on the habit of orientalizing the Jewish people. I am not aware of anyone of importance who actively opposed it, but some of the important debates about the so-called “Jewish Question” ignored the Orient altogether. In 1789, when the debate about emancipating Jews as equal citizens first came up in the revolutionary National Assembly in France, the agenda included at the same emancipating actors and executioners. I do not wish to deny the permanence of the racial and religious elements in the contemporary image of the Jews, and I will come back to that issue later. But we must recognize that there was in the Middle Ages and continuing to our own day an occupational and economic quasi-definition of the “Jew.” This associated the Jew with money. In anti-Jewish imagery Jesus’ disciple suggestively named Judas, betrays the Savior of Humanity for silver coins. In the middle ages and in modern times, the Jew was portrayed as a moneylender and trader. Like professional acting, engaging in finance was not then the celebrity

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occupation that it has become. It was thought to be more like hanging people: a
necessary activity but one that morally pollutes its practitioners. Something like
selling cell phones today.

There was no question of religious or ethnic/racial identity for Count Ton-
nerrre, who defended Jewish emancipation on condition that Jews are given rights
as individuals and not as a “nation”: a typically French sentiment echoed later
by Napoleon. The attitude also permeated the thinking of many Jewish politi-
cal thinkers of the socialist to the liberal stripe, throughout the long nineteenth
century. They expected Jewish citizens to benefit not from a recognition of corpo-
rate rights but from a relegation of religious distinction from the political to the
private sphere.

Karl Marx was one of them. Like Disraeli, Marx was routinely considered
an ethnic Jew in spite of his childhood baptism extorted by family ambitions.
However, he does not touch on Jewish race at all, or the Orient, in his famous
or infamous 1844 essay on the Jewish Question. He sets the religious Jew almost
contemptuously aside and like a good anthropologists prefers to look at the
real, every day Jew of Alltagjude, whom he defines almost entirely by his finan-
cial activities. Religion like race was for Marx a kind of a red herring, or a smoke
screen that covered up the historical importance of social class.

Marx was heard and responded to by his fellow correspondent at the Neue
Rheinische Zeitung, Moses Hess. In Rome and Jerusalem, published in 1862, Hess
decided to stand Marx on his head when he declaimed, “The race struggle is
primary; the class struggle is secondary.” Now those who battled in Hess’s “race
struggle” were the Aryans and the Semites. His “Rome” and Jerusalem” were
mere metaphors for these two “races.” On the other hand, when the Italian risorg-
imento politician, David Levi, spoke (some 20 years later) of the fight between
Rome and Jerusalem, he meant an actual event in ancient history. It was, he said,
the struggle of “a handful of men who in the name of nationality opposed their
existence against the entire Roman world.”

It was an oriental nationality Levi’s Israelites fought for, against an occiden-
tal Roman Emprie. Levi’s discourse, like Hess’, is permeated with binary oppo-
sitions like the following: “The Occident investigates, experiments, decomposes

17 „Der Rassenkampf ist das Ursprüngliche, der Klassenkampf das Sekundäre.” Moses Hess, Rom
und Jerusalem, die letzte Nationalitätsfrage; Briefe und Noten (Prague, n. d.), 211 (Epilogue, sec-
 tion V).
18 … in nome della nazionalità, contrastano la loro esistenza contro tutto il mondo Romano. David
and recomposes matter in order to discover its laws. The Orient ... is the anxious work of humanity managing its God.\textsuperscript{19}

Martin Buber takes us into the twentieth century, but his language is strongly reminiscent of David Levi’s. “The great complex of Oriental nations,” Buber wrote, “can be shown to be one entity ...”\textsuperscript{20} The psychological characteristics of such nations are those of the “motor type” (\textit{motorischer Mensch}) and contrast with the characteristics of the “sensory type” (\textit{sensorischer Mensch}), typified by the peoples of the West. The Occidental, sensory type regards the world as an inventory of items seen as relatively independent of each other and of the beholder. In this type of human being, the senses are “separated from each other and from the undifferentiated base of organic life.” They are under the influence of sight, the most independent and objective among them.\textsuperscript{21} The Oriental is adverse to separating either the objects of perception or the senses through which they are perceived. “He is aware less of the multifarious existence of things in repose than of their processes and relationships. (...) “To motor-type man, the world appears as limitless motion, flowing through him.” Consequently, “He views the world, naturally and primarily, as something happening to him; he senses rather than perceives it, for he is gripped by and permeated by this world, which, detachedly, confronts the Occidental.”\textsuperscript{22}

A Viennese-born German-speaker who grew up in now Ukrainian L’viv, Buber idealized the \textit{Ostjude}, contrary to the prevailing mood at the time. And he developed a form of Zionism that meant to foster the oriental connection to the Arabs, to the point where after his move to Palestine he tried to work towards a binational state.

