

A CRITICAL ASSESSMENT OF RESEARCH LITERATURE ON POST-HOLOCAUST SCANDINAVIAN ANTISEMITISM

Historical research on Scandinavian antisemitism was not seen as a productive research topic for a very long time. This essay uses selected examples which are most explicit to critically review the development of academic research conducted in the field since 1945. How has academia defined, described, and explained antisemitism in Scandinavia after the Holocaust?

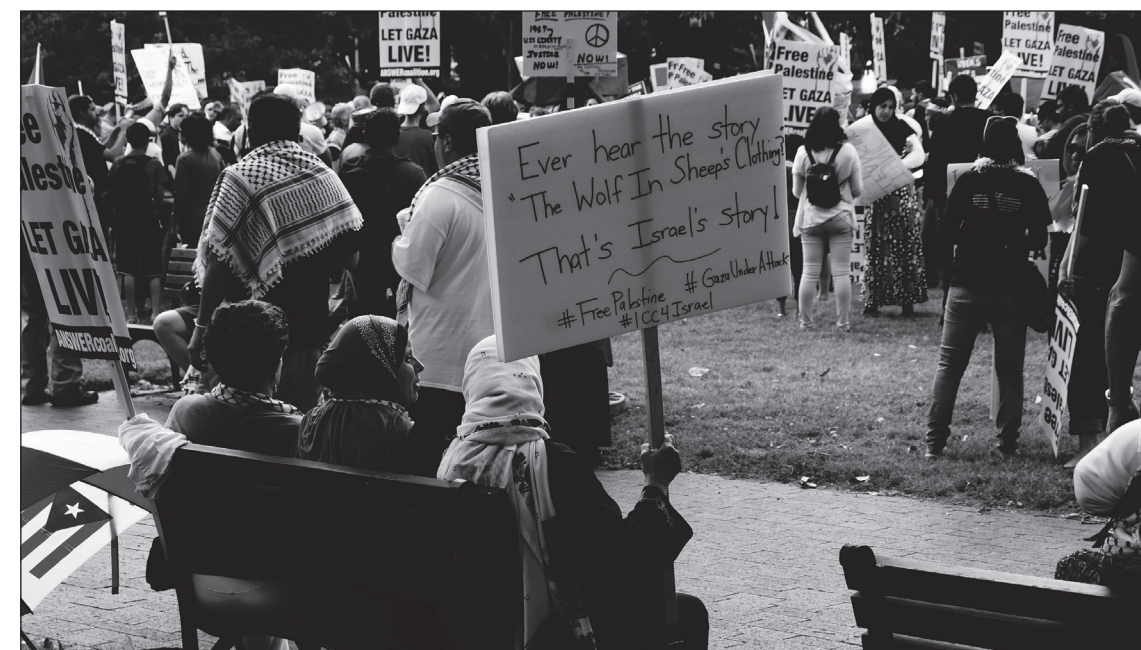
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Norwegian society after the war was under pressure to restore the national values obliterated by the occupying German regime. The patriotic memory consensus originated in the wartime resistance against the occupation, contrasting Nazi ideology from liberal Norwegian identity. Like Denmark and Sweden,¹ the framing of antisemitism as an import from Nazi Germany conceptualised it as the ideology of few traitors. Antisemitism could be seen as external to Norway, to contrast from the solidarity Norwegians would have shown Jews.²

Over 70 years later, in 2012, a survey by the Norwegian Center for Holocaust and Minority Studies (HL Center) indicates that antisemitic notions exist in Norway. 12.5% of the Norwegian population could generally be considered significantly prejudiced against Jews, and

19% believed 'world Jewry works behind the scenes to promote Jewish interests.'³ A recent survey shows that despite a decrease in prejudice against Jews, Norwegian Jews perceive that their discrimination has worsened.⁴

Understanding the roots of contemporary Scandinavian antisemitism calls for an investigation of its development, preservation, and reappearance in society. This essay prepares the ground for such an investigation by critically reviewing the development of academic research done in the field since 1945. Existing research literature is examined regarding how it *defines, describes, and explains* antisemitism in Scandinavia after the Holocaust. This corresponds with three interrogatives: *what* is post-Holocaust Scandinavian antisemitism? *How* does antisemitism manifest itself? *Why* does antisemitism prevail according to existing research?



