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8 A Marginal Phenomenon?

Historical Research on Antisemitism in Norway, 1814 – 1945

Abstract: Historical research on antisemitism in Norway developed relatively late and unsystematically. It had to contend with the prevalent view that antisemitism was virtually non-existent in Norwegian society since so few Jews lived in the country, or that it was at most a marginal phenomenon, limited to sectarian circles on the extreme political right. Challenging the self-image of Norway as a tolerant country, historical research over the last decades has uncovered various manifestations of an exclusionist tradition towards Jews in Norwegian history: from the total ban on Jews in the Constitution of 1814 to the prohibition of kosher slaughter in 1929, from the rejection of Jewish refugees in the 1930s to collaboration and complicity in the arrests and expropriation of Norwegian Jews under German occupation. Focusing on mainstream societal actors, such as the press at the beginning of the twentieth century, research has shown that caricatures of “the Jew” as a morally corrupt and harmful foreigner served as a negative foil to Norwegian identity. This form of stereotyping provided a repository of negative images of Jews for the Norwegian public, which would persist irrespective of the issues of the day.

Keywords: Antisemitism; historiography; Holocaust; Norway.

The (late) discovery of antisemitism in Norwegian history

Historical research on antisemitism in Norway emerged relatively late and unsystematically. After 1945, a patriotic memory culture developed in Norway that used the heroic resistance to Nazism during the German occupation as the ideological basis for national unity and community. While there were certainly also critical voices, the dominant view regarded Nazism and antisemitism as “un-Norwegian,” associated with the German occupiers and the (relatively few) Norwegian quislings.¹ The history of the rescue of Norwegian Jews served as a case in

¹ On patriotic memory culture in Norway, see Anne Eriksen, *Det var noe annet under krigen. 2. verdenskrig i norsk kollektivtradisjon* (Oslo: Pax Forlag, 1995); Synne Corell, *Krigens ettertid – ok-*

point. While the deportation of 773 Norwegian Jews to Auschwitz appeared as the most horrific event in the history of the occupation, there was also a ray of hope, as the Norwegian paper *Arbeiderbladet* wrote in September 1946:

[It could be seen in] the firm and cold stance that the Norwegian people took towards the antisemitic agitation of the Germans, and the natural readiness to help that was shown the Norwegian Jews when it really mattered, to save the lives of fellow human beings. When people in Norway acted this way, they did so in accord with our entire national tradition. The people of Wergeland and Nansen could not act differently.²

Taking the experiences of wartime resistance as paradigmatic, the postwar patriotic narrative constructed an unambiguous national tradition of philosemitism, thereby effectively glossing over manifestations of antisemitism in the country's past. Historical research, too, was affected by this hegemonic national discourse. With the exception of the racist ideology of the Norwegian Nazi Party (*Nasjonal Samling*), antisemitism was regarded as a non-topic in Norwegian history.

It took until the 1980s and 1990s for this consensus to be effectively challenged. Based on an intensive study and documentation of the sources, Oskar Mendelsohn's monumental work *Jødenes historie i Norge gjennom 300 år* (History of the Jews in Norway over 300 years), published in two volumes in 1969 and 1986, meticulously detailed various antisemitic writings, incidents, and debates in the Norwegian public sphere after 1910.³ Nevertheless, Mendelsohn did not delve further into the topic or even develop an argument about the significance of antisemitism in Norway. This was partly due to his "integrationist" approach, emphasizing the common ground of Norwegians and Jews and seeking to reinforce a Norwegian-Jewish identity after the trauma of the Holocaust.⁴ While Mendelsohn remained within the limits of the patriotic Norwegian master narrative, criminologist Per Ole Johansen was more critical. His book *Oss selv nærmest:*

kupasjonshistorien i norske historiebøker (Oslo: Scandinavian Academic Press/Spartacus Forlag, 2010); *From Patriotic Memory to a Universalistic Narrative? Shifts in Norwegian Memory Culture After 1945 in Comparative Perspective*, ed. Arnd Bauerkämper and others (Essen: Klartext Verlag, 2014).

² *Arbeiderbladet*, 27 September 1946. Translation by Hoffmann. See also Ingjerd Veiden Brakstad, "Jødeforfølgelsene i Norge. Omtale i årene 1942–1948: Framstilling og erindring av jødeforfølgelsene i Norge under andre verdenskrig, i et utvalg aviser og illegal presse" (master's dissertation in history, University of Oslo, 2006), 76–77.

³ Oskar Mendelsohn, *Jødenes historie i Norge gjennom 300 år*, vol. 1 (Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 1969), vol. 2. (Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 1987).

⁴ See Christhard Hoffmann, "Nasjonshistorie og Minoritetshistorie: Jødisk historiografi i Norge," in *Fortalt fortid: Norsk historieskriving etter 1970*, ed. Jan Heiret, Teemu Ryymin, and Svein Atle Skålevåg (Oslo: Pax forlag 2013), 246–50, 261.