The number of examples of Jewish self-orientalization could be multiplied almost \textit{ad infinitum}. But I hope the ones I mentioned suffice to drive home the point that Jewish self-orientalization was extremely common even if not universal, and that it was meant to praise rather than to denigrate the Jews and their racial relationship with Arabs.

\textsuperscript{19} “L’Occidente indaga, esperimenta, scompone e ricompone la materia per iscoprirne le leggi. L’Oriente, come dice un storico, è il travaglio affannoso della umanita’ in gestione del suo Dio.” Levi, \textit{Il Profeta}, viii.
\textsuperscript{21} \textit{ibid.}, 58.
\textsuperscript{22} \textit{ibid.}, 59.
Analytical Paradigms

How can we understand this odd fact of Semitic allegiance among Jews, in the overall context of the long nineteenth century and the imperialist project?

One approach has been to discuss the Jews as a colonized people. Susannah Heschel, for example, has written about Abraham Geiger as engaging in colonial revolt.23 It must be admitted, however, that no western Jewish population found themselves colonized by a foreign power in the same way as, for example, the Moroccans or Tunisians did. There may be many comparisons, but essentially the Jews of the West were colonized metaphorically at best, rather than literally. Indeed, the Zionist settlers in Palestine and now in the West Bank have notoriously been termed colonizers. Derek Penslar has dealt very well with this complex and controversial issue.24

Another way to connect western Jews and the colonies is not by claiming that the Jews themselves were either colonizers or colonized, but to suggest that the way they were treated in the West became a template for treating populations in the colonies.

I have mentioned earlier the tendency to read Islam as a revived Judaism, which characterized western Christian attitudes to Islam from the beginning. But such a transfer of identification also occurred with respect to the colonial populations. Ulrike Brunotte has examined how the Puritan settlers of America found lost tribes of Israel, and the process was repeated for centuries in other places.25 Tudor Parfitt showed how lost Jews were found in a large number of colonies.26 Jonathan Boyarin has suggested that ways of dealing with the Jews as the West’s internal Other were exported to dealing with the Other external to the West: Muslims in the areas targeted by western imperialism, but even the far

23 An anachronistic but perhaps telling comparison would be between the western Jews in the long nineteenth century making inroads into academia and the liberal professions, and similar successful efforts by South Asian immigrants more recently, including people responsible for much of the progress in colonial and postcolonial studies.


away American Indians, even in the great majority of cases when they were not imagined as lost Jews.

Boyarin’s focus was on early imperialism, but Amir Mufti suggested that the Jewish example also worked for colonial policy in the long nineteenth century and beyond, all the way to the independence and partition of India. Mufti’s analysis has great merit. He proposes that the Jewish Question established the Jews of Europe as a prototypical minority. Then, he suggests, the Jewish Question inspired European thinking about minorities in the colonies. Such thinking led to partition as a solution, both within and outside Europe. Zionism was a kind of radical partition, a sundering apart of the Jews from Europe. It led to the partition of Palestine between them and the Arabs. Next this experience was applied in British India to create India and Pakistan.

In spite of the many strengths of Mufti’s book, however, he fails to mention that minoritization and partition were processes that were applied across Europe and the Middle East in many other cases. In most cases, these processes hardly seem to be affected by the so-called Jewish Question, which rather seems to be affected by them. Rather, they were the result of nation building on the ethnic principle, or what came to be known as the “self-determination of peoples” and is now a right enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations. Minoritization and partition were generally a side effect of this kind of nation building, when populations who did not belong to the so-called state-forming nation, including Jews, found themselves defined as internal outsiders.

The Jewish revival that was expressed in the Moorish style synagogue and elsewhere as a Semitic revival, was connected to other national revivals. Italians, Germans, and Hungarians were first to build ethnically defined states. The Slavic nations of central Europe had to wait for their triumph until the end of World War I. The idea of the self-determination of peoples became useful to the western powers at the end of World War I, which saw the defeat of two multinational empires: the Austro-Hungarian and the Ottoman.

