

## Middle-class Gothenburg, Jewish Participation, and the Limits of Liberal Tolerance 1870-1900

by *Christoph Leiska*

### Abstract

*This article discusses the extent and conditions of Jewish participation in Swedish society c. 1870-1900. Whereas earlier research on Jewish history in Sweden had pictured this period as a time of peaceful integration, recent studies have stressed the continuities of cultural representations of 'the Jew' as essentially different from 'the Swede'. Taking the city of Gothenburg as an example, this article offers a new approach by discussing the role of conflicting national and urban elements within liberal self-identification. With regard to urban identities, attitudes of toleration and religious pluralism went side by side with the liberal representation of Gothenburg as being different – different from its rural hinterland, but also from the capital Stockholm. These images of Gothenburg as being exceptionally progressive and open-minded facilitated Jewish participation in the city's communal politics and associational life. On a national level, however, the ambiguities of Swedish liberal thinking persisted: An increasingly politicised discussion about national identity from the 1880s onwards reveals that the protagonists of Gothenburg liberalism had far greater difficulties in including Jews into their vision of the Swedish nation than the imagined liberties of Gothenburg city culture would suggest.*

Antisemitism and the extend and limits of Jewish integration in the nineteenth century has long attracted only marginal attention by scholars of Swedish history. The dominant focus on class conflict and societal structures has long obscured the place of ethnic, religious, and other minorities in Swedish history: Changing experiences of minority groups ran counter to long-term narratives of Swedish history that operated with an implicit understanding of a largely homogeneous state and society, divided only by class interests. Especially historians of the 1970s and 1980s looked back to the eighteenth and nineteenth century in order to uncover the roots for what became known as the “Swedish Model”: a special social ethos favoured by deeply-rooted egalitarian traditions that facilitated a peaceful development on all levels of society, and a unique ability to cope with conflicts at critical moments of the historical process. These narratives of Swedish history were obviously modelled along the lines of the German *Sonderweg* theory, which served as starting point and counter-image for the analysis of historical developments in Sweden. Contrasting to nineteenth century Germany's aggressive nationalism, her militaristic political culture and rampant antisemitism, liberal Sweden stood out as a bright alternative, a prosperous country in which people lived in easy tolerance and harmony.

Also the way Swedish Jewish history has been narrated has largely been affected by this kind of master narrative. For a long time, ideas of an exceptionally peaceful and smooth integration of the Jewish minority were readily accepted without problematising the coercive and homogenising impulses of modern society or the efforts of minorities to define their own place in the national community. This traditional understanding could draw upon the works of the liberal doyens of Swedish Jewish history: They interpreted Swedish Jewish history as part of a larger historical process, ever progressing towards enlightenment and liberty.<sup>1</sup> According to Hugo Valentin's masterly study of 1924, which still is the most elaborate presentation of early Swedish Jewish history, the years after the accomplishment of emancipation were something of a golden age for Swedish Jewry: Undisturbed by anti-Semitic harassments and socially accepted by their non-Jewish neighbours, Swedish Jews attained high positions in society and contributed greatly to the progress of the Swedish nation. Indeed, not until the inter-war period did Sweden see the establishment of a handful of anti-Semitic organisations and none of these parties and organisations achieved considerable political strength.<sup>2</sup> Thus, when compared to the turmoil on the continent, the relative failure of Swedish organised antisemitism seemed once more to confirm the particular strength of Sweden's liberal values and tolerant attitudes.<sup>3</sup>

Needless to say, that this idealistic reading of Swedish Jewish history has long been criticised. Especially studies working on cultural representations of "the Jew" in Swedish society have led to a revision of the far too harmonious picture of Jewish integration.<sup>4</sup> However, by strictly confining its analysis on "majority society" and its hostilities, research in antisemitism generally tends to overlook the plurality of interactions between Jews and non-Jews. Moreover, the predominance of discourse analysis within research on Swedish antisemitism leads back to questions regarding the balance of structure and agency: Research on antisemitism as a discourse has little to say about how Jews perceived of their position in public life and how they actively participated in shaping spaces and cultures of interaction.

This article focuses on social practices and every-day relations instead. It tries to apply an "every-day-perspective" on the interactions between Jews and non-

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<sup>1</sup> Hugo Valentin, *Judarnas historia i Sverige*, (Stockholm: Bonnier, 1924); Eskil Olán, *Judarna på svensk mark: historien om israeliternas invandring till Sverige*, (Stockholm: Rex, 1924).

<sup>2</sup> Lena Berggren, *Nationell Upplysning. Drag i den svenska antisemitismens idéhistoria*, (Stockholm: Carlssons, 1999).

<sup>3</sup> For the difficulties of comparative analysis in the field of antisemitism, see, Tony Kushner, "Comparing Antisemitisms: A Useful Exercise?", *Two nations: British and German Jews in comparative perspective*, eds. Michael Brenner, Werner E. Mosse, (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1999), 91-109.

<sup>4</sup> Lars M. Andersson, *En jude är en jude är en jude... Repräsentationer av 'juden' i svensk skämtpress omkring 1900-1930*, (Lund: Nordic Academic Press, 2000).