Norge og jødene 1914–1943 (We for Ourselves: Norway and the Jews 1914–1943), published in 1984, examined attitudes within the Norwegian state bureaucracy and police towards Jewish immigrants and refugees.⁵ Studying the police's records on foreigners (*fremmedpoliti*), Johansen found that antisemitic stereotypes were commonly invoked as a justification for refusing Jews entry to Norway. Furthermore, he traced a line connecting the exclusionary bureaucratic practice in the interwar years to the “servile” execution of orders to register and arrest Norwegian Jews under German occupation.⁶ Johansen's pioneering study met with criticism from the guild of professional historians. In a damning review in *Historisk Tidsskrift*, historian of the occupation Ole Kristian Grimnes brushed aside Johansen's new findings as “impressionistic” and “moralistic.”⁷

During the 1990s, the history of antisemitism became a topic of teaching and research at the University of Oslo, where historian Einhart Lorenz developed and taught a course on antisemitism and Jewish history and supervised the theses and dissertations of a large number of graduate students on these subjects. On a smaller scale, the same happened at the University of Bergen when Christhard Hoffmann, previously affiliated with the Centre for Research on Antisemitism at the Technical University of Berlin, started employment there in 1998. The consequences of these developments were twofold: the history of antisemitism became a topic at universities and, with numerous master's dissertations and doctoral theses completed, an academically-based research milieu with expertise on antisemitism emerged in Norway. Cooperation intensified in the early 2000s when the Norwegian Center for Holocaust and Minority Studies opened in Oslo; it would become the institutional heart for research on antisemitism in Norway. Among various efforts, the research project “The Cultural Construction of ‘the Jew’ in the Norwegian Public from 1814–1940,” financed by the Norwegian Research Council from 2008 to 2012, was developed and directed by Lorenz and Hoffmann (with Øivind Kopperud as coordinator), adding an interdisciplinary approach to the historical research on antisemitism in Norway.⁸

In the following three sections, I will present and discuss the status of research on antisemitism in Norway by looking at new findings about key events.

⁵ Per Ole Johansen, *Oss selv nærmest: Norge og jødene 1914–1943* (Oslo: Gyldendal, 1984).

⁶ Per Ole Johansen, “Norsk Embedsverk og jødiske innvandrere og flyktninger 1914–1940,” in *Judisk liv i Norden*, ed. Gunnar Broberg, Harald Runblom, and Mattias Tydén (Uppsala: Acta Universitatis Upsaliensis, 1988), 287.

⁷ Ole Kristian Grimnes “Johansen, Per Ole, *Oss selv nærmest: Norge og jødene 1914–1943*” [review article], *Historisk tidsskrift* 64 (1985): 106–08.

⁸ On the project, see < <https://www.hlsenteret.no/forskning/jodisk-historie-og-antisemittisme/joden-som-kulturell-konstruksjon/> >.

This review will proceed chronologically, beginning with the exclusionary Constitution of 1814, before turning to antisemitism in the interwar years, and then finally discussing the significance of antisemitism in the Norwegian Holocaust.

The ban on Jews in the Norwegian Constitution of 1814

The Norwegian Constitution (*grunnlov*), adopted and signed by the Constituent Assembly in May 1814 at Eidsvoll, remains one of the oldest single-document constitutions still in force today. Founded on the principles of popular sovereignty, the separation of powers, and human rights, in its time it was widely regarded as one of the most liberal and democratic constitutions in the world. At the same time, it was radically exclusionary towards Jews, Jesuits, and monastic orders. Article 2 of the Constitution stated clearly:

The Evangelical-Lutheran religion remains the public religion of the State. ... Jesuits and monastic orders are not permitted. Jews are still prohibited from entry to the Realm.⁹

That the exclusion of Jews and other religious groups was explicitly written into the Constitution represented a significant tightening-up compared to the traditional practice that had allowed for exceptions by issuing temporary travel and residence permits (letters of safe conduct) for Jews. This prohibition also stood in sharp contrast to the contemporaneous emancipation of the Jews in Denmark. Only two months earlier, Denmark had granted Danish Jews essentially equal rights as citizens (by the Royal Proclamation of 29 March 1814). In Norway, it took another twenty-five years before the poet Henrik Wergeland would publicly criticize the “Jewish clause” and launch a campaign for its repeal. Wergeland, who died in 1845, did not live to see the positive outcome of his initiative. Since an amendment of the Constitution required a two-thirds majority of votes in the Norwegian Parliament, four attempts were necessary before the “Jewish clause” was finally repealed in June 1851.

Most Norwegian historians interpreted the introduction of the ban on Jews, Jesuits, and monastic orders as a necessary step in nation-building: in order to secure national unity, religious pluralism and possible strife should be restricted

⁹ The English translation is quoted in Liselotte Malmgart, “State and Church in Denmark and Norway,” in *The Dynamics of Religious Reform in Northern Europe, 1780–1920*, ed. Keith Robbins (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2010), 210.

as much as possible.¹⁰ Others accepted Henrik Wergeland's view of what happened at Eidsvoll, interpreting the ban as a relic of a bygone age, and blamed either prejudiced peasants or defensive merchants for the clause.¹¹ By contrast, the Norwegian-American historian Samuel Abrahamsen, in an article in 1968, maintained that the anti-Jewish clause in the Norwegian constitution "falls within the general definition of antisemitism." Since the members of the Constituent Assembly did not have any personal acquaintance with Jews, the adoption of Article 2 was based on an "imaginary image of them," with the consequence of effectively "preventing religious and civil rights for Jews."¹² However, Abrahamsen did not substantiate the claim of antisemitism at Eidsvoll, focusing instead on Henrik Wergeland's public campaign for the repeal of the anti-Jewish clause in the 1840s.