Anti-Israel Protest. Photo: Ted Eytan.

Contexts of research

Research on contemporary antisemitism developed slowly in Scandinavia, as in other countries: Zentrum für Antisemitismusforschung at the Technical University of Berlin, and the Vidal Sassoon International Institute for the Study of Antisemitism at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem were neither established before 1982. The new image of antisemitism, as it was manifested in the Holocaust, created blindness to less visible forms of antisemitism, such as 'prejudices rooted in culture, and negative attitudes passed on by broader segments of the population.'⁵ Likewise, Antisemitism before the war was supposed to be minor and could be easily overlooked.^{6,7}

Research contributions

The first major work relating to Jewish history in Scandinavia is teacher and philologist Oskar Mendelsohn's *Jødenes historie i Norge gjennom 300 år*.⁸ Mendelsohn did what no one else had done before him, nor after. His meticulous groundwork presents the events leading to the Jewish establishment in Norway over hundreds of years. Today it is used as a main reference work for studies on Norwegian Jewish history. Mendelsohn began his research upon his return to Norway from Swedish exile and devoted decades to its completion, during the time national archives were

not digitised nor freely accessible. He was criticised for lacking systematic analysis of antisemitism; prioritising rather the narrative of successful Jewish integration in Norway.⁹ Mendelsohn's integrationist approach may be considered in context of his background as a Jewish survivor over the war and a prominent community member in Norway after the Holocaust.

Papers on Scandinavian Jewish history were generally very few and far between until the 1990s when antisemitism became a research field at Norway's academic institutions.¹⁰ At the turn of the millennium, Norway aligned with the European Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities and officially considered Jews a national minority, together with other minorities. With the establishment of HL Center in 2001, and the Oslo Jewish Museum in 2005, a platform was established to research Scandinavian antisemitism from a socio-historical perspective. The focus, however, was still not on contemporary antisemitism.

In Sweden, Henrik Bachner's dissertation in history of ideas was the first to focus entirely on post-Holocaust antisemitism, link between traditional antisemitism and contemporary manifestations in selected public debates (1999). There is no equivalent to Bachner's study in Norway, since most historical postgraduate

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works take a narrower lens of case study and therefore can be of limited scope. A notable exception is HL Center's 'Shifting boundaries: Definitions, Expressions and Consequences of Antisemitism in Contemporary Norway' (2017-2021). The project established methodological insights into the mechanisms and effects of contemporary antisemitism in Norway.

It can be argued that recent publications explore contemporary antisemitism in two channels: Nazi antisemitism, and anti-Zionism. Historian at the Oslo Jewish Museum Kjetil Braut Simonsen took up Holocaust denial in the extreme right in the first post war years, and from 1967.¹¹ He argued that the function of Holocaust denial was first and foremost ideological; a 'tool for orientation' as part of a larger conspiracy rhetoric grouping Jews as a collective and the ultimate enemy. Historian Karl Egil Johansen examined Norwegian attitudes towards Israel after 1945 through written and visual press material. He showed that the Arab-Israeli conflict was covered in the Norwegian press more frequently than any other global conflict, disproportionately to the statistics of victims in ongoing global conflicts.¹² He did not explicitly define negative depiction of Israel as antisemitic but implied it could be rooted in prejudice against Jews. Johansen explained that the public opinion on Israel in Norway was largely shaped by the press and suggested the boundaries between political criticism and collective criticism of Israel could be blurred through this medium.

