

A HOMELESS PATRIOT:
FRITZ MAUTHNER'S SEARCH FOR A HOMELAND IN LANGUAGE

Abstract: This paper investigates the political dimension of Fritz Mauthner's writings in respect to his language critique and his ambivalent relationship to Judaism. Its aim is to oppose the common understanding of Mauthner as a German-nationalist. For doing so, Mauthner's relation to Judaism is contextualised within his philosophical views on patriotism, mother-tongue, and the formation of social communities. By suggesting an anti-nationalist interpretation of his philosophy, it is argued that participation in a certain linguistic practice can explain what it means to belong to a certain community according to Mauthner. The paper discusses to what extent Mauthner's writings can be interpreted as anti-nationalist and concludes that he is too contradictory to be understood distinctively as a nationalist or an anti-nationalist.

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1. *Introduction*

Fritz Mauthner (1849-1923) was born into a Jewish family in the Austrian Empire, grew up in the Bohemian part of the Habsburg Monarchy, and pursued his activities as a philosopher, journalist, and writer in Germany. He is best known for his radical critique of language, in which he negates any epistemological value of language. Although his language philosophy is frequently addressed, the political dimension of his language critique has not been thoroughly explored in the field of philosophy. A historical perspective of his political views, however, can be considered well-known and adequately researched. Mauthner is unapologetically considered as a German nationalist. He was a devoted admirer of Bismarck and considered himself German. He wrote nationalistic pro-German articles during the First World War with which he repelled his close friends¹, among them his long-term friend and

¹ J. Kühn, *Gescheiterte Sprachkritik. Fritz Mauthners Leben und Werk*, Berlin, de Gruyter, 1975, pp. 257-263.

collaborator Gustav Landauer². Mauthner retained his enthusiasm for the German nation throughout his life.

For Landauer, the pro-German attitude was a plain contradiction to Mauthner's philosophy: «You want to be the language critic and think about Germany»³, is said to be one Landauer's reproaches. When Mauthner's nationalism is examined in Jewish studies, literary studies, or in historical studies, his political position is often investigated within the biographical and historical context, and with less attention to his philosophical position. Explanations for his political orientation e.g. refer to his upbringing and his uneasiness as a German speaking Jew in Prague⁴. The same approach is also followed in philosophy: as Mauthner's political beliefs appear to be immune to his philosophical scepticism, his political statements are read separately from the philosophical writings. The reception avoided the kind of puzzlement that had struck Landauer by reading Mauthner as a philosopher on the one hand and as a political thinker on the other. But for various reasons, Mauthner is regarded as a thinker in whom life and work are interwoven and in whom the various genres of his work are to be understood as having equal status⁵. This calls into question a separate treatment of his language philosophy and the political views and it raises questions about the political dimension of his language critique. How can Mauthner be a radical sceptic and a nationalist at the same time? Does his philosophy underlie a certain political standpoint that is independent of his biographical circumstances? These questions have not yet been answered, neither in philosophy nor in other disciplines.

² C. Schapkow, *German Jews and the Great War: Gustav Landauer's and Fritz Mauthner's Friendship during Times of War*, «Quest. Issues in Contemporary Jewish History», (2016), 9, pp. 1-17.

³ F. Mauthner, *Zum Gedächtnis*, «Masken. Halbmonatsschrift des Düsseldorfer Schauspielhauses», XIV (1918/19), 18/19, pp. 300-304. As cited in: U. de Kruijff – M. Matzigkeit, *Fritz Mauthner und Gustav Landauer – eine Freundschaft mit Brüchen*, in »... die beste Sensation ist das Ewige...« *Gustav Landauer – Leben, Werk und Wirkung*, ed. by M. Matzigkeit, Düsseldorf, Theatermuseum der Landeshauptstadt Düsseldorf, 1995, pp. 133-153, p. 149 [«Du willst der Sprachkritiker sein und denkst an Deutschland»]; all translations of Mauthner/Landauer into English by T. Hainscho; the original German is given in the footnotes.

⁴ R. Robertson, *Fritz Mauthner, the Myth of Prague German, and the Hidden Language of the Jew*, in: *Brückenschlag zwischen den Disziplinen: Fritz Mauthner als Schriftsteller, Kritiker und Kulturtheoretiker*, ed. by E. Leinfellner – J. Thuncke, Wuppertal, Arco, 2004, pp. 63-77.