In his pioneering two-volume work on the history of Jews in Norway, Oskar Mendelsohn likewise did not dig deeper into the origins of the anti-Jewish clause and its possibly antisemitic background. He dedicated only eight pages to the introduction of the clause, and eleven additional pages to its application, while he presented Wergeland's campaign against it and the repeal of the act in full detail, in more than two hundred pages.¹³ In Mendelsohn's account, the constitutional ban against Jews was presented as a "mistake that was corrected." In contrast to what had happened in 1814, the history of Wergeland's heroic struggle was a story with a happy ending that could serve as the foundational narrative of Norwegian Jews.¹⁴ The emphasis on Wergeland therefore left the origins of the clause unexamined.

Only in 2014, the year of the bicentennial of the Norwegian Constitution, were two major studies published that shed new light on the banning of Jews in the Norwegian Constitution. In his groundbreaking work *Paragrafen: Eidsvoll*

¹⁰ See Ingvild Leite, "Integrering og ekskludering: Jødernes stilling i den danske anordningen av 29. mars 1814 og i den norske grunnloven 17. Mai 1814" (master's dissertation, University of Bergen, 2012), 7–10; Andrea Tebbenhoff, "'Jødeparagrafen': paragraf 2 i den norske grunnloven fra 1814" (master's dissertation, University of Groningen, 1996), 67–72.

¹¹ See Henrik Wergeland, *Samlede skrifter*, vol. 4, no. 3 (Oslo: Steen, 1925), 377–78.

¹² Samuel Abrahamsen, "The Exclusion Clause of Jews in the Norwegian Constitution of May 17, 1814," *Jewish Social Studies* 30, no. 2 (1968): 68–69.

¹³ Oscar Mendelsohn, *Jødernes Historie i Norge*, vol. 1, 42–49 (on the introduction of the clause), 50–60 (on its consequences), and 61–276 (on Wergeland's public campaign and the repeal of the "Jewish clause").

¹⁴ On the cult of Wergeland as the cornerstone of Norwegian-Jewish identity and memory culture, see Hoffmann, "Nasjonalhistorie og minoritetshistorie," 248–49.

1814 (The Paragraph: Eidsvoll 1814),¹⁵ Håkon Harket confronted the key question head-on: why did the Norwegian Constituent Assembly introduce Europe's most antisemitic clause into Europe's most liberal constitution? In answering this question, Harket first carefully reconstructed who at Eidsvoll actually said what in support of the ban. He then traced these statements back to the broader intellectual, political, and ideological context of the time. As it turned out, the most important proponents of the ban were not to be found among backward peasants, but rather among the liberal intellectual elite, i.e. enlightened men such as Christian Magnus Falsen, Georg Sverdrup, and Nicolai Wergeland, who were among the most progressive fathers of the constitution. As well-read intellectuals, they had closely followed the concurrent debates in Germany and Denmark about the "Jewish question," revolving around the contentious question of whether Jews could become productive citizens. Following the arguments of anti-Jewish thinkers such as Johann Gottlieb Fichte, Friedrich Buchholz, and Friedrich Rühs, who argued that Jewish identity was incompatible with citizenship in a modern state, the ban on Jews was written into the Norwegian Constitution. The clause, Harket concluded, was "not a mishap in an otherwise liberal constitution," but was introduced after lengthy discussions, "because the Constitutional Committee viewed it as part of the foundation for Norway's free constitution."¹⁶

While Harket's study concentrated on the origins of the clause, Frode Ulvund's book *Fridomens grenser 1814–1851: Handhevinga av den norske "jødeparagrafen"* (Limits of Freedom 1814–1851. The Enforcement of the "Jewish Clause" in the Norwegian Constitution)¹⁷ focused on its consequences and the ways in which the constitutional ban was applied in practice. Based on a detailed study and thorough analysis of the comprehensive source material, Ulvund showed that the ban was strictly enforced immediately after the Constitution was adopted in 1814. Requests for exceptions were categorically denied. Jews who accidentally became stranded on the Norwegian coast were imprisoned, fined, and expelled. Only in the 1830s and 1840s did a more liberal application of the clause

15 Håkon Harket, *Paragrafen: Eidsvoll 1814* (Oslo: Dreyers forlag, 2014). For a shorter version in English, see Håkon Harket, "The Ban on Jews in the Norwegian Constitution," in *The Exclusion of Jews in the Norwegian Constitution of 1814: Origins – Contexts – Consequences*, ed. Christhard Hoffmann (Berlin: Metropol, 2016), 41–65. My summary of Harket's book pp. 19–20.

16 Harket, *Paragrafen*, 386. Translation by Hoffmann.

17 Frode Ulvund, *Fridomens grenser 1814–1851: Handhevinga av den norske "jødeparagrafen"* (Oslo: Scandinavian Academic Press, 2014). For a shorter version in English, see Ulvund's article "The Practice of Exclusion: How Article 2 in the Norwegian Constitution was Administered and Enforced between 1814 and 1851," in Hoffmann, *The Exclusion of Jews*, 141–70.

emerge, when the pre-1814 practice of issuing letters of safe conduct for individual Jews was taken up again. Ulvund's study also shows that in a commercial port city such as Bergen, with its Hanseatic tradition, local merchants and their representatives took the initiative to enforce the ban, notifying the authorities about persons, mostly rival merchants, who they suspected of being Jews. The police would then check if the suspects could prove their Christian religious affiliation with baptismal certificates; if not, they were expelled. Ulvund relates this antagonism towards Jews in Bergen to an exclusionary "Hanseatic habitus" that was prevalent at the same time in German Hanseatic towns such as Bremen, Hamburg, and Lübeck.¹⁸

