

## Introduction

### Brandes as a Vital Cosmopolitan Archive

In the first years of our current global age, shortly after the collapse of the Eastern European and Soviet communist regimes, Francis Fukuyama's "end of history" thesis seemed for many to be an accurate diagnosis and prognostication of forthcoming world historical events. In the introduction to *The End of History or The Last Man Standing* (1991), which was based on the Hegelian interpretation of the human "desire for recognition" as the key principle for historical development, Fukuyama designated Western liberal democracy as "the end point of mankind's ideological evolution."<sup>1</sup> In explaining why Western liberal democracy applies itself to the human struggle of recognition better than any other state form, Fukuyama writes that:

The inherently unequal recognition of masters and slaves is replaced by universal and reciprocal recognition, where every citizen recognizes the dignity and humanity of every other citizen, and where that dignity is recognized in turn by the state through the granting of rights.<sup>2</sup>

Fukuyama does not reflect much, however, on terms such as "national cultural tradition," "nation state," or "nationalism," except from downgrading the continuing relevance of these terms. Influenced by Fukuyama's "end of history" thesis and similar diagnoses of a global and non-binary world order after the fall of communism, the long-gone field of cosmopolitanism was revitalized in the 1990s. Important cultural thinkers, philosophers, and sociologists such as Julia Kristeva, Homi K. Bhabha, Martha Nussbaum, Jacques Derrida, and Ulrich Beck designated themselves as cosmopolitans in the tradition of Kantian liberal

cosmopolitanism. All of these influential scholars wrote essays and books thematizing that the universally shared “cosmopolitan existence” which Immanuel Kant had envisioned in “Idee zu einer allgemeinen Geschichte in weltbürgerlicher Absicht” (1784) would in the succeeding decades replace the dominance of nation states and national cultural traditions.<sup>3</sup> According to Ulrich Beck in *The Cosmopolitan Vision* (2004), in what could be seen as the culminating work in this wave of liberal cosmopolitan optimism of the 1990s, the so-called national outlook and the twentieth-century tendency to observe all historical and political matter through the lenses of national state paradigms had become backwards and outdated.<sup>4</sup> Instead, according to Beck, we should all develop what he calls the cosmopolitan outlook.<sup>5</sup> The increasingly globalized world would thus increasingly develop through borderless, transgressing, and transnational processes. Beck observes how the development from national to cosmopolitan outlook could already be observed in the early 2000s in the way we—as Westerners—semantically represented our global age existence:

A transvaluation of values and words is taking place, symbolized by a veritable flood of words such as “diaspora” and “hybridity” [...]. The experiences of alienation or living in between, the loss of ontological security [...] and existential exclusion, talk of ambivalence [...] even the reproach of “rootlessness”, have lost much of their apocalyptic meaning.<sup>6</sup>

Beck refers to a time in history when the concept of “rootlessness” and the “experiences of alienation or living in between”, as well as cultural diaspora, had an “apocalyptic meaning” for many, and he seems to be certain that such views now belonged to the past.

Ulrich Beck has been criticized since the publication of *The Cosmopolitan Vision* for not paying enough attention to the unintended consequences of the globalization processes in his cosmopolitan vision of how this bond of cosmopolitan-oriented human beings will gradually—and almost naturally—replace the national outlook.

However, in recent years, it has become clear that many people,

Westerners as well as non-Westerners, do not feel part of a “progressive global age” in which terms such as *cosmopolitanism*, *strangeness*, *diaspora*, *rootlessness*, and *cultural hybridity* have lost their apocalyptic meaning. Right-wing populism is on the rise and many, it seems, do not want to live according to a cosmopolitan outlook. In this context, the constant flow of new “revolutionizing” technologies, the individual flexibility required by an ever more globalized work market, and accelerating information loads are often experienced as difficult challenges, and not only by those usually counted as “Modernisierungsverlierer.”<sup>7</sup> Also, recent research documents that some segments benefit more from the positive effects of the globalization processes than others, and have easier access to the advantages of our global age.<sup>8</sup> In fact, more and more people fear the future of our global age, and why would it be any different? A majority of TV series, films, political campaigns, and journalistic breaking news feed us narratives on a daily basis that represent the world we inhabit as overloaded with crises prognosing the future of our present-day global age through various dystopian and catastrophic scenarios (for example in the context of the climate crisis, the Western democracy crisis, pandemic crises, financial crises, migration crises, etc.).