In 2013, author and journalist John Færseth distinguished between social antisemitism, i.e., daily, stereotypical thinking of Jews, and political antisemitism, i.e., Jewish collective hatred. He argued that the relative absence of critical reaction against antisemitism in Norway, compared to other countries, indicates latent antisemitism survived the war. Nevertheless, he did not explain why Norway is different from other countries.¹³ In *Resurgent Antisemitism* (2013) Eirik Eigli wrote on the development of the anti-Zionist movement in Norway. He described that the emergence of radical anti-Zionism after 1967 was tied with the antisemitic perception of Jews as a Western imperialist power in the Middle East. He defined this as antisemitic because such rhetoric stereotypically associated Jews with domination and exploitation. He explained that the common ground between anti-imperialist, and later pro-Palestinian anti-Zionism, was the delegitimization of Jewish self-consciousness in the state of Israel and their human right to national security in their indigenous homeland; including their right to defend themselves.

Historian Christhard Hoffmann explored antisemi-

tism as defined and used in two public debates: 1. The Swastika Epidemic of winter 1960, in which Jewish communities around the world were targeted and estates defaced with antisemitic graffiti. 2. The First Lebanon War in 1982. With the organisation and increasing popularity of anti-Zionism from the late 1960s there was no longer a clear consensus on what legitimate criticism of Israel was, and what could or could not be said about Jews.¹⁴ Hoffmann discussed the International Oslo Hearing on Antisemitism which was hosted by the Nansen Committee against Jewish persecution in 1983. The Hearing was attended by world experts on antisemitism, scholars, religious leaders, and chairpersons of Norwegian parliamentary groups. An intellectual driving force behind the meeting - Norwegian Jewish psychiatrist and Holocaust survivor Leo Eitinger - introduced a new, broader definition of antisemitism: to delegitimize the Jewish state meant to delegitimize Jewish self-determination. Traditional anti-Jewish tropes which infiltrate the political debate on Israeli policy could be defined as antisemitic.

Antisemitism in the North (2020) explored how and why antisemitism has existed in the Nordic region; a geographic area historically understood to have been the home of very few Jews. The different chapters compiled in the work concluded that people's unfamiliarity with Jewish people in a historical perspective created ignorance and contributed to the formation of misconceptions and prejudices. Drawing on quantitative research on Sweden and Denmark, Lars Dencik distinguished between three types of antisemitism: 1. Classic antisemitism, based on traditional stereotypes, 2. Aufklärungsantisemitismus, rejection of traditional Jewish practices, 3. Antisemitic anti-Zionism. He argued that whereas classic antisemitic tropes are taboo today, Aufklärungsantisemitismus and antisemitic anti-Zionism are on the rise. To conclude, while most authors agree that racist antisemitism has been marginalised in Norway after the Holocaust, and antisemitic anti-Zionism has become a main channel to express anti-Jewish prejudice, there is no consensus on what antisemitism is, and to what extent it is evident.

Oskar Mendelsohn's Jødenes historie i Norge gjennom 300 år

Oskar Mendelsohn asserted that open, political antisemitism never - apart from Second World War propaganda - infected Norway as it did Central and Eastern Europe.¹⁵ He brought Norway as a contrast case to Poland where Jews fell victim to violent pogroms shortly after the war. On the other hand: 'The Norwegian Jews

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had had the good fortune to return to their homeland and be met with compassion and goodwill.¹⁶ Mendelsohn exemplified the returning Jews' re-embracing into Norwegian society with the increasing interest from the press in their stories and public initiatives to commemorate the victims. On the other hand, he did not expand on the rehabilitation difficulties in the Jewish community after the war, including issues of property restitution, and did not discuss official policy towards Displaced Persons arriving after the war.