Placing the exclusionist arguments against Jews at Eidsvoll in a broader comparative perspective, Ulvund, in his book *Nasjonens antiborgere: Forestillinger om religiøse minoriteter som samfunnsfiender i Norge, ca. 1814–1964* (Anti-Citizens of the Nation: Constructions of Religious Minorities as Enemies of Society in Norway, c. 1814–1964) studied the discursive constructions in Norway, between 1814 and 1964, of religious minorities (Jews, Mormons, and Jesuits) as "the nation's anti-citizen" and "enemies of society."¹⁹ He argued that the negative images of these religious groups in Norwegian popular consciousness shared many commonalities: they were not based on genuine experience, but taken from the transnational circulation of stereotyped ideas, and they served as a counter-image to what it meant to be a good Norwegian citizen.²⁰ Ulvund's approach, comparing and contrasting negative attitudes towards Jews with attitudes towards other minorities, might serve as a model for future research that tries to examine antisemitism in connection with other antagonistic worldviews, such as anti-Catholicism, racism, or conspiratorial thinking.

Manifestations of anti-Jewish hostility in the interwar years

After lifting the ban on Jews in 1851, the road was clear for the immigration of Jews to Norway. In contrast to the fears of a Jewish "invasion" that had haunted debates on the issue, actual immigration was slow and limited. It was not until the end of the nineteenth century that a Jewish congregation was officially estab-

¹⁸ Ulvund, "The Practice of Exclusion," 152–55.

¹⁹ Frode Ulvund, *Nasjonens antiborgere: Forestillinger om religiøse minoriteter som samfunnsfiender i Norge, ca. 1814–1964* (Oslo: Cappelen Damm Akademisk, 2017).

²⁰ Ulvund, *Nasjonens antiborgere*, 211–28.

lished in Christiania (Oslo). The Jewish minority in Norway never numbered more than two thousand people and remained one of the smallest in Europe.

Compared to other European countries, organized antisemitism was a marginal phenomenon in Norway before the Second World War. In an overview of the years 1900 to 1940, historian Terje Emberland described antisemitism in Norway as “mainly latent and situational” in character.²¹ In his view, it was based on xenophobia, nourished by elements of anti-Jewish propaganda, and activated in certain contexts, such as the fear of competition, of cultural or religious alienation, or of war and revolution.²² The diffuse nature of anti-Jewish hostility in Norway makes it difficult to determine its extent and intensity. Consequently, scholars have come to different conclusions. The following discussion of the state of research on antisemitism in Norway in the period between 1910 and 1940 focuses on two different manifestations: (1) Antisemitism as a comprehensive ideological worldview that was prevalent in small sectarian circles; and, (2) Incidents of antisemitism in mainstream Norwegian society, such as the media, political debates, and the state administration.

Racism and conspiratorial thinking: antisemitic propagandists and their circles

Historical research on modern antisemitism has long focused on the founders, supporters, organizations, and networks of the antisemitic movement, and the societal background conditions for its emergence in the 1870s and 1880s. Since there were no antisemitic organizations in Norway comparable to those in other European countries, research chiefly concentrated on those few individual ideological entrepreneurs who spread the antisemitic doctrine through their writings. The first and probably most influential antisemitic screed in Norway was Eivind Saxlund’s book *Jøder og Gojim* (Jews and Goyim), which was first published in 1910 and went through several editions. Saxlund was an attorney at the Supreme Court of Norway. Lacking originality, his book was more or less a compilation of the main works of German (racist) antisemitism (Theodor Fritsch, Houston Stewart Chamberlain, and, in a later edition, Werner Sombart). As the Norwegian public had little experience (in 1910) recognizing antisemitism, many reviewers read the content of Saxlund’s book as objective information

21 Terje Emberland, “Antisemittismen i Norge 1900 – 1940,” in Trond Berg Eriksen, Håkon Harket, and Einhart Lorenz, *Jødehat: Antisemittismens historie fra antikken til i dag* (Oslo: Damm, 2005), 401.

22 Emberland, “Antisemittismen i Norge 1900 – 1940.”

about “the Jews.”²³ Another propagandist of racist antisemitism in Norway was the typographer Mikal Sylten, who edited the journal *Nationalt Tidsskrift* (1916–45). Like Saxlund, he took his message mainly from German antisemitic sources such as Theodor Fritsch’s *Der Hammer*, and presented it as a fight for truth against “Jewish censorship.” Propagating the conspiratorial narrative of *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, Sylten sought to expose the destructive work of Jews and “hidden Jews.” He compiled lists of persons in Norway and abroad who he considered influential Jews (*Who’s Who in the Jewish World*). While the circulation figures of *Nationalt Tidsskrift* were small and, throughout the almost thirty years of its publication, declining, its impact was multiplied by other journals reprinting some of its articles.²⁴

In addition to adopting the ideology of racist and conspiratorial antisemitism directly, antisemitic ideas became influential in Norway as integrated elements of broader religious and ideological movements. In his groundbreaking work on *völkisch* religion and Nazism in Norway, historian of religion Terje Emberland analysed the interweaving of neo-pagan and racial (Pan-Germanic and Nordic) thinking amongst key ideological figures of Norwegian Nazism. He thereby shed new light on the significance of an antisemitic, anti-Masonic, and conspiratorial worldview amongst some of these ideologues and in their circles.²⁵ Moreover, in a thorough study about the antisemitism of Norwegian poet Alf Larsen, historian of ideas Jan-Erik Ebbestad Hansen explored the relationship between the anthroposophical worldview of Rudolf Steiner (with its antagonistic image of the Jews), and antisemitic thinking amongst Norwegian writers of the 1920s and 1930s, such as Marta Steinsvik.²⁶ Recently, Martin Ringdal examined how seven key antisemitic propagandists in interwar Norway interpreted and disseminated *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*. He found that these different ideological actors shared an alternate conception of reality that also found its expression in fields other than anti-Jewish conspiracy theories and described

23 Olaf Sunde Christensen, “Jøder og Gojim. Mottakelsen av et antisemittisk skrift fra 1910” (master’s dissertation, University of Oslo, 1998); Einhart Lorenz, “Eivind Saxlund,” in *Handbuch des Antisemitismus*, vol. 2, no. 2, ed. Wolfgang Benz (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2009), 772.