⁵ E. Leinfellner – J. Thuncke, *Vorwort*, in *Brückenschlag zwischen den Disziplinen: Fritz Mauthner als Schriftsteller, Kritiker und Kulturtheoretiker*, ed. by E. Leinfellner – J. Thuncke, Wuppertal, Arco, 2004, pp. 7-18.

An essay by Peter Stachel⁶ in which he denies that Mauthner's language philosophy and his German nationalist views are contradictory, remains an exception. Stachel refers to what he calls Mauthner's *Kriegsschriften*, German-nationalistic newspaper articles written during the years of war 1914-1918 in order to encourage the fight for a German victory, and points out that these writings are based on the philosophical assertion of an identity-creating function of language. For Stachel, the political dimension of Mauthner's language critique is as nationalistic as Mauthner's political views.

When it comes to Mauthner's affiliation with Judaism, he is cast as an example of Jewish antisemitism, and again, mostly his autobiographical writings are considered. The most influential works on Mauthner and Judaism are an early study by Gershon Weiler⁷, and Sander L. Gilman's treatment of Mauthner⁸. Mauthner's engagement with Judaism is more extensive on a biographical level than on a philosophical one. Considering his philosophy, nevertheless, illuminates his relation to Judaism on a theoretical level.

There is rich text material, especially in autobiographical remarks, that allows to expose Mauthner's nationalism and antisemitism. Carolin Kosuch presents e.g. an elaborate reconstruction and historical contextualisation of the private diary that Mauthner wrote during the First World War⁹. At the same time, a reader of Mauthner can find anti-nationalistic arguments in his writings¹⁰ as well as arguments against antisemitism. By exploring Mauthner's philosophical views on patriotism, mother-tongue, and the formation of social communities, this paper develops an anti-nationalist reading. This interpretation is used to investigate his relationship to Judaism and to contrast it with the common understanding of Mauthner as German-nationalist. Eventually, it is shown that Mauthner is too contradictory to be read as distinct nationalist or anti-nationalist.

⁶ P. Stachel, „Die nüchterne Erkenntniskritik hat vorläufig zu schweigen“. *Fritz Mauthner und der Erste Weltkrieg oder Die Geburt der Sprachkritik aus dem Geist des Nationalismus*, in: *Aggression und Katharsis. Der Erste Weltkrieg im Diskurs der Moderne*, ed. by P. Ernst – S. Haring – W. Suppanz, Wien, Passagen, 2004, pp. 93-134.

⁷ G. Weiler, *Fritz Mauthner: A Study in Jewish Self-Rejection*, «Year Book of the Leo Baeck Institute», VIII (1963), 1, pp. 136-148.

⁸ S. L. Gilman, *Jewish Self-Hatred. Anti-Semitism and the Hidden Language of the Jews*, Baltimore (MD), Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986.

⁹ C. Kosuch, *Misratene Söhne. Anarchismus und Sprachkritik im Fin de Siècle*, Göttingen, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2015, pp. 305-315.

¹⁰ E. Leinfellner-Rupertsberger, *Die Republik der Sprachen bei Fritz Mauthner: Sprache und Nationalismus*, in: *Die Wiener Jahrhundertwende*, ed. by J. Nautz – R. Vahrenkamp, Wien, Böhlau, 1993, pp. 389-404.

His relationship to Judaism is discussed in the sections 2-3 and serves as an exemplary framework for this paper. Sections 4-5, which explore the political dimension of Mauthner's language philosophy, are the core part of this paper. Following the ideas developed in the core part, section 6 investigates Mauthner's controversial views on Jewish assimilation.

2. *Is Mauthner a Member of the Jewish Community?*

In the autobiography Mauthner writes that his family had been «estranged from the Jewish nature»¹¹. He states that his father grew up «literally without knowledge of any catechism»¹² and calls his mother 'anti-religious', i.e. she knew much about Judaism, but she did not practise any religion, and when she spoke about it, she did it with mockery¹³. Margarethe, daughter of Mauthner and his wife Jenny, was baptised protestant in 1878; Mauthner left Judaism at the age of 42 and did not join any other religion¹⁴. These circumstances suggest that the question posed in the section headline can be negated. But solely taking Mauthner's legal status and childhood education into account does not tell the whole story.