Mendelsohn made a first explicit use of the term 'antisemitism' when referring to extremist political groups from the 1960s. Antisemitic behaviour in the beginning took the form of degrading, stereotyping remarks against Jews. In contrast with the extreme circles, however, he showed that major press condemned antisemitism: Norwegian society, liberal and accepting, naturally stood against antisemitism described as the product of ignorance. Anti-Jewish hatred was marginalised to extremist circles. In 1960, the NS-veteran magazine *Folk og Land* called the new *Holocaust film Sannheten om Høkerkorset* 'communist propaganda' and a 'scam'.¹⁷ The magazine denied the murder of six million Jews and the gas chambers. Relating to the Swastika Epidemic of 1960, Mendelsohn explained that the authorities and the public were not inclined to believe Nazism could be revived in Norway, and therefore the incidents were perceived as single-standing crimes. Yet, he emphasised that the public took a zero-tolerance

stance regarding neo-Nazism in Norway. Major newspapers protested against the threat to the Jewish community. Nazi antisemitism belonged to the old world order which Norway successfully resisted. It was a virus in society but not one which could grow from within.

Mendelsohn reviewed the case of former high school teacher Olav Hoaas, who was convicted for incitement to racial hatred according to Article 135a in 1976.¹⁸ Hoaas expressed a Nazi ideology in marginal magazines in the late 1960s. Mendelsohn quotes Hoaas in *Ny nasjonal politikk*: 'Once we have removed all foreign races by deportation or sterilization, then we will have achieved that people of the kind who, based on experience, is prone to make spies and agents of foreign powers, are out of the way.' Here Mendelsohn described, but did not explain, conspiracy thinking and demonisation.

He brought Hoaas' case as an example of the strength of the Jewish community, whose members stood up against explicit antisemitism, and received the authorities' and the public's support. In 1975, Leo Eitinger, Kai Feinberg (both Auschwitz survivors), Robert Levin, and Charles Philipson represented the community in the matter in a protest letter to the Attorney General and Ministry of Church and Education. Mendelsohn himself performed in the trial, together with Eitinger. From Mendelsohn's account, Hoaas was unambiguously antisemitic which put him on a direct path to conviction: Hoaas complained that the prose-



Lars Weisæth og Leo Eitinger, Kontoret for katastrofepsykiatri, Universitetet i Oslo/Forsvarets sanitet, 1987. Photo: FS Eriksen.

cutor should not have been allowed to determine in his case because he was under 'foreign' Jewish influence. Mendelsohn concluded that the case successfully raised public awareness to the rise of Neo-Nazism and Holocaust denial in Norway.

Mendelsohn emphasised the positive depiction of Israel in major Norwegian newspapers. He argued that Israel criticism after 1967 was meant as constructive advice 'precisely from a place of friendship and care for Israel.'¹⁹ He showed that official visits from Israel were covered extensively and positively in major newspapers, as well as the events which signified fruitful relations between the two countries. For example, when Minister of Foreign Affairs Moshe Dayan visited Norway in 1978, various press articles described Zionism as 'the world's oldest liberation movement'.²⁰ However, he did not contextualize this considering Israel's invasion to Lebanon that same year and the growing popularity of an anti-Zionist movement in Norway. Rather, it appears Mendelsohn framed anti-Zionism in context of Norway's consistent support of Israel since its proclamation. Public anti-Zionist expressions are acknowledged briefly while counter reactions to them are brought forward, to show that members of the Jewish community were in a strong position to defend their affinity to Israel.

Mendelsohn associated the anti-Zionist movement in Norway from the late 1960s with marginal extremist circles in the Left.²¹ He illustrated the formation of a new radical voice with the resolution adopted in the annual meeting of the Socialist People's Party's youth organisation (SUF) in 1967, that Israel is an illegitimate state and must not exist. In 1969, the Norwegian Student Society adopted a resolution that a Jewish state built on Zionist principles means colonization of foreign territories and the expulsion of the local population.²² Mendelsohn did not explain anti-Zionism bias as antisemitic. He did not discuss how the Jewish community in Norway related to the public debate on Israel and avoided discussing any example where Norwegian Jews would have been targeted for the Jewish state. In this approach, Israel criticism was part of a political discussion, and not potentially a channel for antisemitic expressions.