Jews in Swedish politics and civil society. Its aim is, thus, to shed some light on the extent and conditions of Jewish participation and to critically reconsider the efficacy of those liberal ideas which are so often offered as explanation for the undisturbed and smooth integration of Jews into Swedish society. The chosen example for this study is Gothenburg, Sweden's port to the West, and undisputed centre of nineteenth-century liberalism.<sup>5</sup> At the same time, the city was home to the second largest Jewish community in Sweden which in 1855 had proudly celebrated the inauguration of the country's first public synagogue. As similar building projects throughout Europe, the synagogue on *Stora Nygatan* symbolically affirmed that the Jews were willing to be seen and that they had the wherewithal to establish a presence in their city.<sup>6</sup>

### Gothenburg: City of Liberalism

The Napoleonic Continental System in the beginning of the century had radically altered Gothenburg's economic and political elite. With Gothenburg's port serving as one of few loopholes for England's trade with the Continent, the local economy boomed and attracted merchant families of very different origins.<sup>7</sup> While some of the new players on a brisk but increasingly risky market accumulated great wealth which provided the basis for Gothenburg's emerging enterprises in the following century, some of the long-established merchant houses had to face bankruptcy and disappeared. In the early 1830s, the city's economic and political elite had profoundly changed.<sup>8</sup> A new elite of merchants, financiers and factory owners gradually took over more and more power from older governmental agencies and self-confidently began to re-define Gothenburg's city culture. This transformation of the city was facilitated by the fact that Gothenburg lacked strong traditions of autonomy and pre-modern forms of self-government. Founded in 1623 as a new port and stronghold on the west coast of Sweden, Gothenburg's rights and status as a town had long been limited by the state's interest in its strategic position. Until the early nineteenth century, the local representatives of the crown had exerted considerable influence on the city's policies and defended their right to possess

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<sup>5</sup> See Jan Christensen, *Liberalernas stad. Fattigvård och kulturdonationer i artonhundratalets Göteborg*, (Göteborg: Daidalos, 2009); Fredric Bedoire, *The Jewish Contribution to Modern Architecture 1830-1930*, (Jersey City: KTAV Publishing House, 2004), 454 et seq.

<sup>6</sup> Richard I. Cohen, "Urban Visibility and Biblical Visions: Jewish Culture in Western and Central Europe in the Modern Age", *Cultures of the Jews. vol. 3: Modern Encounters*, ed. David Biale (New York: Schocken books, 2002), 9-76, 25.

<sup>7</sup> For Gothenburg's general history, see, Martin Fritz, *Göteborgs historia: Näringsliv och samhällsutveckling. vol. 2: Från handelsstad till industristad 1820-1920*, (Göteborg: Nerenius & Santérus, 1996).

<sup>8</sup> Thomas Magnusson, "Borgarklass i vardande. Göteborgskapitalister 1780 och 1830", *Historisk Tidskrift* 109/1 (1989), 46-74.

one of three keys to the city's treasury (the other two were held by *borgerskapets* aldermen and the treasurer).<sup>9</sup>

It needs to be emphasised that the immigration of Jews to Gothenburg and other Swedish cities took place in this peculiar period of fundamental socio-economical, and political changes. Other than in the port cities on the continent, Jews in Gothenburg were immigrants in the literal meaning of the term: Not until the 1770s had Jews been allowed to settle in the Kingdom of Sweden. During the reign of Gustavus III (1771-1792) the ban on Jewish settlement had partly been lifted and small Jewish communities started to develop in four assigned towns.<sup>10</sup> Even if anti-Judaic attitudes of the Church persisted in Christian preaching and arts, Jewish - non-Jewish interactions in Swedish towns had no previous history of segregation and no memories pertaining to a Jewish-Gentile past. On the other hand was Jewish life still subject to the heavy restrictions of the *judereglement* which only were abolished in 1838. In 1815, the small Jewish community of Gothenburg comprised of not more than 215 individuals, but slowly grew to 382 in 1855 – the year of the inauguration of Gothenburg synagogue, and 667 in 1890. The restrictive immigration policies towards Jews in the early 19th century had an immense impact on both the social structure of the Jewish immigrant group and on the character of Jewish integration: The modes and spheres of interaction between Jews and non-Jews in Gothenburg were very much shaped by the fact that the vast majority of Jewish newcomers integrated into a specific subgroup of society: The wealthy and educated middle class. As the following pages will show, Jews were intensely engaged both in the cultural formation of this faction of Gothenburg bourgeoisie which became the main bearer of Gothenburg liberalism.

Liberal ideas were shaped and disseminated at the local level through the mediation of voluntary associations. They provided an important forum for the expression of social and political values and were considered as central to the reform of society.<sup>11</sup> Only very few of these associations were explicitly directed towards political goals. But membership in an association constituted a basic prerequisite for an active and responsible citizenship, promoted by liberal thinkers from the middle of the nineteenth century onwards. The various societies and clubs of Gothenburg's economic elite had opened up relatively early for the Jewish immigrants. In contrast to German cities, where Jews continued to be denied access to the general associational life, the

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<sup>9</sup> Regarding the administrative history of Gothenburg see: Artur Attman et al., *Göteborgs stadsfullmäktige 1863-1962. vol. 3: Stadsfullmäktige. Stadens styrelser och förvaltningar*, (Göteborg: Elander, 1971).

<sup>10</sup> For the general history of Swedish Jewry, see Valentin, "Judarnas historia".

<sup>11</sup> Torkel Jansson, *Adertonhundralets associationer: Forskning och problem kring ett sprängfullt tomrum eller sammanslutningsprinciper och föreningsformermellan två ambällsformationer c:a 1800-1870*, (Uppsala: Uppsala Universitet, 1985).

heterogeneous character of the new bourgeoisie in Gothenburg seems to have led to a more inclusive character of the city's associational life – sure enough only in relation to cultural difference, but neither in relation to class nor gender. The powerful merchant guild had already during the time of the Napoleonic Continental System admitted individual Jewish merchants and so had the Order of the Amaranth (*Amaranther-Orden*), a society devoted to the conveying and practicing of bourgeois manners and values.