It is clear that Mauthner rejected Jewish religious beliefs. He did so in his personal life as well as in his philosophy. However, the legitimacy of his philosophical criticism of Judaism can be doubted. According to Weiler, Mauthner makes his judgments based on a misconception because he «treats Judaism throughout as if it were a kind of Christianity»¹⁵. Weiler argues that Mauthner's critique is grounded in his conception of Christianity and therefore, he did not understand Judaism sufficiently enough to develop a

¹¹ F. Mauthner, *Erinnerungen. Bd. I.: Prager Jugendjahre*, München, Georg Müller, 1918, p. 110 [«Mein Elternhaus stand dem jüdischen Wesen fremd gegenüber»].

¹² *Ibidem*, p. 112. [«Der Vater war buchstäblich ohne Kenntnis irgendeines Katechismus aufgewachsen»].

¹³ *Ibidem*, p. 113.

¹⁴ C. Schapkow, „Obne Sprache und ohne Religion?“ *Fritz Mauthner und die zeitgenössischen Debatten über Deutschland und Judentum*, in: *An den Grenzen der Sprachkritik: Fritz Mauthners Beiträge zur Sprach- und Kulturtheorie*, ed. by G. Hartung, Würzburg, Königshausen & Neumann, 2013, pp. 19-49, pp. 25-26.

¹⁵ Weiler, *Fritz Mauthner: A Study in Jewish Self-Rejection*, pp. 140-141; in the novel *Der neue Ahasver* (1882) Mauthner explicitly says so himself: «Die Christenheit umfasst dagegen als Kulturerscheinung unsere zivilisierte Welt. Ihr gehört ein jeder an, an welchem die Jahrhunderte unserer Zivilisation nicht spurlos vorübergegangen sind, ob er sich nun einen Juden, einen Atheisten oder einen Buddhaisten nennen will» (F. Mauthner, *Der neue Ahasver. Roman aus Jung-Berlin*, Berlin, Philo, 2001, p. 202).

serious critique. Hence, an examination of Mauthner's reasons for criticizing the Jewish faith would not be fruitful in order to better understand his relationship to Judaism.

Regardless of his rejection of the Jewish religion, Mauthner does not deny his Jewish heritage. In 1913, he remarks that he plans to elaborate on his Judaism at length in the autobiography¹⁶ and in 1924, he states that he is «by birth a Jew»¹⁷. What it means to be a Jew, irrespective of the religious affiliation, is unclear in Mauthner's writings and cannot be deduced from his childhood memories, his legal religious affiliation, or his criticism of religion. None of his texts is exclusively dedicated to Judaism or the question of Jewish existence. Judaism is taken up in several of his writings, but it is treated in an autobiographical context or the context of questions concerning language, atheism, or assimilation¹⁸.

It can be deduced that Mauthner was not interested in Judaism in general, but only insofar as it was of his personal concern, i.e. regarding the question whether he belongs to the Jewish or to the German community. His thoughts on Judaism are therefore derived from writings about his personal affiliation with the Jewish community.

3. *Mauthner's Relationship to Judaism*

Mauthner's attitude towards being a Jew is judged ambivalently¹⁹. His writings include both, the statement that he is «by birth a Jew»²⁰ and the statement that he considers himself so much of a German that he would rather commit to antisemitism if he had to choose exclusively between either Judaism or Germany²¹. A passage that is frequently referred to in order to elaborate on his relationship to Judaism comes from a letter written to Gus-

¹⁶ *Gustav Landauer – Fritz Mauthner. Briefwechsel 1890-1919*, ed. by H. Delf, München, C. H. Beck, 1994, p. 282.

¹⁷ F. Mauthner, *Skepticism and the Jews*, «The Menorah Journal», X (1924), 1, pp. 1-14: 2.

¹⁸ The posthumously published essay *Skepticism and the Jews* is an exception. It addresses the question if scepticism is a trait of Jewish thought. Mauthner eventually negates this question and uses the reflections for a characterisation of his own philosophy.

¹⁹ H. Delf, *Einleitung*, in: *Briefwechsel Landauer–Mauthner*, pp. XIII-XXXIII, p. XXVII.