Perhaps it was Mendelsohn's background that led him to narrate a success story of Jewish re-integration in Norway.²³ In his book, he did not critically reflect upon different notions of antisemitism, and how these might have been perceived and related to in post-war Norway. The term appears to apply to traditional anti-Jewish elements, for example physical violence, Holocaust-denial, and explicit anti-Jewish remarks. Where the situation is ambiguous, Mendelsohn described the support of the public and the authorities in the community to illustrate how certain challenges of discrimination did not reflect the community's otherwise well-established social position. Mendelsohn would have

agreed in his narration to an understanding of his time, that 'antisemitism', as it was defined in context of the war, was marginal in Norway.

Henrik Bachner's *Återkomsten: Antisemitism i Sverige efter 1945*

Henrik Bachner's study of post-war antisemitism in Sweden found that traditional antisemitic elements could be manifested in contemporary criticism of Israel. He claimed that the attitudes behind antisemitic behaviour found new manifestations with the taboo on antisemitism. He argued that anti-Zionism is the central channel for these principles today. The Jews are not directly targeted as Jews but are targeted for their nation state, grouping them as a collective in context of a nuanced political debate.

Bachner described two factors in the shift of Swedish public opinion on Israel after the Six Day War. Firstly, with Israel's victory and territorial expansion the Zionist establishment demonstrated power in the Middle East. The Jews, who after the Holocaust gained Europe's empathy were now perceived as capable in comparison to the Arab minority in Israel, now perceived as the new underdog. Secondly, anti-Zionist attitudes emerged as part of the New Left movement in the 1960s against imperialism and global injustice.²⁴

Bachner explained that Israel was subjected to higher standards than other countries perceived as imperialist. Whereas certain political systems could be changed through revolution, Zionism, the Jewish national movement, was illegitimate since it was racist and exploitive. He referred to journalist Jan Myrdal who compared between Israel and Hitler. Myrdal argued that Israel's sole purpose is to exploit the Palestinians and steal their natural resources: 'Israel has tied itself to imperialism' and 'the international monopoly capi-



The Merchant Jew in the Pilot's Cabin, 1863. Painting: Carl Lorck.

talism'.²⁵ Bachner explained that Jewish violence was not contextualised but determined meaninglessly brutal, while Palestinian violence would be justified for the struggle against imperialism. Bachner implied that by stereotypically associating Zionism with 'international' power and exploitation, Myrdal revived an antisemitic trope of Jews with money.

Bachner argued that Zionism should be considered first and foremost as a national movement, subjected to criticism like all others. Anti-Zionism could not necessarily be considered antisemitic. After the Six Day War, a radical element developed in Israel criticism. Bachner described that the Jews, who could no longer be targeted for their religion or race were now targeted as a collective as representatives of the Jewish state. He explained that legitimate distinction between the Jewish people and Israel as a political institution allowed the manifestation of antisemitism under the guise of political opinion.

After the First Lebanon War, anti-Zionism moved away from the margins and could be adopted in the central, democratic parties. The public responded vehemently to the massacres in Palestinian refugee camps Sabra and Shatila, where Christian phalanges allied with Israel murdered between hundreds and thousands of civilians, in what was meant to be evacuation as part of the Israeli Defence Forces' advance inward Lebanon. The Israeli State Commission of Inquiry found Israel partially responsible since the military leadership could have reacted sooner once it had become aware of the events. In reality, Israel was perceived to have had a central role in the massacres and was accused of war crimes.