24 Kristin Brattelid, “Mikal Sylten: Et antisemittisk livsprosjekt” (master’s dissertation, University of Oslo, 2004); Einhart Lorenz, “Nationalt Tidsskrift,” in *Handbuch des Antisemitismus*, vol. 6, ed. Wolfgang Benz (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2013), 483–84.

25 Terje Emberland, *Religion og rase: Nyhedenskap og nazisme i Norge 1933–1945* (Oslo: Humanist Forlag, 2003), 158–69.

26 Jan-Erik Ebbestad Hansen, *En antisemitt trer frem: Alf Larsen og ‘jødeproblemet’* (Oslo: Press, 2018).

their shared characteristics with the help of the sociological concept of a “cultic milieu.”²⁷

Vidkun Quisling launched his authoritarian nationalistic party *Nasjonal Samling* (National Union) on 17 May 1933. Followers came to his movement from very different quarters; they included church-oriented Conservatives, neo-pagan racists, and radical nationalists with either Italian- or German-style fascist orientations. Initially, antisemitism was not one of the main factors attracting these supporters, but as the party failed to unite the forces of the political right in Norway and proved to be a total failure at the ballot box, ideological differences would become more important. In the argument between “Christian” and “national-socialist” wings of the party, the issue of racist antisemitism became crucial and controversial. In the end, the radical antisemites prevailed. Historical research has shown that the political marginalization of *Nasjonal Samling* “from party to sect” went along with a radicalization of its ideological profile, in particular an unreserved adoption of the racist and conspiratorial antisemitism of the German Nazi party.²⁸ The most influential figure in this respect was the editor of the party newspaper, Haldis Neegaard Østbye.²⁹ The ideological orientation of *Nasjonal Samling* towards national-socialist antisemitism did not mean that it was able to integrate the “cultic milieu” of the radical antisemites into the party. Some of these activists joined *Nasjonal Samling*, others remained in opposition to Quisling and continued with their own activities.³⁰

27 Martin Aasbø Ringdal, “‘Norge, vokn op!’ Syv norske aktørers fortolkning og bruk av ‘Sions vises protokoller’ 1920–1945” (master’s dissertation, University of Oslo, 2018).

28 Hans Olav Brevig, *NS – Fra parti til sekt, 1933–1937* (Oslo: Pax forlag, 1970); Dag Olav Bruknaap, “Ideene splitter partiet,” in *Fra idé til dom: Noen trekk fra utviklingen av Nasjonal Samling*, ed. Rolf Danielsen and Stein Ugelvik Larsen (Bergen: Universitetsforlaget, 1976), 9–47; Christhard Hoffmann, “Die reine Lehre einer politischen Sekte: Antisemitismus in der norwegischen ‘Nasjonal Samling’,” in *Vorurteil und Rassenhass: Antisemitismus in den faschistischen Bewegungen Europas*, ed. Hermann Graml, Angelika Königseder, and Juliane Wetzel (Berlin: Metropolis, 2001), 253–73.

29 On Østbye, see Rikard A. Toftesund, “‘Da alt folket skulde tro løggen.’ Haldis Neegård Østbye: Antisemittisk ideolog i Nasjonal samling” (master’s dissertation, University of Bergen, 2001).

30 For example, the Ragnarok circle or the circle around Eugen Nielsen; see Emberland, *Religion og Rase*, 114–46, 285–310.

Incidents of antisemitism in mainstream Norwegian society

With the *linguistic turn* and the influence of cultural studies since the 1980s, historians have increasingly explored the semantics of antisemitism as a “cultural code.” This new approach did not explain antisemitism exclusively by studying antisemites, but also by understanding antisemitism as an “autonomous symbolic form of interpreting the world.”³¹ Consequently, the focus of scholarly interest moved away from the writings of hardcore antisemitic ideologues to the cultural products of mainstream societal actors such as the media, the churches, and the literary world. In Norway, this approach was first systematically employed in the research project “The Cultural Construction of ‘the Jew’ in the Norwegian Public from 1814–1940.”³² Its results challenge the popular perception that antisemitic ideas in Norway before 1940 were limited to marginal radical circles.