According to the German historiographer Reinhart Koselleck, it is only logical that we can observe this intensification of cultural products, political ideologies, and journalistic breaking news forecasting our future through such dystopian crises and catastrophic scenarios. Hence, according to Koselleck, modern human consciousness is characterized by a temporal distinction between the past and the future, instead of perceiving time mainly as pre-modern and cyclical.<sup>9</sup> In this way, modern consciousness also generates a gap between past experiences and future expectations. This gap amplifies the human utopian and dystopian imagination, which grows still further if the gap between our *Erfahrungsraum* and *Erwartungshorizont* increases. The accelerated social and technological changes of our present-day global age thus leave us with less and less useful *Erfahrungsraum* on which we can build constructive expectations of the future.<sup>10</sup>

Indeed, today, we live in an age of accelerated overheating and unintended crisis consequences of which we cannot rationally predict the outcome. As such, it seems that the type of optimistic cosmopolitanism that Ulrich Beck designated as an ideal for all to follow back in the 2000s has lost its relevance. Following Koselleck's concepts of *Erfahrungsraum* and *Erwartungshorizont*, one could instead ask: Do we have any concrete experiences of cosmopolitanism and global-age processes from which we can learn and build our present-day anticipations of how our global age will develop, so that we do not act in an atmosphere of reckless optimism or, on the other hand, on feelings of anxiety, panic, and crisis?

Recently, in *Once Within Borders: Territories of Power, Wealth and Belonging since 1500* (2016), Charles S. Maier defines the period from the 1970s onwards as the second modern era of intensified globalization in the history of modern Europe.<sup>11</sup> Maier convincingly argues that the fin-de-siècle period, from the 1870s to 1914, should be considered as forming the first wave of accelerated globalization in modern European history.<sup>12</sup> The fin-de-siècle period was thus—like our present-day global age—characterized by continuous upheaval and renewal, which transformed the existing European societies and individual life worlds. In this process, Jews and Jewishness became a focal point in discussions of the dramatic transition from the old world to the liberal democratic and capitalist modern societies of the twentieth century. As such, it was indeed in the fin-de-siècle period that cosmopolitanism and various globalization processes acquired this “apocalyptic meaning” Ulrich Beck speaks of in the passage quoted above. Hence, it was not in Hitler's Nazi Germany of the 1930s that the identity characteristics of cosmopolitanism, alienation/strangeness, rootlessness, in-between-ness, and cultural hybridity became interconnected with Jewishness, and established a dominant cultural code by which the accelerated processes of the first intensified globalization period were discussed and anticipated.<sup>13</sup> Historical research that focuses on the period from when Hitler gained power in Germany as the time when modern antisemitism became a dangerous new form of populism is merely addressing the culmination

of a much longer historical course of interconnected events and narratives. According to the already classic studies on modern antisemitism by Reinhard Rürup and Shulamit Volkov, and newer work by Michael Stanislawski and Maurice Samuels, we must go further back, at least to the 1870s. This was the time when modern antisemitism developed into a dominant cultural code that primarily focused on Jews and Jewishness in the context of the unintended consequences of this first period of intensified globalization.

### *The Goals of the Book*

The construction of an almost synonymous relation between Jewishness and cosmopolitanism became the focal point in the modern antisemitic and the later Nazi ideology. As such, Georg Brandes (1842–1927) stands as a key historical actor due to the great influence he exerted as one of the leading European intellectuals in the fin-de-siècle period, not only in the context of the creation of modern antisemitic populism, but also because of his own interconnections of Jewishness and cosmopolitanism. From his earliest writings, Brandes characterized himself as a cosmopolitan, and he defined the cosmopolitan tradition of which he considered himself a part as Jewish-related. Most of Brandes' interconnections of Jewishness and cosmopolitanism were contextually bound to the different ongoing discussions of the so-called Jewish Question in the fin-de-siècle period; his passionate engagement with different topics related to the so-called Jewish Question is evident from the first of his publications in the 1860s to the last four books he published before he died in 1927. Brandes drew from various intellectual sources when he elaborated on the relation between Jewishness and cosmopolitanism in both his early and later writings.<sup>14</sup> He was particularly influenced by other modern European Jewish intellectuals and writers such as Berthold Auerbach, Heinrich Heine, Moritz Lazarus, Benjamin Disraeli, and Ferdinand Lassalle. Doubtlessly, Brandes' greatest inspiration for identifying with the cosmopolitan tradition, which in his early writings he calls "modern Jewishness", was the Dutch Jewish philosopher Baruch Spinoza.<sup>15</sup> In previous (mainly Danish-based) research on Brandes, little