An important example for the persisting exclusion of Jews, however, were the freemasonry lodges of Gothenburg. In contrast to English or French lodges, Scandinavian freemasonry of the so-called “Swedish rite” emphasised (and in fact still does so today) its Christian character by refusing to accept non-Christians. Swedish freemasonry thus became a stronghold for the idea of confessional homogeneity and the predominance of Lutheranism in society.<sup>12</sup> Due to the small overall number of Jews, the continuing exclusionary practice of the Masonic Lodges never sparked a significant reform debate in Sweden. Moreover, the predominantly Christian character of its lodges seems to have weakened the position of freemasonry within the upper bourgeoisie's sociability during the course of the century. The merchant elite of Gothenburg had created new, competing forms of sociability, of which the most prominent certainly was *The Royal Bachelor's Club*. The club was a very exclusive society, established by and for Gothenburg's upper class men. Founded in 1769 already, it connected to the tradition of English gentlemen's clubs, providing a private environment in which to carry out conversation and billiard sports. Though established about in the same time as the Masonic Lodges of the city, the club had its heyday not before the fall of the Napoleonic continental system, when it became an association of a more official character. As early as 1821, the club had decided to admit Lazarus Elias Magnus (wholesaler), Valk Isaac Vallentin (merchant), and Aron Magnusson Magnus (merchant). During the following years, further Gothenburg Jews applied successfully for membership. *The Royal Bachelor's Club* became one of the most prominent gathering places of the city's (male) mercantile elite, joined in 1872 by the *Merkantila Förening* and in 1894 by the more occupational-related *Börssällskap*.

Scholars have often portrayed the history of associations and civil society as a male-dominated story. Jewish middle-class women, however, played important roles in the differentiation of Gothenburg's associational life. Women of the Magnus family for example, were very involved in *Sällskapet för uppmuntrande av öm och sedlig modersvård* (The Society for Encouraging Tender and Moral Motherly Care). During the 30 years from 1870 to 1900, some member of the family always was active within the society's board. Founded in 1849, the society was one of the city's most reputable charity institutions. Its members

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<sup>12</sup> So far, research on Swedish freemasonry seems not to have noticed this peculiar exclusive character; see the essays in *Mystiskt brödraskap – mäktigt nätverk: Studier i det svenska 1700-talsfrimureriet*, ed. Andreas Önnersfors (Lund: Lunds Universitet, 2006).

were solely established women of Gothenburg's higher bourgeoisie who directed the society's activity towards working class mothers with at least three children. Though the society did distribute direct support to a limited number of women, the main purpose of the society was not to grant material help, but to inculcate its protégées with a sense of moral responsibility, domestic peace and orderliness.<sup>13</sup> The society ran a work-house for mothers and closely co-operated with the city's Poor Relief Board.

The numerous clubs and associations had a major impact on the making of Gothenburg's middle-class. Their activities formed important networks; their members shared common values and interests and thus created mutual trust and a sense of common belonging. At the same time, the socially exclusive clubs and associations of the city's male elite provided the main forums for defining and formulating local policies. They constituted a parallel, informal structure of communal politics, where future policies and recommendations for elections were discussed and sometimes even decided beforehand.<sup>14</sup> The underlying understanding of communal politics as – in contrast to politics on a national level – being primarily “un-political” and harmonious was an integral part of what later became known as *Göteborgsandan* (the spirit of Gothenburg). With the important exception of freemasonry and those associations connected to the Church or evangelical revivalism, Jewish Gothenburgers took part in these informal structures and made use of their possibilities to influence the decision-making process within communal politics. The participation in voluntary associations and liberal discussion circles on a local level provided the opportunity to, at least to some extent, influence politics on a level, where discriminatory regulations still excluded Jews from direct participation: In the early 1860s, Aron Philipsson, a successful advocate and member of the Jewish Community Board, participated actively in the debates leading to the Swedish *Riksdag* being reformed as a modern bicameral parliament. In spite of the fact that even those liberal reforms would not bring equality in terms of eligibility to the *Riksdag*, Philipsson was nominated member of the city's delegation to present the government with the city's reform proposals.<sup>15</sup>

Compared to the slow and gradual process of emancipation at a national and legislative level, the integration into the networks and associations of local liberalism was by far less controversial. However, in spite of the changes in local political culture, which originated from the associational networks of a new bourgeoisie, it was not before 1862 that the municipal reform (*1862 års*

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<sup>13</sup> For the “Society for Encouraging Tender and Moral Motherly Care” see, Birgitta Jordansson, “Women and Philanthropy in a liberal context. The case of Gothenburg”, *Charitable Women. Philanthropic Welfare 1780-193. A Nordic and Interdisciplinary Anthology*, eds. Birgitta Jordansson and Tinne Vammen, (Odense: Odense University Press, 1998), 65-88.

<sup>14</sup> Åberg, Martin: *En fråga om klass? Borgarklass och industriellt företagande i Göteborg 1850-1914*, (Göteborg: Göteborgs Universitet, 1991), 155 et seq.

<sup>15</sup> Stig Ekman, *Slutstriden om representationsreformen*, (Uppsala: Uppsala Universitet, 1966), 231.

*kommunalförordningar*) finally brought an end to the old corporative form of local government. The composition of the subsequently established town council once more reflected the primacy of a self-confident elite in the city. Half of the city councillors were directors or wholesalers, and only two out of 50 were representatives of the city's master artisans. For the Jewish citizens however, who had never gained access to the traditional corporate institutions, the new institution meant a radically new opportunity to participate in the city's political culture. In the following years, Jews assumed an important role in Gothenburg Liberalism and thus had an important part in creating "The Liberals' city" (*Liberalernas stad*) as the city was frequently referred to. During a time in the 1870s, twelve of the 57 seats in the city council were held by Jewish councillors. Earlier research has documented the various activities of Jewish town councillors and other municipal office-holders.<sup>16</sup> In deed, there is no sign for discrimination considering appointments to communal public offices. Philip Leman, a Jewish advocate, was elected city councillor in 1872 and re-elected several times. For more than 30 years, he was member of the city council and acted as its deputy chairman for 16 years. For some time he was chairman of the city's powerful and prestigious financial committee and through the years acted as member in countless boards and ad-hoc committees. In September 1895, he was elected Member of the First Chamber of the *Riksdag* by the town council.