**Race, Nation, Pan-Nation**

This notion of the state-forming nation or people requires us to explore the notions of race, nation, and pan-nation. Recent scholarship has been moving away from

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an essentialist definition of "race" that privileges physiognomy and especially skin color. There are other criteria on which a group can be racialized. These include religion, as the Jewish case abundantly illustrates. Race can be seen as imagined common descent; that is a group is imagined as if they had the same ancestors, and those ancestors can be characterized by physiognomy as well as by things like religion.

Such a flexible definition of race as imagined common descent does not differentiate between race and the ethnic Volk. Some scholars might not mind this. They may wish to deliberately ignore the difference between race and nation; I myself have done so in the past. On second thought, however, the distinction is actually very important.

It is true that what defines a group called a race and what defines a group called a nation may in certain circumstances be the same things, including when that defining criterion is religion. It is also true that there has always been in ordinary usage a slippage between the terms "race" and "nation." The Jews, for one, have often been called both.

However, I would like to consider here not the content of the terms "race" and "nation," which is famously flexible, but rather their use. And I note that races have never been held as deserving of a state, while nations, also known in this context as "peoples," are thought to be entitled to national self-determination. Nation or Volk is potentially a state-forming subject, while a race is not. On the other hand, as Hannah Arendt suggested, race was the "ideological weapon for imperialistic politics." While the discourse of Nation is the ideological scaffolding of the nation-state, the discourse of race is the ideological scaffolding of Empire.

Of course, it must be remembered that, in the long nineteenth century, discourses of Empire and Nation were connected. Each colonizing nation saw itself as spearheading the colonizing mission of the West as a whole, which was racialized as the white man's burden. New nation states dreamed of a colonial mission, though none could compete with England or France. "Reunited" Germany and Italy actually acquired colonies in Africa. Czechoslovakia had to be content by annexing Carpatho-Ukraine and sending anthropologists to Central America.

As I have already intimated, the scientific support for the notion of nation was created by the philologists. It was also the philologists who pointed to a link between the Nation and wider quasi-racial relationships.

These enthusiasts for the lost past helped European populations to define themselves on the basis of ancestral language, even if it was no longer spoken much by the elites. German nationalists railed against the use of French by the nobility. Some Czech nationalists had to learn their “own” language from scratch, as they had grown up speaking German. Finns had to embrace Finnish and give up Swedish. This logic defined Jews as a nation with Hebrew as its tongue, even though few Jews spoke it.

The philological definition of nation, however, took place in a broader framework. Philologists did not only uncover ancient relationships between dialects that they then grouped together as the languages of nations. They went above and beyond that, positing linguistic relationships that spanned huge expanses of the Earth, ultimately helping to draw the family tree of Man. Annie McClintock has shown how the notion of the Family of Man supported an imperialist discourse of superiority and inferiority among nations.31 In the linguistic family tree of Man, the mightiest branch was the Indo-European, also known as Indo-German, Indo-Aryan, and Aryan. It branched out into such language families as the Indic, the Iranian, and in Europe of course the Romance, the Slavic, and the Germanic.

The Semitic language family, generally considered close to the Aryan, included most prominently Hebrew and Arabic. The Hebrews – in many ways the prototypical Nation of the biblical heritage – came to be seen as relatives of the Arabs, fellow “Semites” from the Orient. The notion of reviving the Hebrew language became inherently connected to the fantasies of reviving a Jewish commonwealth in Palestine, which have already been mentioned.

Though most Zionists were not self-orientalizing Jews, many were. Orientalization as Semites facilitated the conception of creating a homeland for the Jewish minority in the Orient. The Viennese architect Wilhelm Stiassny, who built many Moorish style synagogues, had a whole blueprint for creating a Jewish city in the Holy Land or, as he put it, a “neighboring country” (Nebenland) in the Orient.32 Of

31 Annie McClintock, Imperial Leather: Race, Gender, and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest (New York: Routledge, 1995).
course, such a move was only possible in the historical circumstances under the aegis of one or another colonial power.

Philologically defined nationalist movements often saw themselves as the local expression of the whole pan-nation’s revival. German nationalism, in Hegel and Fichte already, was meant to restore the glories of the Aryan but especially the Germanic peoples. For Hegel, the Volksgeist that would take religion to its highest, Protestant, stage was not German or deutsch, but Germanic or germanisch. From this perspective, the creation of a German nation-state was to invigorate the Germanic spirit from America to the German settlements in Russia.

