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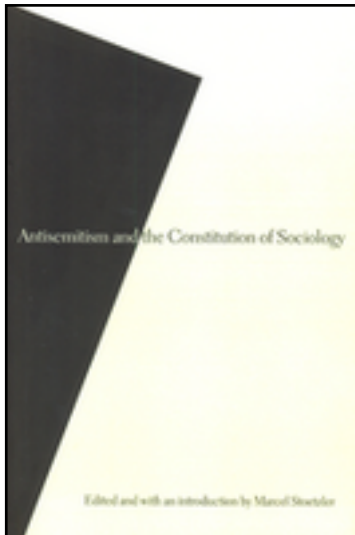
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Antisemitism and the Constitution of Sociology

A text collection on intertwined discourses of modernity



Marcel Stoetzler (Hrsg.)

**Antisemitism and the Constitution of
Sociology**

USA

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In his introduction to „Antisemitism and the Constitution of Sociology”, Marcel Stoetzler argues that antisemitism and sociology were intertwined discourses of modernity. This „complicated relationship“ is the subject of the volume, and its unifying theme is to explore and test „the hypothesis that the formation of sociology and that of antisemitism were related, partly consubstantial, as much as competing, sometimes antagonistic phenomena“ (p. 2).

This hypothesis is based on the observation that both discourses constituted themselves as responses to a common problem: the social and moral dislocations brought about by liberal modernity. Modern antisemitism and classical sociology’s shared concern with the disintegration of social solidarity and the disenchantment of the world has meant that despite sometimes explicit opposition between the two discourses, they nonetheless shared a genetic affinity such that their relationship was, and continues to be, more ambiguous than usually thought.

Stoetzler’s framing is provocative, and many sociologists will object to the implication that the founders of their discipline unwittingly reproduced antisemitic patterns of thought.

Stoetzler builds on Svend Ranulf, who saw in classical sociology a forerunner of fascism, and his claims raise many of the same questions. For example, if the potential for antisemitism was ingrained within classical sociology, why did not more sociologists actually become antisemites? What, in other words, is the concrete historical significance of the ambiguity he highlights? Even if one agrees with Stoetzler that sociology and antisemitism shared a common problematic, what is the explanatory value of this? Is it enough to point out ironies and denounce subterranean complicities? Does not Stoetzler base his claims on a questionable discursive essentialism? Stoetzler warns of the ever-present danger of antisemitism within sociological discourse, but when and under what conditions does this potentiality become actualized?

The book is divided into three parts: Part 1 deals with antisemitism and the formation of classical sociology, Part 2 with sociological responses to antisemitism, and Part 3 with sociological accounts of antisemitism following the Holocaust.

Part 1 begins with Chad Alan Goldberg's contribution. Goldberg describes two forms of antisemitism, reactionary and radical, and argues that Durkheim's work reacted to both. In Durkheim's view, the radical antisemitic call to dispossess Jews was based on a pre-modern form of solidarity that betrayed the universalistic values of the Revolution. According to Goldberg, it was Durkheim's reading of the Revolution and its historical significance, and not his Jewishness, that ultimately accounted for his opposition to antisemitism.

In his chapter, Stoetzler focuses on Durkheim and Weber to argue that classical sociology's rejection of utilitarianism in fact mimicked antisemitic critiques of modernity. According to Stoetzler, although sociology was a liberal competitor to antisemitism, the fact that it was built on a shared value-laden antinomy between cohesion and dissolution meant that sociological discourse was constitutively receptive to antisemitic arguments targeting Jews as the agents of social dissolution. Stoetzler argues that so long as sociology remains committed to the notion of a moral economic community, its critical response to antisemitism and fascism will be weakened.

Irmela Gorges provides an informative account of a controversial 1887 study on rural usury by the „Verein für Socialpolitik“ (German Economic Association), whose findings reflected widespread antisemitic prejudices. However, this provoked both a scientific and human critique that Gorges characterizes as a decisive step in the development of objective research methods in the German social sciences.