The liberal utopia of Gothenburg depended heavily on the census suffrage system, and thus on the exclusion of the vast majority of the city's population. Census suffrage (which included in some cases women, but also public companies) guaranteed political power to a small group of leading citizens holding up to 100 votes each. In 1870, only 20% of the city's population were entitled to vote at all, most of them holding only one single vote.<sup>17</sup> In this respect, Gothenburg liberal culture certainly was an elite phenomenon which offered participation only to a small stratum of the city's population. However, I would argue that Gothenburg Liberalism's exclusionary character in relation to class and its inclusionary character in relation to cultural difference were in fact two faces of the same coin. Gothenburg liberalism rested upon the individualistic values and ideals of a new mercantile elite. It did not have much in common with the pre-modern traditions of municipal autonomy which were represented by the board of aldermen (*Borgerskapets äldste*). Neither did Gothenburg Liberalism connect to 19th century's mass movements (*folkrörelse*), which were of great importance to the liberal movement in more rural areas.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Artur Attman, "Judiska insatser i Göteborgs samhällsutveckling," *Göteborgs Mosaiska Församling 1780-1980: Minnesskrift till Göteborgs Mosaiska församlings 200-års jubileum*, ed. Carl Vilhelm Jacobowsky, (Göteborg: Göteborgs Mosaiska Församling, 1980), 33-57.

<sup>17</sup> Attman et al., "Göteborgs stadsfullmäktige", 58 et seq.

<sup>18</sup> See, Martin Åberg, "Liberalismen som historiskt problem", *Parti eller rörelse? Perspektiv på liberala organisationsstrategier 1880-1940*, eds. Tomas Nilson and Martin Åberg, (Lund: Sekel 2010), 9-15.

The needs and interests of Gothenburg as a trading city and the political influence of a heterogeneous merchant elite made the city a stronghold of Swedish liberalism during the times of major political reforms from the 1840s to the 1850s. Besides, Gothenburg's reputation as the home of Swedish liberalism was largely based on the influence of its leading newspaper, *Göteborgs Handels- och Sjöfartstidning* ("The Gothenburg Trade and Shipping Journal", usually called only *Handelstidning*) and its talented editor, Sven Adolf Hedlund. Hedlund took over editing the newspaper – which already then was known as "radical from Gothenburg" – in 1851 and quickly turned it into the leading liberal voice of the country.<sup>19</sup> Together with the writer, religious historian and idealist philosopher Viktor Rydberg, he managed to establish a close collaboration with Scandinavia's leading intellectuals, as for example Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson in Norway and Georg Brandes in Denmark. Right from the beginning, Sven Adolf Hedlund's agenda concerning *Handelstidning* is quite clear: cultural identity, political reforms and – especially in the 1850s and 60s – religious toleration. Hedlund's villa in Gothenburg became a major forum for political, literary and aesthetic discussions. Early members of his staff were the Jewish writers Jonas Philipson and Mauritz Rubensson, later joined by the famous literary critic Karl Warburg.

In addition to its political agenda, liberal *Handelstidningen* was also a protagonist in the transformation process of Gothenburg's urban culture. In the 1860s and 1870s, Mauritz Rubensson became famous for his accounts of the city's society life but also for his reports on the stunning metamorphosis of "new Gothenburg".<sup>20</sup> In deed, after the old city walls had been torn down in the beginning of the nineteenth century, Gothenburg had gradually evolved into a modern city. On the first of December 1856, the first train bound for Jonsered left the new station; Gothenburg's new bourgeoisie promenaded proudly on *Nya Allén* or in *Trädgårdsföreningen's* recently established park. In 1854, the statue of Gustavus Adolphus, the founding father of Gothenburg, completed the rebuilding of the city's central square. The significant changes in the cityscape took place in a time of huge migrations from the countryside into the city: Gothenburg's population grew rapidly from 21.000 in 1830 to 130.600 in 1900. *Handelstidningen* and other newspapers assisted the profound transformation of the city as much as they profited from it: As on the continent, the growth of a bourgeois public sphere and the accessibility of cafés, parks, and waiting rooms invited reading and brought ever larger readership to the newspapers.<sup>21</sup> In addition to the coverage of diplomatic crises and parliamentary debates, *Handelstidningen* and other newspapers served as a medium for local communication and gave meaning to the rapid change of the city.

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<sup>19</sup> Christensen, "Liberalernas stad", 90 et seq.

<sup>20</sup> See for example, Mauritz Rubensson, "Det nya Göteborg", *Göteborgs Handels- och Sjöfartstidning*, August 19, 1875; August 8, 1875.

<sup>21</sup> Peter Fritzsche, *Reading Berlin 1900*, (Cambridge (MA): Harvard University Press, 1996), 57.



The newspapers' writing on the city thus both reflected and shaped their middle-class readers' identification with the city: Through the press, the protagonists of Gothenburg Liberalism established their reading of the city as exceptionally open and tolerant: In their point of view, Gothenburg was different: In contrast to Stockholm, Gothenburg had no royal palace and no gentlemen of leisure. It was a city of burghers, characterised above all by entrepreneurial spirit and a civic sense of responsibility. In 1864, Sven Adolf Hedlund attested to this special spirit of Gothenburg in a review of the recently started *Svenske Månadsskrift*:

“It is not a mere coincidence that Svensk Månadsskrift is edited in Gothenburg. It rather is an expression of the many-faceted and industrious spirit which reigns here. Gothenburg's society is young and fortunately enough youthful as well. Hence, [in Gothenburg], courage meets both the freedom and the independence of thinking and acting.”<sup>22</sup>

More than half a century later, Torgny Segerstedt, one of Sven Adolf Hedlund's successors as editor-in-chief of the newspaper, published a similar account of Gothenburg's exceptionally open-minded city culture:

“Seafaring, commerce and merchant culture with its cosmopolitanism has constituted the living spirit in Gothenburg life for decennia. [...] The relation to countries overseas has always lent a unique character to the city. [...] In Gothenburg, the same traditions which have made the city truly follow its great founder's [Gustavus Adolphus of Sweden] intentions over hundreds of years, are still alive and form the city's culture.”<sup>23</sup>

Also the self-conceptions of Gothenburg's urban Jewish elite were in line with these narratives of Gothenburg as an exceptionally free and outward-looking community. When Robert Jaffé reported about “Jews in Sweden” for the German Jewish newspaper “*Ost und West*”, his local informants provided him with a portrayal of proud descendants of courageous seafarers and self-assertive merchants of Sephardic origin:

“The ancestors of the Swedish Jews came from across the sea as tall and upright men. They encountered the Swedes with all their [courtly] manners, which they had acquired when they had been grand marshals at the Royal Court of Spain. [...] Until today, these

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<sup>22</sup> *Göteborgs Handels- och Sjöfartstidning*, March 17, 1864, as quoted in Frauke Hillebrecht, *Göteborg in der nordischen Kulturideologie*, (Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag C. Winter, 2000), 99, fn. 1; all translations are my own.

<sup>23</sup> Torgny Segerstedt, “Göteborg”, *Svenska turistföreningens årskrift*, 1924, 96.

men's descendants distinguish themselves by their decent behaviour, their dignified conduct of life, and their respectable attitude."<sup>24</sup>

Thus, along with the socio-economic dynamics of an emerging port city it were also cultural perceptions of Gothenburg's peculiar urban identity that constituted the framework for the integration of Jews into the city's middle-class. The presence of a prosperous Jewish community in the city could serve as a proof for the progressive attitudes of middle-class liberalism: for Gothenburg's political elite, attitudes of tolerance were a fundamental component of self-identification and added to the allegedly exceptional character of liberal Gothenburg's political culture. In 1859, Victor Rydberg published a literary description of Gothenburg's new cityscape. He takes his literary visitor on a boat trip in order to visit the "very latest Gothenburg". Soon the boat reaches *Stora Nygatan* and Gothenburg synagogue which brings Rydberg to reflect on the inauguration ceremony which he attended four years before. What emerges from his account is nothing less than a liberal utopia:

"I wished, that you, as I did, would have had the opportunity to attend the inauguration of the Gothenburg synagogue. [...] A Catholic had composed the most beautiful hymns, a Protestant had written their lyrics and Protestants raised their voices together with Abraham's children to praise Jehovah"<sup>25</sup>

A similar argumentation became apparent, when in 1872 the above-mentioned Aron Philipsson ran for parliament. Only one year before, a revision of the *Regeringsform* had given Jewish citizens eligibility for the *Riksdag*. During the local election meeting, Philipsson's candidature was proposed and supported by Charles Dickson, one of the city's representatives in the first chamber of the Swedish *Riksdag* and member of one of the most influential families of the town. Dickson emphasised Philipsson's merits for the city but argued as well, that it should be a "matter of the heart" for all Gothenburgers, to see their city among the first to implement the emancipatory reform of the *Regeringsform*.<sup>26</sup> Philipsson could count on the support of all relevant political factions and consequently was elected to the *Riksdag*. However, the primarily symbolical meaning of this election was obvious: The liberal *Handelstidning* was surely delighted about the outcome of the election, but it gave as well a vague criticism: Some Gothenburg citizens had wished to hear at least something about Philipsson's thoughts in the political issues of the time.

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<sup>24</sup> Robert Jaffé, "Die Juden in Schweden", *Ost und West*, 3/12 (1903): 815-822, 815.

<sup>25</sup> Viktor Rydberg, "Stora Nygatan med Synagogan", *Vandringar i Göteborg*, ed. Albert Ekmans Fond (Göteborg 1963 [1859]), 9.

<sup>26</sup> *Göteborgs Handels- och Sjöfartstidning*, September 03, 1872.

Thus, the *modus vivendi* which had come to exist between liberal middle-class Gothenburg and its Jewish peers was a reciprocal relationship. Jews had achieved social acceptance, economic success, and the possibility to develop the institutions of a religious community. The Gothenburg liberal elite, in turn, saw its liberal attitudes and practices verified, which, amongst others, legitimated its own idealist re-creation of Gothenburg city culture. For prominent liberals like Sven Adolf Hedlund or Victor Rydberg, the involvement of Jews in the city served as a proof for the city's exceptional progress with regard to modernity and tolerance.

It was this special character of Gothenburg Liberalism which made the city a preferred target for anti-Semitic attacks from parts of the conservative movement in the mid-1880s. After Germany, as Sweden's most important trading partner, had abandoned her free trade policy in 1878, the political dispute about protective tariffs intensified and led to a lasting politicisation of Swedish society. Gothenburg, as a trading city and traditional stronghold of Liberalism was soon at the centre of a heated debate, which quickly changed from the field of economics to questions of "true patriotism" and national identity. As many of the arguments on both sides of the controversy stemmed from the German debate, it comes as no surprise that parts of the protectionist movement turned out to be rather receptive for the anti-Semitic overtones of anti-liberal campaigns in Germany. In Gothenburg, the establishment of the conservative newspaper *Göteborgs Aftonblad* in 1888 provided a platform for anti-Semitic ideas and, even more important, gave new legitimacy to anti-Semitic opinions. For *Göteborgs Aftonblad*, the Jewish presence in city politics repeatedly served as a powerful counter-model for delineating its own, putatively "Swedish" alternative against the dominating culture of the liberal elite. It is hardly surprising that such debates often evolved around some of the large (and expensive) educational projects which formed a core element of Gothenburg liberalism. Anti-Semites perceived Gothenburg liberalism as essentially alien and rootless, controlled and led astray by the dubious plans of the Jews. However, also these anti-Semitic attacks on liberal Gothenburg, decrying cosmopolitan "*Jödeborg*" as threateningly "un-Swedish", were constructed against and around liberal imaginations of the city as a place of exceptional freedom and openness. Thus, in a twisted way, anti-Semitic accusations and conspiracy theories confirmed the outstanding role of Jewish participation for the city's political culture. It is important to note, though, that antisemitism neither was a permanent aspect of conservative propaganda in Gothenburg, nor became an integral part of conservative doctrine and thinking, as Shulamit Volkov has famously argued for the German case.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Shulamit Volkov, *Germans, Jews, and Antisemites: Trials in Emancipation*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 100 et seq.