attention has been paid to his representations of Jewishness, and none has so far thematized which cosmopolitan tradition Brandes considered himself part of, though the primary identity marker with which most previous research characterizes Brandes is that he first and foremost was a cosmopolitan, in his writings as well as in his practice.<sup>16</sup> As such, this book seeks to contribute to two fields. First, it adds to the existing research on Georg Brandes and the key theme in this literature: Brandes' role in shaping modern Denmark. In this context it also intends to establish more substantial links between Brandes research and the field of Danish Jewish history, as well as to the much larger scholarly field of Jewish Studies. The book's second historiographical goal is to create an awareness of the importance of Georg Brandes' life and work as a cosmopolitan archive in the modern intellectual historical field. Regarding the first goal, in my opinion, the dominant post-WW2 collective memory of the "miracle of '43" vis-à-vis the rescuing of Danish Jews from Nazi concentration camps during WW2 plays an important role when it comes to the lack of existing research on Danish Jewish history, and specifically on the Jewish themes in Brandes' oeuvre. The way this collective memory is usually narrated today reflects a belief that Denmark and Danish history is mainly to be considered an exception in the broader history of antisemitism in modern Europe. However, there are many other important historical events in Danish Jewish history that we can learn from today; the case of Georg Brandes represents rather different perspectives, no less important than the rescuing of the Danish Jews in 1943.

There is no doubt that what happened in 1943 offers a unique historical perspective in the context of the Holocaust. We must never forget that most of the Danish Jews were rescued and sailed to Sweden, and it is natural that the story has become one of the most significant Danish post-WW2 collective memories and as such an important modern Danish nation-building element. This was evident in 2018 when the 75th anniversary celebration of this event at the synagogue in *Krystalgade* in Copenhagen was broadcast live on the national Danish television station, DR. The Danish Prime Minister Lars Løkke Rasmussen

gave a speech at the synagogue and the Israeli Foreign Minister also attended the ceremony. Subsequently, as a collective memory, the rescuing of the Danish Jews has come to symbolize that, in 1943, the Danish Jewish minority had become recognized as fully equal Danish co-citizens even though the Danish Jews were a non-Christian minority. As a narrative, this collective memory has come to symbolize that, in the midst of occupying Nazism and the horrors of WW2, democratic co-citizenry had materialized as a crucial nation-building element in Denmark.<sup>17</sup> Fundamentally, Danes trusted and recognized each other as equal citizens no matter what religious and cultural background they came from.

In recent years, important perspectives have been added to how we can narrate this historical memory to younger generations, for example in the education system. The high prices that the fishermen who sailed the Danish Jews to Sweden charged have been scrutinized; recent research furthermore documents that, after the war, many Danish Jewish families returned to Denmark only to find that their houses and apartments were now occupied by Danish co-citizens who refused to move out.<sup>18</sup> The somewhat passive but seemingly calculated role of the German commanding forces in Denmark, particularly the role of *Reich-bevollmächtigten* Werner Best, in October 1943 has also been touched upon. Denmark was one of the most important foreign suppliers of agricultural products to Germany and German troops during WW2 and, in 1943, it was more necessary than ever for the Germans to maintain the export of Danish goods.<sup>19</sup> Such perspectives are necessary because of the central role that key collective memories play in our continuing nation-building process; indeed, this was reflected in the way we celebrated the 75th anniversary of the rescuing of the Danish Jews.

The reactions to Georg Brandes' Jewish background in the context of his enterprise as an active public intellectual represent a rather different perspective in Danish Jewish history than the collective memory of the rescuing of the Danish Jews in 1943. Studying Brandes and the modern antisemitic reactions to him and his work presents us with many

examples of how the democratic virtue of equality was constantly put to the test in the building of modern Denmark.

The general lack of interest in elements other than the rescuing of the Danish Jews in 1943 in the context of Danish Jewish history is also reflected, as mentioned, in the existing research on Brandes' representations of Jewishness. The scholarly articles and books that have already thematized Brandes' representations of Jewishness certainly present valuable examples, and so does Jørgen Knudsen's monumental biography.<sup>20</sup> However, the main tendency has been to represent Brandes as a so-called "assimilated Jew" who mainly distanced himself from Jewishness. To give an example: Although Jørgen Knudsen's biographical work on Brandes is significant, it fundamentally lacks frameworking analytical concepts and terminology as regards Brandes' representations of Jewishness. Overall, Knudsen represents Jewishness as a fixed identity position, which Brandes himself did not identify with. Following this, at one point, Knudsen even characterizes Brandes as a self-hating Jew;<sup>21</sup> and Knudsen has even previously been accused of being an antisemite.<sup>22</sup> Regarding the academic works that take Brandes' representation of Jewishness as their key topic, Henry J. Gibbons' "The reluctant Jew" (1980) delivers a substantial overview of the complex field of Brandes' representations of Jewishness. However, Gibbons and more recent work such as Tine Bach's *Exodus* (2004) do not really move beyond pointing to Brandes' distancing strategy and to the contradictory and ambivalent nature of his Jewish themes.<sup>23</sup> This has contributed to the more general conception within research on Brandes that his representations of Jewishness are unimportant and not relevant as regards his more famous struggles and writings.