²⁰ Mauthner, *Skepticism and the Jews*, p. 2.

²¹ Weiler, *Fritz Mauthner: A Study in Jewish Self-Rejection*, p. 146 [«Aber ich bin nicht fähig in mir ein jüdisches Herz zu entdecken; Antisemit ist natürlich Unsinn. Gäbe es aber einen ernsthaften u. unlösbaren Widerspruch zwischen Judentum u. deutschem Volkstum, dann wäre ich Antisemit. So sehr u. so ganz bin ich Deutscher»].

tav Landauer in 1913. Mauthner writes: «I feel myself only German; I know thereby that my brain somehow has a ductus that is called Jewish; for the worse or for the better, I cannot and will not change it»²².

What does it mean that a brain has a ductus? One of the fundamental thesis of Mauthner's language philosophy is the identity of thinking and speaking²³. In principle, every thought ought to be expressed in words. Otherwise, mental activity is not considered to be a thought. The epistemological consequence of this hypothesis is that reason cannot supersede human language. The social consequence is that there are many different ways of thinking, namely as many as there are different ways of speaking²⁴. At least one of these ways can be called 'Jewish'. In German, 'ductus' (*Duktus*) can also refer to the individual style of handwriting. Although Mauthner rejects graphological claims of being able to infer a person's character traits from an analysis of their handwriting²⁵, he commits to a materialist understanding of the brain according to which the brain's neural pathways determine cognitive capabilities. Mauthner's remark about the brain having a ductus metaphorically refers to this conception. If a brain, somehow, has a ductus, and this ductus is called 'Jewish', then there must be a particular Jewish way of thinking as well as a particular Jewish way of speaking.

Mauthner frequently mentions one particular way of Jewish speaking, namely *mauscheln*. The term's etymology remains unclear and its connotations have changed repeatedly in the last 200 years²⁶. Since the early 19th century, it signifies a particular style of speaking or refers to acts of manipulation and bargaining, and these acts have unmistakably been associated with 'Jewishness'²⁷. Although there are examples of neutral uses, *mauscheln* was mostly used as a pejorative term.

Mauthner does not provide a definition and uses the term *mauscheln* in a broad sense. In the autobiography, *Mauscheldeutsch* is what he calls the pidgin language(-s) used by Jewish salesmen²⁸. Among the examples given

²² *Briefwechsel Landauer–Mauthner*, p. 282 [«Ich fühle mich nur ein Deutscher; weiß dabei, daß mein Gehirn irgendwie einen Duktus hat, den man jüdisch nennt; um so schlimmer oder um so besser, ich kann und will es nicht ändern»].

²³ F. Mauthner, *Beiträge zu einer Kritik der Sprache*. Bd. 1: *Zur Sprache und zur Psychologie*, nach der 3., um Zusätze vermehrten Auflage von 1923, Wien, Böhlau, 1999, pp. 176-193.

²⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 638.

²⁵ F. Mauthner, *Wörterbuch der Philosophie*. Bd. 1, nach der 2. verm. Aufl. von 1923/24, Wien, Böhlau, 1997, pp. 33-39.

²⁶ H. P. Althaus, *Mauscheln. Ein Wort als Waffe*, Berlin, de Gruyter, 2002, pp. 240-251.

²⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 223

²⁸ Mauthner, *Erinnerungen*, p. 32.

for *mauscheln*, there are particular styles of pronunciation²⁹, the use of a particular vocabulary – *Mauschelausdrücke*³⁰ –, lively gesticulation in general and the use of facial and bodily expressions for negations in particular³¹. These examples suggest that Mauthner's notion of 'language' includes elements that otherwise are not considered.

Mauthner exercises a nominalist critique upon the notion of 'language' in his philosophy. Understanding language as a system of signs and rules may be of use for abstract systematisations, but it misses the reality of language. Language is only 'real' when it is carried out, in the act of speaking, i.e. the «instantaneous movement of my speech organs and their sonorous outcome»³². Therefore, when Mauthner mentions 'language', he usually has 'speech' in mind. He explicitly states that «language is language use»³³. Hence, gesture, intonation, bearing, etc. belong to language.