Based on an extensive study of primary sources, historian Lars Lien analysed the construction of “the Jew” in Norwegian daily newspapers and satirical magazines between 1905 and 1925.³³ His findings illustrate in graphic detail that negative stereotypes and racist images of Jews were widespread in Norwegian popular media. These images did not originate in real conflicts between the majority society and Jewish minority in Norway, but were largely taken over from transnational antisemitic sources and applied to the Norwegian context. Caricatures of “the Jew” as a morally corrupt and harmful foreigner appearing in different, often contradictory, forms served as a negative counter-image to Norwegian identity and as a rhetorical tool to denounce political opponents as “un-Norwegian.”³⁴ This kind of stereotyping did not fly the flag of self-avowed antisemitism and it may usually not have been aimed at real (Norwegian) Jews, but it nevertheless consolidated a general worldview in which “the Jew” symbolized the immoral Other. Moreover, it provided a range of negative stereotypes of Jews for the Norwegian public which would persist regardless of the issues of the day.³⁵ For a more complete picture, it will be necessary that Lien’s pioneering work on the construction of “the Jew” in the Norwegian press be followed up by systematic

31 Jan Weyand, *Historische Wissenssoziologie des modernen Antisemitismus: Genese und Typologie einer Wissensformation am Beispiel des deutschsprachigen Diskurses* (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2016), 38. Translation by Hoffmann.

32 See the essays in Vibeke Moe and Øivind Kopperud, eds, *Forestillinger om jøder – aspekter ved konstruksjonen av en minoritet 1814–1940* (Oslo: Unipub, 2011).

33 Lars Lien, “‘...pressen kan kun skrive ondt om jøderne’. Jøden som kulturell konstruksjon i norsk dags- og vittighetspresse 1905–1925” (PhD thesis, University of Oslo, 2015).

34 Lien, “‘...pressen kan kun skrive ondt om jøderne’,” 386.

35 Lien, “‘...pressen kan kun skrive ondt om jøderne’,” 199.

studies on other cultural actors and discursive influences, such as the Norwegian Church and the free churches; art, literature, and theatre; philosophy and historiography.

The two main issues that sparked anti-Jewish agitation amongst the Norwegian public were the political controversy about the ban on Jewish religious slaughter in the 1920s and the question of Jewish immigration after 1933. In his comprehensive study on the discursive contexts and political processes that led to the 1929 legal prohibition of the Jewish slaughter method in Norway, historian Andreas Snildal carefully documented the widespread use of anti-Jewish stereotypes and antisemitic rhetoric in debates preceding the ban.³⁶ He insisted, however, that the motivations of those activists who supported the prohibition (particularly in the animal welfare movement and the peasants' movement) were often complex and could not simply be reduced to antisemitism. In his conclusion, Snildal nevertheless argued that his findings challenged the widespread notion that antisemitism in interwar Norway was "a marginal phenomenon": the controversy around kosher slaughter proved that antisemitic agitation did not just aim at external images but was "just as much directed towards the country's own Jewish community."³⁷ Moreover, the lengthy duration and intensity of the debate contributed to the popularization and legitimization of antisemitic ideas, by depicting Jewish religious rituals as foreign and barbaric.³⁸ Finally, the case demonstrated that grassroots politics did not necessarily lead to positive outcomes, since in this instance it "led to restricting the religious freedom of a vulnerable minority."³⁹

The other issue that gave rise to antisemitic agitation was immigration. After the First World War and the Russian Revolution, the conservative press evoked the threat of a mass invasion of East European "Bolshevik Jews" to Norway. As Einhart Lorenz has shown, these scaremongering scenarios of impending Jewish immigration combined widespread fears of revolution with antisemitic propaganda.⁴⁰ When, in the 1930s, German, Austrian, and Czech Jews were forced to flee from Central Europe, sections of the bourgeois press vehemently opposed

36 Andreas Snildal, "An Anti-Semitic Slaughter Law? The Origins of the Norwegian Prohibition of Jewish Religious Slaughter c. 1890–1930" (PhD thesis, University of Oslo, 2014).

37 Snildal, "An Anti-Semitic Slaughter Law?," 311.

38 Snildal, "An Anti-Semitic Slaughter Law?," 312.

39 Snildal, "An Anti-Semitic Slaughter Law?," 309.

40 Einhart Lorenz, "'Vi har ikke invitert jødene hit til landet' – norske syn på jødene i et langtidsperspektiv," in *Forestillinger om jøder*, 38–42.

accepting Jewish refugees in Norway, arguing that they would be harmful and a misfortune to the country.⁴¹

In both these debates, about religious slaughter and about immigration, mainstream political actors and publicists used arguments that originated from the worldview of radical antisemitic circles. This is particularly clear in the peasant movement and its newspapers, as Kjetil Braut Simonsen and others have convincingly shown.⁴² Moreover, studies by Per Ole Johansen and Einhart Lorenz have demonstrated that the police and state bureaucracy discriminated against Jewish refugees in matters of immigration.⁴³ Taken together, these studies suggest that the conventional interpretation of Norwegian antisemitism as situational, marginal, and limited to radical sectarian circles is not really convincing. The existence of a long-term bureaucratic tradition of discrimination against Jewish immigrants and refugees proves that “silent and effective” practices of antisemitic exclusion were already well-established in Norway during the interwar period.⁴⁴

The role of antisemitism in the Norwegian Holocaust

The study of antisemitism in interwar Norway is also of direct significance for the poignant question of Norwegian collaboration in the Holocaust. In the spring of 1942, 1,582 Jews were registered by the police as living in Norway; 773, among them 53 unregistered, were arrested by the Norwegian State Police and deported to Auschwitz, while more than 1,000 were aided by the resistance movement in fleeing to Sweden. Only 38 of those deported survived the war.⁴⁵

⁴¹ Lorenz, “‘Vi har ikke invitert jødene hit til landet’,” 46–49.