Generally, in the research on Brandes, there has been a tendency to highlight the influence exerted on him particularly by the Danish Protestant-based philosophy of Søren Kierkegaard, rather than more obvious Jewish-related influences. A number of works have been published which emphasize that the most important inspiration for Brandes (as Paul Rubow already stated in his influential 1932 doctoral thesis *Georg Brandes' Briller (Georg Brandes' Spectacles)*) was the influence of Ki-



erkegaard.<sup>24</sup> However, it is significant that it was not Søren Kierkegaard but Baruch Spinoza who Brandes himself identifies as his greatest intellectual and spiritual influence, in a key scene from his autobiography *Levned I–III (Recollections of my Childhood and Youth I–III)* (1905–08). As such, it is the argument of this book that Spinoza and specifically that a particular depiction of Spinoza as a life example in the literary genre of Spinozism was Brandes' primary intellectual and spiritual guide in life. In this context, Berthold Auerbach's literary biography *Spinoza* plays a key role in Brandes' designation of the cosmopolitan tradition he considered himself part of, and in how Brandes conceived of his in-between position in society in general.

In fact, Brandes' fascination with Spinoza and the Spinozism that Auerbach's novel represents has already been documented in what must be considered one of the most quoted—if not *the* most quoted—works in the research on Brandes, Henning Fenger's *Georg Brandes' Læreår (The Formative Years of Georg Brandes)* (1955). However, Fenger's book also seems to have helped instigate the idea fundamental to the previous research on Brandes that Brandes' Jewish themes were unimportant. Hence, Fenger is quite eager to stress that the different Jewish sources that Brandes occupied himself with did not have any substantial influence on him; there is almost no mention of Brandes' Jewish background and the role this played in his *Bildung*, although there is no doubt that Fenger's book is a well-researched piece of work.

According to Fenger, Brandes studied the work of Spinoza thoroughly and from as early as 1861/1862 Brandes called himself a Spinozian materialist and pantheist.<sup>25</sup> Yet, having documented this, Fenger symptomatically highlights Kierkegaard as a greater inspiration for Brandes than Spinoza. Then, having documented Brandes' fascination with Auerbach's work of Spinozism, Fenger goes on to scorn Auerbach's two Jewish-related novels, *Spinoza* and *Dichter und Kaufmann* (1840). First, Fenger determines them to be of poor artistic value; he even calls them "sickly." After this, Fenger claims that the only reason Brandes favors Auerbach's Jewish-related novels is because of the writers' "racial kinship."<sup>26</sup> As can be seen in the following quote, Fenger moreover

reproduces the antisemitic stereotype of perceiving Jewish males as feminized and de-masculinized in comparison with Christian-baptized males:

It is difficult to say anything pleasant about Auerbach [...]. His work can in no way be compared to the masculine art of Gottfried Keller. In his Jewish pseudo-historical novels, there is a sickly humanism and tolerance, with which even the most passionate admirer of Lessing and Lessing's *Nathan* will have difficulties. [...] Brandes' admiration should be understood on the basis of the historical context – and the racial kinship.<sup>27</sup>

Surprisingly, given this statement, Fenger's book was in fact written less than ten years after WW2. However, we can observe that antisemitic racial stereotypes continued to play an influential role in the Danish civil sphere after WW2, and as such also after the rescuing of the Danish Jews in 1943. In fact, no one has ever questioned or even brought up Fenger's influential verdict on some of Brandes' most important Jewish influences as being racially disposed and "sickly", even though his book has been quoted and used as a valuable reference in most scholarly work on Brandes since 1955.