Against these anti-Semitic attacks from the right, Jews could count on Gothenburg liberalism as a reliable ally: In October 1886, a small newspaper from Gothenburg's neighbouring town Borås joined the ongoing debate about free trade policies. It railed against rapacious Jewish merchants in Gothenburg who had no interest whatsoever in the common good of the Swedish people but would do anything to prevent a patriotic tariff policy. Hence, for *Borås Tidning*, the question of protective tariffs was nothing less than a "question of nationality."<sup>28</sup> Gothenburg *Handelstidning* published an equally short as harsh reply, rebuking its small counterpart for its racial definition of nationality:

"We cannot in any way accept if people who are born in Sweden and Swedish citizens – fully incorporated into our country and its interests – are referred to as "alien nationality" (*nationalitet*). To produce arguments of race in order to avoid being accused of religious intolerance has been part of the scandalous quarrels in Germany, after which one could hardly speak of nationality anymore. When it comes to race, it is all about talent and character and here does the Semitic race surely not fall behind its Aryan counterpart. It does not in any way depend on race, if a man belongs to one or another nationality. Germans and Swedes, Russians and Frenchmen belong to the same race, but have different nationalities, whereas the Swedish constitute an foreign race in Finland, something that does not deter them from being "good Finns" in nationality."<sup>29</sup>

### Liberal ambiguities

The quotation seems to resemble a classic voluntarist model of "Western" liberal nationalism: *Handelstidningen's* anonymous author rejects any racial definition of nationality, he unambiguously defends Jewish emancipation and presents an inclusive "civic" understanding of nationality that in deed seems to open up for ideas of ethnic and cultural plurality.

Yet, while legally arguing above reproach, it is just this confinement to the merely judicial term of *nationalitet*, which gives reason to throw a little doubt on the efficacy of those traditions of tolerance and cultural pluralism. Liberal Swedish nationalism was on a much larger extend founded upon ideas of common descent and a homogeneous cultural heritage, than the above-mentioned quotation seems to suggest. Anthony D. Smith's argument, that any

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<sup>28</sup> *Borås Tidning*, October 07, 1886, October 12, 1886.

<sup>29</sup> *Göteborgs Handels- och Sjöfartstidning*, October 13, 1886 (edition A) . For the polemics see as well: Benny Jacobsson, "Sverige åt svenskarna - eller åt medborgarna? Två 'idealtypiska' nationalismen 1886", *Nationalism: en kursredovisning från Avdelningen för idéhistoria vid Stockholms universitet*, ed. Bo Lindberg, (Stockholm: Stockholms Universitet, 1997), 40-56.

concept of nation is composed “of different elements and dimensions, which we choose to label voluntarist and organic, civic and ethnic, primordial and instrumental”<sup>30</sup> seems as well to apply on the Swedish case. Also liberal *Handelstidningen* did, in other contexts, base its conceptions of the Swedish nation and “Swedishness” on myths of origin and shared memories and customs. Imaginations of an “old Norse” past as a natural society of unlimited freedom and equality were an important argument for liberal reformers: *Handelstidningen*’s campaigns for the formation of volunteer rifle corps (*skarpskytteföreningar*) as well as its demand for radical reforms in the field of political representation and its ideas for a new, national education were very much based on those conceptions of a free and unified Swedish *folk*. In its announcement for 1870, the newspaper published a programme for re-constructing an authentic Nordic and Swedish national culture:

“All the peoples (folk) of the Nordic peninsula [...] are beginning to sense that the prerequisites of true education (*bildning*) are rather to find within and to develop out of themselves. These prerequisites are their ancient antiquities (*fornminnen*) and their folk culture (*folklivet*); and it is not until a folk, through those, has found itself, has grown strong, self-sufficient, and complete, that it is strong enough to properly acquire other peoples’ education and let its own light shine for others. [...] The old mores, a world view (*livsåskådning*) of simplicity and sincerity, the old Norse spirit, and even a pure, Swedish language is still to be discovered, and it is most likely to be found in the midst of the people in the countryside, who are still nearly untouched by any ‘foreign make-up’.”<sup>31</sup>

Swedish Liberals strongly rejected the conservatives’ belief in natural ties between the institutions of the Crown, the Church and the Swedish people, they opposed conservative celebrations of long-gone military greatness but they widely agreed to an understanding that the Swedish nation was made up of people with a common ancestry, language, and culture. Ideas of *folkligbet* and “Swedishness” were pivotal constituencies of liberal conceptions of the nation. At the same time, these ideas reveal the exclusionary potential of Swedish liberal nationalism. As Zygmunt Bauman put it: “Jews have been Europe’s prototypical strangers. In the continent of nations and nationalism, they were the only reminder of the relativity of nationhood and the outer limits of nationalism.”<sup>32</sup> On a national level, Swedish liberalism had no better answers to

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<sup>30</sup> Anthony D. Smith, *The Nation in History. Historiographical Debates about Ethnicity and Nationalism*, (Hanover (NH): Brandeis University Press, 2000), 25.

<sup>31</sup> *Göteborgs Handels- och Sjöfartstidning*, December 12, 1871, as quoted in Hillebrecht, “Göteborg”, 162, fn.