⁴² Kjetil Braut Simonsen, “‘Den store jødebevægelse’: antisemitiske bilder av jøden i bondeavisene *Nationen* og *Namdalen*, 1920–1925” (master’s dissertation, University of Oslo, 2009); Kjetil Braut Simonsen, *Antisemittisme, innvandringsfiendtlighet og rasetenkning i norsk bondebevegelse, 1918–1940* (Oslo: HL-senteret, 2012); see also Kristin Foskum, “*Nationen* og antisemitismen: en undersøkelse av avisa *Nationens* holdning ovenfor jøder i perioden 1926–1938” (master’s dissertation, University of Oslo, 2005) and Lorenz, “‘Vi har ikke invitert jødene hit til landet’,” 46–48.

⁴³ Johansen, *Oss selv nærmest*, 102–04; Einhart Lorenz, *Exil in Norwegen: Lebensbedingungen und Arbeit deutschsprachiger Flüchtlinge 1933–1943* (Baden-Baden: Nomos, 1992), 282–89.

⁴⁴ Johansen, “Norsk Embedsverk og jødiske innvandrere og flyktninger,” 287–88.

⁴⁵ Bjarte Bruland, *Holocaust i Norge: Registrering, Deportasjon, Tilintetgjørelse* (Oslo: Dreyer 2017), 365–66.

After the Second World War, the persecution and deportation of Norwegian Jews was largely understood by the Norwegian public as a measure exclusively attributable to the German occupying power, passing over the active involvement of Norwegian authorities in the processes of arrest and expropriation. This view has gradually changed since the 1990s, when the Norwegian state finally offered restitution to Jewish organizations and, in 2012, the prime minister publicly apologized for the role Norway played in arresting its own Jews. The official acceptance of responsibility has intensified the need to further explore the background to Norwegian collaboration in the Holocaust, and to determine the role that antisemitic attitudes among Norwegians may have played in the process. Within historiography, two main lines of interpretation have emerged, one emphasizing the influence of homegrown antisemitic traditions in Norway, the other attaching greater importance to political framework conditions and situational factors in explaining Norwegian collaboration in the Holocaust. A few examples may illustrate this: Taking a long-term comparative perspective on the courses of Jewish history in Denmark and Norway between 1814 and 1945, the Danish historian Therkel Stræde contrasted an “integrationist paradigm” in Denmark with a “strong exclusionist tendency” in Norway, in order to explain the different fates of Danish and Norwegian Jews during the Second World War.⁴⁶ In the same way, focusing on the continuities of antisemitic stereotyping in Norway, Einhart Lorenz argued that the negative imagery resulted in a “widespread feeling that the Jews were foreigners who presented a threat to Norway”; he saw “indifference and cultural distance” towards Jews as “essential preconditions for the Norwegian participation in the deportations.”⁴⁷ By contrast, Bjarte Bruland, in his thoroughly researched analysis of anti-Jewish measures in occupied Norway, emphasized the decisive role of the German occupiers, their close cooperation with the Norwegian collaboration government, and the effectiveness of the “lightning action” in the autumn of 1942.⁴⁸ Bruland identified the antisemitic mindset of the German perpetrators (and their Norwegian accomplices in the Quisling government) as the ideological driving force behind the measures, but he did not systematically examine what impact anti-Jewish attitudes among Norwegian bystanders might have had on the course of events. Several of the documented cases suggest that some of the Norwegians who helped

⁴⁶ Therkel Stræde, “The ‘Jewish Feud’ in Denmark 1813,” in Hoffmann, *The Exclusion of Jews in the Norwegian Constitution of 1814*, 120.

⁴⁷ Einhart Lorenz, “Antisemitische Judenbilder und die norwegische Haltung zur Deportation,” *Jahrbuch für Antisemitismusforschung* 16 (2007): 234. Translation by Hoffmann.

⁴⁸ Bruland, *Holocaust i Norge*.

Jews to hide and flee did so in spite of their antisemitic prejudices.⁴⁹ This shows that ideological factors and negative attitudes alone might not be sufficient to determine human action in a concrete situation and that other factors might have been more important.

Despite these different perspectives, there is a widespread consensus among historians that Norwegian antisemitism, regardless of its xenophobic and exclusionist features, was not exterminatory by nature, and that the persecution and destruction of the Norwegian Jews would not have happened had it not been initiated and ordered by the German occupiers.⁵⁰

Moreover, discussions in recent historiography suggest that it might be helpful to distinguish between different historical actors and different forms of antisemitism when assessing the effects of anti-Jewish attitudes during the occupation years. There is no doubt that the Quisling government and the leadership of *Nasjonal Samling* shared a radical antisemitic worldview with German National Socialists, and recent research has emphasized that this antisemitism was not a matter of opportunism but rather the core element of a comprehensive conspiratorial belief system.⁵¹ It has proven much more difficult to determine to what degree subordinate authorities held antisemitic beliefs as they carried out measures against Jews that were ordered from above. In a few cases, even high-ranking members of the Nazified State Police warned individual Jews about the arrests and thereby enabled them to escape.⁵² The most complicated and agonizing question regards the role of the Norwegian resistance movement. Why did its leadership not explicitly call upon its members to help Jews? Did anti-Jewish prejudices perhaps have a negative effect on the rescue of Jews? In his source-oriented study, Bruland clearly distinguished between the racist-conspiratorial antisemitic propaganda of the Quisling regime and expressions of anti-Jewish prejudice among average Norwegians.⁵³ He regarded the latter not as “malicious antisemitism” but as a form of xenophobia and (in the case of the resistance movement) mainly as a situationally-conditioned disdain towards civilians.⁵⁴ Bruland emphasized that negative attitudes towards Jews did not prevent their rescue,⁵⁵ and concluded that given the specific circumstances – i. e. the

⁴⁹ Bruland, *Holocaust i Norge*, 464–68.