The point that I want to make is not that Danish history is a hidden gem of unresolved antisemitism. However, modern Danish history should not be considered as an exception in the history of antisemitism of modern Europe, either. Certainly, antisemitism has been evident in Denmark just as it has all over Europe. In this context, we must not forget that three documented violent pogroms occurred in Denmark in the first half of the nineteenth century.<sup>28</sup> In 1819, the week-long Hep Hep pogrom was a rather savage and violent event in which Danish Jews in several Danish cities were chased and beaten up, and many Danish Jewish properties were wrecked. H. C. Andersen was one of the few to write about the Hep Hep pogrom, in his autobiography *Mit Livs Eventyr* (*The Fairy Tale of my Life*) (1855), since he first arrived in Copenhagen from Odense as a teenager in the midst of it.

In the case of Georg Brandes as a significant historical actor in the

building of modern Denmark, this book provides many useful perspectives on the various ways in which the cultural code of modern antisemitism was used to warn against the dystopian dangers of modernity and as such modern rootlessness, alienation, and cultural in-between-ness. As mentioned, in the fin-de-siècle period liberal democracy was materialized and capitalism took its last steps in becoming an all-encompassing structure of society. In general, in Western Europe, the dominant public reaction to these significant changes was initially a liberal optimism, which the visions of Brandes' Modern Breakthrough project incarnated. Yet, as the years went by, particularly from the 1890s onwards, this optimism grew into widespread pessimism. Modern antisemitism became a popular cultural code, not only in Germany, to explain why modernity had become a runaway locomotive. Back then, according to many, not just the antisemites, the spirit of modernity, the dominant *zeitgeist*, was the modern Jewish spirit. As such, this *zeitgeist* was represented by a particular kind of Jewishness: The emancipated bourgeois-influenced Western European Jews, the so-called "assimilated Jews," those individuals who had transgressed and challenged the otherwise fixed categories of class, nation, gender, and religion. For many, in the Christian-based majority societies of Western Europe, these socially mobile individuals of Jewish descent threatened social cohesion and the national order with their willingness to be mobile, their ability to create vibrant, transnational networks, their "rootless" freethinking, and their cosmopolitan-oriented, "de-nationalized" ideas.

In a Danish/Scandinavian context, Georg Brandes and his brother Edvard Brandes became the most frequently projected incarnations of this type of Jewishness. Georg Brandes was constantly signified as a subversive "cosmopolitan Jew," who threatened social cohesion and the Danish Protestant-based cultural tradition. He even went into a 5-year exile in Berlin because the stigmatization of him and his Jewish background in Denmark became intolerable after the publication of *Emigrantlitteraturen*. Hence, Brandes' Modern Breakthrough project and the self-confidence with which he had presented these visions in 1871 were increasingly seen as a kind of fatal hubris. Subsequently, Brandes

was held responsible by many for how this transition manifested itself in Denmark (although Brandes can in no way be held responsible for any of the unintended consequences of the accelerated capitalistic processes and the industrialization of this period). In a poem written for Brandes' 70th birthday, in 1912, the Danish 1917 Nobel Prize-winning author Henrik Pontoppidan described Brandes' Modern Breakthrough as having turned out to be a "mirage," like spring-smelling hot air, which had seduced the Danes without containing lasting and meaningful substance. Pontoppidan represents Brandes' Modern Breakthrough project as having catalyzed a development, which had resulted in Eve and "the baboons" eating lustfully of the fruits of the tree Brandes had attempted to plant in Danish soil back in 1871 (using the ancient Jewish tale of Adam and Eve as an analogy).<sup>29</sup>

### *Brandes' Jewish Cosmopolitanism*

Still, it makes little sense to contextualize Brandes' representations of Jewishness as only relevant to an isolated version of the national history of Denmark. Throughout his writings, Brandes continuously participated in broader Western European discussions of the so-called Jewish Question. It would be an historical error to perceive these discussions as separated national discussions. Particularly, in Brandes' work there is a noteworthy transnational dialectic, which in some cases is surprising. A good example of this is the significant role he played in the very creation of the ideology of racially based modern antisemitism. In historical research, the *Berliner Antisemitismusstreit* of 1879–81 is generally viewed as the dispute from which racially based modern antisemitism developed.<sup>30</sup> The founders of this ideology are usually understood to be Heinrich von Treitschke, Wilhelm Marr, and Adolf Stoecker. In 1877, the Norwegian bishop J. C. Heuch published an anti-Jewish pamphlet against Georg Brandes that garnered a lot of attention in the Danish civil sphere. A few years later, one of the founding fathers of modern antisemitism, Adolf Stoecker, then used and quoted from Heuch's writing when, in the German *Reichstag*, he warned against the growing Jewish influence. Stoecker put forward Georg Brandes as a primary example