<sup>32</sup> Zygmunt Bauman, “‘Strangers’: The Social Construction of Universality and Particularity”, *Telos* 78 (1988): 7-42, 26.

the challenge of religious difference than its continental counterparts. How should a Jewish minority be integrated into imaginations of a culturally authentic core of the nation? In a manuscript dealing with the Danish-Jewish author Meïr Aron Goldschmidt, *Handelstidningen's* editor-in-chief Sven Adolf Hedlund suggested that Jews either could be members of the Jewish nation or “cosmopolitans” amongst the nations – the latter specifically meant as a positive quality because Jews, by virtue of their singular nature, could have a reconciliatory influence on the people of the world.<sup>33</sup> However well-intentioned, Hedlund’s argument does as well reveal that he was not really able to break with the liberal ideal of national homogeneity and to include visions of cultural plurality into his cultural construction of nations. Jews were still imagined as being outside the national community.

These ambiguities of liberal thinking did only rarely find their way into public debate: Sweden never experienced a public dispute similar to the Berlin *Antisemitismusstreit* which brought to light the problematic perceptions of Jews in the German bourgeois elite. Neither gave the severe crisis which led to the dissolution of the union between Norway and Sweden in 1905 any reason to discuss a purported influence of international Jewry as for example was the case during the Boer War in Britain. With regard to the local level of integration and participation, the peculiar character of communal politics has to be taken into account: As attitudes of toleration and religious pluralism constituted an important part of Gothenburg liberalism’s self-perception, they formed a strong obstacle to expressing anti-Jewish resentments in public. Moreover, the rhetoric of political antisemitism, well known from the ongoing polemics in Germany, would have violated a set of unspoken rules of Gothenburg middle-class politics, which perceived of itself as primarily “un-political” and exceptionally harmonious.

However, these obstacles fell away when writing under the protection of satire,<sup>34</sup> or when reporting about “foreign Jews”: When *Handelstidningen's* correspondent in Vienna wrote a critique on Theodor Herzl’s play *Das neue Ghetto*, he praised the author for showing “the real character of Judaism” and acknowledged Herzl’s contribution to the ongoing debate about the “Jewish Question”. Yet, the critic took a sceptical view towards the ideas of Zionism. In stead, he advised to openly address “the faults and shortcomings” of Judaism, which “has not as much been reformed internally as it appears from the outside”. Thus, both the “Jewish Problem” and the problem of antisemitism was primarily caused by the Jews themselves, who nevertheless used the press and their financial power to put the blame on others.<sup>35</sup> Also Fritz Henriksson, writing for the same newspaper from Berlin, failed to notice

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<sup>33</sup> Sven Adolf Hedlund, “Omdömen om den danske skriftställare Goldschmidt”, Sven Adolf Hedlunds papers, file 2:43, Gothenburg University Library.

<sup>34</sup> See Andersson, “En jude är en jude är en jude” 2000.

<sup>35</sup> *Göteborgs Handels- och Sjöfartstidning*, January 26, 1898.

the anti-Semitic overtones in his report from the German capital. He felt disgusted by organised antisemitism and strongly condemned its fanatic leaders. However, also he found that the spreading of organised antisemitism in Germany was partly to blame on the Jews themselves: wasn't it strange how Jews dominated Berlin? And this in spite of the fact, that – “here like anywhere else and at all times” – Jews did not have their strengths in the field of creation, but rather choose to appropriate and make use of the work of others. “And although they never [...] will melt into the surrounding *folk* nor join their nationality, they hold a hegemonic position in the German capital: Thus it didn't come as a big surprise that the surrounding *folk*'s hate turns against them.”<sup>36</sup> In both reports, Jews constituted an essentially alien element and a “problem on principle” in their national surroundings, which only did not make itself felt in Sweden because of the small overall number of Jews. However, it would be misleading to understand the two correspondents as simply being infected by Viennese or Berlin illiberality. Rather does their readiness to accept anti-Semitic accusations reveal the difficulties of Swedish liberalism to deal with questions of cultural diversity and to include conceptions of difference into their vision of national identity.<sup>37</sup>

When in the 1880s and 1890s, the political dispute about protective tariffs led to a politicisation of national identity and to new forms of political rhetoric, these inconsistencies of liberal thought became more apparent within local politics. In 1886, the above-mentioned town councillor Philip Leman ran for one of Gothenburg's seats in the Second Chamber of the Swedish *Riksdag*. Until then, the electoral districts of the city had widely been regarded “safe seats” for the nominees of the town council and some influential associations. By the time of the election, Leman had been serving as a town councillor for more than 10 years and was a respected and successful associate in one of the city's most distinguished law firms. His candidature was not only supported by the powerful *Merkantila förening*, but as well by both important liberal newspapers. In short, the outcome of the election seemed to be a mere formality. However, Leman lost the election against a local schoolteacher, who had unsuccessfully run for parliament several times before and who was even by conservative observers considered a “weak” candidate. In spite of this setback which the local press blamed on the low voter turnout, Leman was nominated candidate two times in 1892. During these election campaigns, Leman was confronted with anti-Semitic articles and commentaries in the conservative press. Again, he lost both elections against prominent members of the conservative opposition. In contrast to the election of Aron Philipsson only ten years before, nationalist arguments had supplanted notions of

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<sup>36</sup> Fritz Henriksson, *Från det moderna Tyskland: Studier, bilder och intryck*, (Stockholm: Bonniers, 1901), 327.

<sup>37</sup> On the complex relationship between liberalism and *fin-de-siècle* nationalism see the inspiring article by Pieter M. Judson: “Rethinking the Liberal Legacy”, *Rethinking Vienna 1900* ed. Steven Beller, (New York: Berghahn Books, 2001), 57-79.