⁵⁰ Bruland, *Holocaust i Norge*, 20.

⁵¹ Kjetil Braut Simonsen, “Vidkun Quisling, antisemittismen og den paranoide stil,” *Historisk Tidsskrift* 96, no. 4 (2017): 446–67; Bruland, *Holocaust i Norge*, 208, 372.

⁵² Bruland, *Holocaust i Norge*, 384, 427–29.

⁵³ Bruland, *Holocaust i Norge*, 382.

⁵⁴ Bruland, *Holocaust i Norge*, 464, 467.

⁵⁵ Bruland, *Holocaust i Norge*, 468.

suddenness and short duration of the anti-Jewish actions in Norway – the resistance against them by helping Jews escape to Sweden was “significant.”⁵⁶

Taking issue with this, journalist and author Marte Michelet came out with a much more critical assessment in her well-documented book, published under the title *Hva visste hjemmefronten?* (What Did the Resistance Movement Know?) in November 2018. Michelet claimed that, as early as the summer of 1942, the leadership of the Norwegian resistance movement had already received warnings from German anti-Nazis about an impending action against Norwegian Jews, but chose not to act.⁵⁷ The information was not passed on, Michelet argued, because a “rescue operation for Jews, an unpopular minority, was understood as running counter to the interests of the resistance movement.”⁵⁸ Michelet’s book, written in a self-confident and at times polemical manner, caused quite a stir. Bruland and some resistance historians rejected her allegations entirely, claiming they were unfounded and biased, while others welcomed a renewed debate about the more sombre aspects of the occupation years.⁵⁹ The different perspectives and interpretations clashed on 20 December 2018 at the seminar “Krigens fortellinger” (Narratives of the War) organized by the Norwegian Center for Holocaust and Minority Studies in Oslo.⁶⁰ It attracted a huge audience of more than 500 listeners and contributed through informed and nuanced discussions to a cooling down of the emotionally charged debate.

Conclusions and open questions

The findings of this historiographical overview may be summarized as follows: Research on antisemitism in Norwegian history emerged relatively late and was initially driven forwards by individual pioneering scholars working outside the guild of professional historians. It had to grapple with the widespread opinion that antisemitism was unknown (or at least insignificant) in Norwegian his-

⁵⁶ Bruland, *Holocaust i Norge*, 386.

⁵⁷ Marte Michelet, *Hva visste hjemmefronten? Holocaust i Norge: varslene, unnvikelsene, hemmeligholdet* (Oslo: Gyldendal, 2018).

⁵⁸ Michelet, *Hva visste hjemmefronten?*, 341. Translation by Hoffmann.

⁵⁹ Bjarte Bruland, “Moralsk historieskriving,” *Dag og Tid*, 9 November 2018; Arnfinn Moland, “Michelets bok om Hjemmefronten og jødene er et faglig og etisk forfeilet prosjekt,” *Aftenposten*, 12 November 2018; Per E. Hem, “Hjemmefronten sviktet jødene,” *Morgenbladet*, 9 November 2018.

⁶⁰ The contributions and discussions from the seminar are available online in streaming video at < <https://www.hlsenteret.no/aktuelt/arrangementer/2018/streaming/krigens-fortellinger.html> >.

tory before the German occupation during the Second World War. Over the last thirty years, historians have challenged this self-congratulatory narrative of Norwegian history and have explored some of the blind spots of the past that had escaped rigorous research for such a long time (almost two hundred years in the case of 1814). Taken together, the results of this research proved the existence of an exclusionist tradition towards Jews in Norwegian history. It manifested itself discursively in the construction of the “Jewish Other” as a negative counter-image to Norwegian identity, and concretely in the total ban on Jews, the prohibition of Jewish religious slaughter, and the bureaucratic rejection of Jewish immigrants and refugees because they were Jews. These findings may also challenge the conventional view that antisemitism in Norway was a marginal phenomenon before the Second World War.

In addition to the desiderata already mentioned in this overview, there are, I believe, two main topics that could advance our knowledge in this field. (1) In order to place the exclusionist tradition towards Jews in Norwegian history in perspective, a comprehensive study of those public intellectuals (from Henrik Wergeland to Johan Scharffenberg) who criticized and opposed the ideology and practices of antisemitism in Norway would be helpful. How did these public figures define (and explain) antisemitism, what arguments did they use against it, and how much support did they receive? The study of anti-antisemitism can explore the power (and limits) of an integrationist tradition towards Jews in Norwegian history, and thereby determine the framework conditions⁶¹ for antisemitism in Norway. (2) As we have seen, most research on antisemitism in Norway has focused on the periods 1814 to 1851 and 1914 to 1945. In contrast to this, the time between 1851 (the repeal of the anti-Jewish clause in the Constitution) and 1914 (the First World War) has received almost no scholarly attention. In this period, the first Jewish immigrants arrived in Norway, trying to make a living, build their religious community, and integrate into society. A systematic study of their reception and the associated discourses on Jews and Judaism could further illuminate the interplay of integrationist and exclusionist forces in Norwegian-Jewish history.

⁶¹ In other words, a kind of “leeway” for antisemitic activity. In a society that has very strong integrationist tendencies, the room for manoeuvre for antisemites will be rather small.