In Russia in the meantime, a rising pan-Slavic spirit tended to support Russifying policies within the Empire, but was also strategically invoked to bolster the state-forming claims of Slavic-speaking separatists in Austria and Hungary, which came to fruition under the protection of the victorious western powers through the creation of Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia.33

In short, German nationalists spoke in the name of the Germanic peoples as a whole. Czech or Bulgarian nationalists saw their goals as empowering to all Slavs. And Jews who dreamed of a Jewish homeland in the biblical Holy Land thought that through their own revival they would be helping their Arab cousins.

Although for the most part the hope to benefit the Arabs was but a way to make Jews feel better about settling in an Arab-majority land, there were some important exceptions, when self-orientalizing Jews did see themselves as championing a rising Orient against the declining West. (That the West was in decline was a widely held perception, the best known works claiming this being Houston Chamberlain’s Foundations of the Nineteenth Century, published in 1899, and Oswald Spengler’s The Decline of the West, published in two volumes between 1918 and 1923.)

The group around Martin Buber was one of the most important among those who advocated a Jewish espousal of the values of the Orient, but there were others. The rabbi of the Moorish style Jerusalem Street congregation in Prague, to which Kafka’s family seems to have belonged, was even more radical than Buber. Rabbi Aladar Deutsch wrote that a fight between the East and West had already begun. The “smallest of the fighters proved himself the strongest. He had enough spirit to quickly see through the hollowness and the weakness of Western culture,

33 This linguistic-nationalist policy was in concert with the pan-Slavic rhetoric of the Austro-Hungarian Slavs themselves, and for Russia represented a change from when they had supported the independence of Slavic Bulgaria and non-Slavic Romania from the Ottoman Empire. For in that case, they had argued in terms of Eastern Orthodox, not Slavic solidarity.
(...and he organized the resistance to it.) This unnamed “fighter” are the Zionists. Deutsch sees them as the vanguard of a great oriental revolt:

A small fragment of the old Orient had given its old virtues, which had never decayed, a new life, in order to sweep away the Lie. The Orient is moving, it is beginning the fight with a small maneuver against the falseness of the West ... The Orient as the old site of spiritually infused Semitism (Semitentum) will, recognizing the spiritual emptiness and cowardice of the Aryan so-called culture force back the Aryan where he belongs.34

That this fight is not exclusively that of the Jews is made clear in the next paragraph, which demands

... the unification of the whole Family of Sem and the preservation of the purity of their cultures and principles.35

Such self-orientalizing sabre-rattling should not be mistaken for an anticolonial stance, though. Nowhere does Deutsch, or Buber, for that matter, suggest an alliance of oriental equals against the western colonial powers. On the contrary, from Disraeli to Herzl and beyond, restoring the Jewish nation in the Orient imagined one or another western power, or at times the Ottomans, as its protectors and guarantors.

In this curious and round-about way, the orientalization and self-orientalization of the West’s Jews through a “return” to the Orient, lead to their final occidentalization as the agents of western power in the Orient.

To be sure, the powerful forces of racialization and ethnicization, of orientalization and self-orientalization, are ones that we are as scholars attributing to the actions of Jews in the long nineteenth century. They were not necessarily their own conscious concern. They simply followed intuitively strategies meant to gain prestige for themselves as individuals or as a group, or in many cases to defend themselves against discrimination and worse.

As far as they were concerned, in 1844 the Jews of Hamburg were bringing the exotic wisdom and glory of the East to the West. The Jews settling in the Land of

34 Typescript, Jewish Museum, ch. 9, 144. Jewish Museum of Prague, Deutsch archive. The typescript text is not signed, and I am going by the attribution given to it by the Jewish Museum. Deutsch was made the head of the Jewish community of Bohemia and Moravia under German occupation. He may conceivably have been forced to produce this text for purposes of German anti-Jewish propaganda. However, even if its radicalism is uncommon, his self-orientalist Zionism is not. Here as elsewhere Jewish and gentile orientalization of the Jews depend very closely on each other, though they are never identical.

35 ibid., 144.
Israel, on the other hand, were bringing the achievements of the West to the East. Fatefully, the Arab cousins failed to see the beauty in this very specific union of Orient and Occident.

Bibliography