Gothenburg's liberal exceptionalism and attitudes of toleration. Even the subsequent delegation of Philip Leman to the First Chamber of the *Riksdag* by his fellow town councillors in 1895 could not hide the fact, that a considerable number of liberal voters had refused to approve the nomination of Leman. Also liberal observers had to acknowledge that the conservative campaign had been a success: they had effectively cast doubts on Leman's "national" credibility and reminded liberal voters of the cultural basis of their conceptions of the national community. Until the end of World War I, Aron Philipsson should remain the only Jewish representative of Gothenburg in the Second Chamber of the *Riksdag*. As a commentary put it in *Handelstidningen*:

"Anti-Semitism is much more spread in our society than we can imagine. On the top of society as well as at its bottom one comes across the idea: No Jews to the Riksdag! There are only few who want to articulate this idea in public, but in private, amongst friends, this happens quite often. This may be the most important lesson of the recent election."<sup>38</sup>

### **Negotiating urban and national identities**

By 1870, Gothenburg Jewry had achieved social acceptance, economic success and space in which to develop the institutions of a vivid religious community. The modes and spheres of interaction in the city were very much formed by the values and ambitions of a new and heterogeneous urban elite, that gradually took over more and more power from older governmental agencies and self-confidently began to re-define Gothenburg's city culture. A small Jewish elite of some ten to fifteen families had early gained access to the networks of sociability of this new urban elite. As entrepreneurs in some of the times most prosperous branches of industry and commerce they actively took part in the formation of Gothenburg's urban culture and likewise accepted a role as mediators of middle-class values into the Jewish community.

By the middle of the century, with bourgeois power consolidated, town guides and the local press praised the civic qualities of the Jews which provided proof, that Jews had merited the privilege of equality. For Gothenburg liberalism, the presence of a vivid Jewish community in the city added to the allegedly exceptional character of Gothenburg's culture of tolerance and served as a proof for the progressive attitudes of middle-class liberalism. This is not to say that Jews merely had a passive, "decorative" role in Gothenburg Liberalism. Bourgeois Jews defined the character of many of the economic, cultural, and educational associations that constituted the liberal milieu of the city and paved

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<sup>38</sup> "Från allmänheten. Hvad har inträffat?", *Göteborgs Handels- och Sjöfartstidning*, October 10, 1892.



the way for later liberal organisations.. As long as the communal census suffrage was in effect, Gothenburg Jewry decisively influenced central aspects of municipal politics and civic culture. Thus, the heyday of Gothenburg communal liberalism between 1848 and 1900 opened up a window of opportunity for the Jewish group which actively participated in creating “new Gothenburg’s” urban culture. Until World War I, relations between Jews and gentiles in politics and civil society were close and the extent of participation high. Anti-Semites in Gothenburg remained a small minority which never was able to exert considerable influence on communal politics or the city’s associational life. With regard to urban sociability and communal politics, the middle-class protagonists of Gothenburg liberalism cultivated a pluralist image of the city, where Jews were regarded as fellow citizens on equal terms.

This perception of Gothenburg as a particularly modern and open-minded city was both a prerequisite to the participation of Jews and a core element in the liberal conceptions of an urban identity of Gothenburg. At the same time, the world view of the protagonists of Gothenburg liberalism and their ideas of a national community were very much built upon ideas of a common, and authentic culture, which had been exceptionally well-preserved in the Nordic countries. The question of the relation of Jews to these liberal concepts of the Swedish nation was by far less un-controversial than the liberties of Gothenburg culture suggests. These ambiguities of liberal thinking did only rarely affect day-to-day relations between Jews and non-Jews in the city. But with the politicisation of national identity during the political debates of the 1880s, the unanswered question whether Jews “really” could be Swedes was posed anew.

In Gothenburg, the contradictory streams of thought within liberal doctrine intertwined with different elements of national and urban self-identifications. Eric Hobsbawm has argued that “we cannot assume that for most people national identification [...] excludes or is always or ever superior to, the remainder of the set of identifications which constitute the social being”<sup>39</sup> The self-identification of middle-class Gothenburgers as participants in modern urban life represented a strong sense of belonging, even if it was inextricably interwoven with national and various other forms of identifications. Given the situational and variable character of identities, the idea and sense of belonging to a nation is not necessarily the dominant factor in everyday encounters in the city. In local politics and associational life, urban identifications could overlap and sometimes even outweigh national ones.<sup>40</sup> During the election campaign for Aron Philipsson in 1872, notions of urban self-identification prevailed.

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<sup>39</sup> Eric J. Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism since 1780: Programme, Myth, Reality*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 11.

<sup>40</sup> This is an idea particularly emphasised by Nathaniel D. Wood: “Urban Self-Identification in East Central Europe Before the Great War: The Case of Cracow”, *East Central Europe* 33/1-2 (2006): 9-29.

Attitudes of tolerance were presented as integral part of Gothenburg's civic pride and as fundamental to its distinctive character as a city. In contrast to this, when Philip Leman ran for parliament in 1886 and 1892, questions of national identification were put forward by a strengthening conservative opposition and gave cause for concerns amongst liberal voters. Thus, considering the similarities of the two candidacies – both candidates were long-standing members of the city council, both participated in a number of voluntary associations, and both were wealthy and respected lawyers – the different outcome witnesses the delicate balance of liberal tolerance in Gothenburg; in a way, it was easier to become a Gothenburger than a Swede.

**Christoph Leiska**, born 1979 in Aachen, Germany. PhD candidate in History at the Centre for Research on Antisemitism at the Technical University Berlin and member of the Center's Research Group "Anti-Semitism in Europe (1879-1914)". In 2010-2011 he was a Doctoral Fellow at Uppsala Universitet, funded by Svenska Institutet. Studied history, political sciences and science of journalism in Berlin and Uppsala. His dissertation analyses Jewish integration and anti-Semitism in the Scandinavian countries, c. 1870-1917.

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