Part 1 ends with Y. Michal Bodemann's discussion of Sombart and classical German sociology's relationship to nationalism and race. Bodemann contends that German sociology largely avoided questions of antisemitism and ethnonational diversity, and that insofar as it did discuss such concerns, it displaced them temporally and spatially onto more distant, and thus less contentious, empirical terrain. As a result, German sociology was theoretically unprepared for the rise of fascism. An exception to this indifference was Sombart, whose essentialist musings on the „Jewish spirit“ were, of course, racist and antisemitic.

Part 2 begins with Robert Fine delving again into the fraught debate over Marx's „On the Jewish Question“. Fine finds the case of an antisemitic Marx to be unconvincing, arguing instead that the famous set of essays were a subversion of the very premise of the „Jewish question“ as specifically Jewish and a forceful argument for the unqualified emancipation of Jews. Amos Morris-Reich follows this with a discussion of how antisemitism shaped the scientific practice of Georg Simmel, Franz Boas, and Arthur Ruppin. Though all three engaged in a critique of antisemitism, their variable willingness to tackle antisemitism explicitly, Morris-Reich argues, can be explained by generational differences in the authors' attachment to the assimilationist ideal.

Richard H. King surveys the relationship between American sociology and antisemitism before and after World War II. He finds that before the war, Jews and the „Jewish question“ were generally avoided as objects of inquiry. This changed following the war, when a transformed American Jewish consciousness led to a greater sociological interest in Jewish life. King argues, however, that this attention was largely sympathetic.

Roland Robertson closes out Part 2 with a wide-ranging interrogation of the concept of „civilization“. Through an engagement with Norbert Elias, Robertson makes the distinction between „civilization as a sociocultural complex“ and „civilization as process“ and explores their implications for sociological thought, suggesting that a differentiated concept of civilization is critical for a full understanding of race and antisemitism.

Jonathan Judaken kicks off Part 3 with a discussion of Talcott Parsons' 1942 „The Sociology of Modern Anti-Semitism“. Though the text was an early contribution to „critical theories of antisemitism“, Judaken suggests, the force of Parsons' critique of fascism and antisemitism was ultimately limited by his attachment to an ambivalent liberalism – what Judaken calls „anti-antisemitism“ – that could not affirm the historical particularity of Jewish experience.

Eva-Maria Ziege tells the story of the Institute of Social Research's unpublished study „Antisemitism among American Labor” (1944), which she characterizes as the „missing link” between the *Dialectic of Enlightenment* and *The Authoritarian Personality*, and which transformed the Frankfurt School's understanding of the place of antisemitism in modern society. Complementing Ziege's chapter is Daniel Lvovich's intellectual profile of the anti-fascist Italo-Argentine sociologist, Gino Germani, a central figure in the modernization of Argentine sociology.

Werner Bonefeld closes Part 3 with a critique of the contemporary „anti-imperialist“ left. Though Bonefeld is light on examples, what he rejects is an indulgent attitude toward antisemitism which excuses it as the epiphenomenal expression, however wrongheaded, of a rational kernel of anti-capitalist resistance. Anti-imperialist antisemitism, Bonefeld suggests, is not only problematic on its own terms, but represents a false anti-capitalism leading to false alliances. The volume concludes with an essay by Detlev Claussen in which he ends where Stoetzler began, by affirming the „concrete historical urgency in examining antisemitism as a constitutive and unexamined aspect of the history of sociology“ (p. 334).

The reader will find contributions in this volume to be valuable – though which will depend on her predilections. As is typical for a volume of conference proceedings, the individual chapters are sometimes only tenuously connected. Indeed, there is a tension that runs through the entire volume. On the one hand, the central critical theme of the volume is the genetic affinity between sociology and antisemitism. Yet many of the empirical case studies do not support such an alarming perspective, highlighting instead the contributions of social scientists in the struggle against antisemitism. If anything, the reader is left wondering why, given this genetic affinity, more sociologists have not indulged in overt antisemitism. There is, in other words, a disjuncture here between critical theory and historical explanation that is only seldom addressed.

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