'A Jewish way' of speaking is therefore a language of its own. From Mauthner's understanding of language as speech follows that language is a social practice. He concludes that the place of language is «between the people»³⁴. Speaking in a particular way, e.g. in 'a Jewish way', must thus primarily be regarded as a social phenomenon and not as an aspect of personal identity. For Mauthner, speaking determines the development of neural pathways. Hence, a brain's ductus is oriented towards the language that is spoken, not the other way around. A person's way of speaking shapes their personal identity. This allows the assumption that, for Mauthner, being a Jew means to speak in 'a Jewish way', i.e. speaking in a way that allows somebody else to recognise the speech as 'Jewish'.

4. *Mutual Understanding and Social Cohesion*

If language is a social practice that becomes reality between people, lingual action needs at least two participants³⁵. Mauthner assumes that social communities emerge because of the possibility to communicate. His philosophi-

²⁹ F. Mauthner, *Beiträge zu einer Kritik der Sprache. Bd. 2: Zur Sprachwissenschaft*, nach der 3., um Zusätze vermehrte Auflage von 1923, Wien, Böhlau, 1999, pp. 149-150.

³⁰ Mauthner, *Beiträge 1*, p. 541.

³¹ Mauthner, *Beiträge 2*, pp. 147-148.

³² Mauthner, *Beiträge 1*, p. 185 [«augenblickliche Bewegung meiner Sprachorgane und ihr tönendes Erzeugnis»].

³³ *Ibidem*, p. 24 [«Sprache ist Sprachgebrauch»].

³⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 28 [«zwischen den Menschen»].

³⁵ *Ibidem*, pp. 28-29.

cal analysis of concepts such as *Volk* and *Nation* refers to such a principle: political or social groups are language communities. Therefore, according to Stachel, Mauthner's philosophy does not contradict his political beliefs, but follows a contemporary nationalistic ideology³⁶. Mauthner states that «*Volk* is (...) what speaks a common language»³⁷ and with reference to Mauthner's propagandistic writings, Stachel identifies a nationalism born out of his language philosophy.

Stachel interprets 'language community' as a group of people formed and held together by a common language. His interpretation is plausible, but does not sufficiently take into account the social nature of language. Following the interpretation of language as speech, it is not necessary for a language community to use only one language. Mauthner introduces the concept *Individuallsprache* (individual language) and states that there are «not two people who speak the same language»³⁸. All people speak their own *Individuallsprache* and hence it is not possible to create a commonality between two speakers. Yet, people can understand each other. Mutual understanding happens on a pragmatic level, when speakers achieve their intended goals. On the individual level, understanding somebody else corresponds to the evocation of similar ideas (*Vorstellungen*) and similar cognitive associations. With two people, these ideas may be similar, but they are not the same. On this level, mutual understanding is possible, but «two people can never understand each other completely»³⁹. Mauthner thus emphasizes the radically individual nature of language as well as its nature as social action⁴⁰.

If the social nature of language is considered, it is possible for two speakers to understand each other using different languages. In fact, there are different languages involved in every conversation, namely as many *Individuallsprachen* as there are individual speakers.

³⁶ Stachel, *Mauthner und der Erste Weltkrieg*, p. 106.

³⁷ F. Mauthner, *Die Sprache*, Frankfurt am Main, Rütten & Loening, 1906, p. 78 [«Ein Volk ist (...), was eine gemeinsame Sprache spricht»].

³⁸ Mauthner, *Beiträge 1*, p. 18 [«Es gibt nicht zwei Menschen, die die gleiche Sprache reden»].

³⁹ F. Mauthner, *Beiträge zu einer Kritik der Sprache. Bd. 3: Zur Grammatik und Logik*, nach der 3., um Zusätze vermehrten Auflage von 1923, Wien, Böhlau, 1999, p. 239 [«Niemals können zwei Menschen einander vollkommen verstehen»].

⁴⁰ In the encyclopedia article *Sprachkritik*, Gerald Hartung discusses Mauthner's individual and social conception of language in the tradition of the philosophical critique of language: G. Hartung, *Sprachkritik*, in: *Enzyklopädie jüdischer Geschichte und Kultur, Bd. 5: Pr-Sy*, ed. by D. Diner, Stuttgart/Weimar, J. B. Metzler, 2014, pp. 560-565.