Based on the analysis of newspaper reports, Bachner showed that antisemitic voices explicitly connected between Israel and the imagined 'Jewish world domination'. Zionism was not judged as a national movement, but the Jewish attempt at a genocide.²⁶ In none-communist Europe, the anti-Zionist climate prompted physical violence against Jews with no affinity to Israel. In the early 1980s synagogues in Paris, Vienna and Antwerp were bombed, a Jewish restaurant in Berlin was bombed, and a grenade was thrown at a group of Jewish children in Antwerp.

Bachner defined antisemitic Israel criticism as arguments which are not factually based but rooted in traditional, classical, or racist anti-Jewish notions.²⁷ He quoted *Göteborgs-Posten*: 'How many innocent people – men, women, and children – will be hurt, maimed, killed in Lebanon until Begin is satisfied?... Only Begin

and his government can be blamed for this terror...'²⁸ Here, the writer directed his criticism at the elected Israeli government. In comparison, Bachner quoted *Hälsinge-Kuriren*: 'Through a brutal and successful Blitzkrieg, Israel has been able to occupy large parts of Lebanon...'²⁹ Here, he compared Israel's invasion to Lebanon to a Nazi occupation strategy. The first acknowledged Israeli self-defence, and in the latter writer's view, Israel's actions were necessarily illegitimate. Bachner explained that the Israeli people could pay the price for criticism over governmental policy and be subjected to demonisation.

Bachner referred to a caricature in *Aftonbladet* in 1978 that portrayed a Palestinian man chained in spiked barbed wire. The wire wrapped around his head reminded of the crown of thorns worn by Christ upon his crucifixion. The caricature is titled: 'Eye for eye, tooth for tooth'.³⁰ Israel's mistreatment of the Palestinians was compared to Judas Iscariot's murder of Christ, maintaining the oldest classical libel. The idea of the Jews in contemporary Israel reflected their negative image as originally portrayed in the Christian universe.

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Henrik Bachner found a way to identify and explain antisemitism where it was not openly acknowledged. Looking at the development of antisemitism as a continuous process, he argued that there are ultimately no different types of antisemitism, but antisemitism adjusts to fit social conventions over time. He showed that the Holocaust was still used as contextual framework in the discourse on Jews and antisemitism after the war. Some claimed the Jews deserved a state after their near animalisation in the Holocaust, while others posed that Israel mistreated the Palestinians like the Nazis mistreated the Jews, therefore the Jewish state was as illegitimate as Nazi Germany. Bachner introduced antisemitic anti-Zionism as the main manifestation of antisemitism in post-Holocaust Sweden. Christian antisemitism went back to the archetype of the Jew as killer of Christ. What is common to all these manifestations is that they follow the same idea that of the Jew as an Other.

Conclusion

Antisemitism in Scandinavia was not seen as a productive research topic for a very long time. In recent decades, academic projects focus on contemporary antisemitism with an interdisciplinary approach analysing the nature and manifestations of antisemitism in a distinctive Nordic environment. As illustrated in Mendelsohn's history, antisemitism was associated in

the past with violent persecution. Bachner showed that after the Second World War, the antisemitic element has also existed in contemporary anti-Zionism. This overview suggests a lack in studies analysing antisemitism as a socio-historical phenomenon. The gap lies between works which either explore antisemitism in a limited scope or give a comprehensive overview but lack systematic analysis, over larger periods and different locations, considering how antisemitism may have shaped Scandinavian Jewish identifications

NOTES

- 1 Bak, "Chronicles of a History Foretold."
- 2 Hoffmann, "A Marginal Phenomenon", 155; Hoffmann, "A Fading Consensus", 29-31.
- 3 Hoffmann et al., *Antisemitisme i Norge*, 8; 50.
- 4 Moe, *Holdninger til jøder og muslimer*.
- 5 Bachner, *Återkomsten*, 14; Simonsen, "Norwegian Antisemitism after 1945", 177.
- 6 Hoffmann, "A Fading Consensus", 29; Hoffmann, "A Marginal Phenomenon", 155-156.
- 7 The scarcity of research on antisemitism early after the war comes with the exception of a survey by the Norwegian Institute of Social Research in Oslo in 1952 on the dynamics of nationalist attitudes. It drew light on the prevailing negative prejudices of Norwegian population towards Jews. See Bay et al., "Survey instruments"; Hoffmann, "A Fading Consensus", 35.
- 8 See Mendelsohn, 1986. In the following I use the most explicit examples to discuss when and how the term 'antisemitism' has been used, and what is concluded in the historical and cultural contexts.
- 9 Simonsen, "Norwegian Antisemitism after 1945", 174-176; Hoffmann, "Nasjonshistorie og Minoritetshistorie", 246.
- 10 Hoffmann, "A Marginal Phenomenon", 157.
- 11 Simonsen, "Holocaustbenektelse i folk og land"; Simonsen, "Antisemitism on the Norwegian Far Right."
- 12 Johansen, *Jødefolket inntar en særstilling*, 171.
- 13 Færseth, "Den tolererte antisemittismen", 315-316.
- 14 Hoffmann, "A Fading Consensus", 40.
- 15 Mendelsohn, *Jødenes historie i Norge*, 364; Simonsen, "Norwegian Antisemitism after 1945", 17.
- 16 Mendelsohn, *Jødenes historie i Norge*, 337; 364.
- 17 Mendelsohn, *Jødenes historie i Norge*, 365-367.
- 18 Hoffmann, "A Fading Consensus", 37; Mendelsohn, *Jødenes historie i Norge*, 373-377.
- 19 Mendelsohn, *Jødenes historie i Norge*, 385.
- 20 Mendelsohn, *Jødenes historie i Norge*, 386.
- 21 On developments in the Norwegian Left after 1967, see Gjerde, *The Meaning of Israel* p. 7-53; 188-358.
- 22 Mendelsohn, *Jødenes historie i Norge*, 388-389. The resolution of 1969 was repealed two weeks later.
- 23 Søbye, "Introduction", 13-23.
- 24 Bachner, *Återkomsten*, 153-158; 236-332; 375-387; 390-392.
- 25 Bachner, *Återkomsten*, 239.
- 26 Bachner, *Återkomsten*, 375.

- 27 Bachner, *Återkomsten*, 376.
- 28 Bachner, *Återkomsten*, 387.
- 29 Bachner, *Återkomsten*.
- 30 Bachner, *Återkomsten*, 392; 390.

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PRODUCING MASCULINITY

Masturbation Taboos and the Aesthetic of Pornography

This article will explore the possible link between the history of masturbation shaming and the development of pornography in the Western World, with particular focus on the development of modern masculinity as a way to link the two. The shaming of masturbatory acts was focused heavily on men, at the same time as pornographic production was similarly directed. The central question is how we can understand the production of masculinity through the production of pornography, and its relation to the taboo of male masturbation. This article will therefore try to understand how the discourse around masturbation has been understood to affect masculinity and pornography's aesthetics.

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At the dawn of the modern era a new moral panic spread throughout Europe: The fear of masturbation. While it had long been a (minor) religious taboo, it had not occupied the low esteem of a grievous moral failing. It was a fringe problem, mostly discussed in the context of the moral life for schoolboys and monks. However, at the dawn of the 18th century, something fundamentally shifted, and solitary sex was brought into the public discourse in a way that marked an important turning point in the ideals of sexual virtue. The loud condemnation of masturbation would not dissipate for another

200 years, and even beyond it is still struggling to be treated as a normal aspect of the human bodily experience. At the same time as the moral panic around masturbation was gaining steam, another development was on its way: the proliferation and expanding production of pornographic material. The late 18th and 19th century saw an explosion in the availability of printed pornographic materials, mostly literary, but also graphic. These two developments are both pivotal events in the evolution of modern sexuality. However, their connection, and their possible interaction in forming each other, is a topic of limited research.