There is no reason to assume that the use of different languages cannot lead to mutual understanding. This consideration implies that social cohesion does not rely on sharing one language, but on mutual understanding. Mauthner's statement that «*Volk* is (...) what speaks a common language»⁴¹ can be re-interpreted as the claim that communities are formed because their members are able to understand each other. In the following section, this interpretation is used as the guiding principle for investigating the political dimension of Mauthner's language critique.

5. *Mother-tongue and Patriotism*

Without any exception, Mauthner writes about the mother-tongue in positive terms. The mother-tongue «is loved even more strongly than one's own family (...) just like one loves his eye»⁴², its use provides «deep joy»⁴³. He does, however, not explain why the mother-tongue is loved. A psychological explanation proves to be viable⁴⁴: For Mauthner, all thought has to be expressible as a linguistic statement. As the first language, the mother-tongue initially connects speakers to their world. It shapes their thoughts and creates what can be called a 'style of thinking'. It therefore impacts the speakers' personal development and determines their being in the world. Using one's mother-tongue reaffirms the knowledge gathered about the world and reinforces the social bonds to those who speak the same language. It is impossible not to love the mother-tongue, because an aversion against it equals an impossible aversion against the language of one's own thought.

The love of the mother-tongue is linked to the concept of homeland (*Heimat*)⁴⁵ and provides the foundation for Mauthner's political thought. A sense of belonging to the world is expressed in having a homeland; this sense explains the origin of 'patriotism'⁴⁶. For Mauthner, patriotism can be reduced to the love of the mother-tongue: «Patriotism is the love of one's own moth-

⁴¹ Mauthner, *Die Sprache*, p. 78.

⁴² F. Mauthner, *Muttersprache und Vaterland*, Leipzig, Dürr und Weber, 1920, p. 52 [«Man liebt die Muttersprache sogar stärker als man seine Familie liebt, (...) wie man sein Auge liebt»].

⁴³ Mauthner, *Beiträge* 3, p. 227 [«Wir alle haben an dem Gebrauche unserer Muttersprache eine tiefe Freude»].

⁴⁴ T. Hainscho, *Fritz Mauthners Heimatbegriff: Zwischen Deutschnationalismus, jüdischem Selbsthass und Sprachkritik*, «Colloquium: New Philologies», VI (2021), 1, pp. 54-69.

⁴⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 55.

⁴⁶ See Mauthner, *Muttersprache und Vaterland*, p. 59.

er-tongue»⁴⁷. Because it is impossible not to love one's own mother-tongue, it follows that every person is a patriot.

Elisabeth Leinfellner points out how Mauthner's interpretation of patriotism refrains from chauvinistic hate against other languages⁴⁸ and Hans-Joachim Hahn calls his interpretation «anti-national patriotism»⁴⁹. Labelling Mauthner's position as 'anti-national' because he does not interpret patriotism as a love of the nation, but as a love of the mother-tongue, does not consider the role of language in nationalism. Mauthner indeed rejects the love of the father-land as misguided patriotism⁵⁰, but his ideas go well with nationalist positions that see language as an integral part of identity⁵¹. Using a particular vernacular to reinforce social bonds among a language community or to include or exclude (non-)speakers from such a community are typical nationalist language policy measures and they are deeply incorporated within Mauthner's language philosophy. The claim that social cohesion is created solely by language can lead to a nationalist position; it is quite possible to justify with Mauthner's writings that a nation should be established by a monolingual community living in a demarcated territory⁵².

Examples for this claim are found in Mauthner's writings. A first example is a book review of Bohemian playwright and journalist Heinrich Teweles' *Der Kampf um die Sprache* (1884). Mauthner writes that it is a call to arms if a language is taken from the people⁵³. By 'taking a language', Mauthner means the suppression of language-minorities, which can be done e.g. by biased education, the obligation to use a particular vernacular, or the language of public signposting⁵⁴. A second example is found in his novel *Der neue Abasver* (1882)

⁴⁷ F. Mauthner, *Wörterbuch der Philosophie*. Bd. 2, nach der 2. verm. Aufl. von 1923/24, Wien, Böhlau, 1997, p. 526 [«Patriotismus ist die Liebe zur eigenen Muttersprache»].

⁴⁸ Leinfellner-Rupertsberger, *Sprache und Nationalismus*.

⁴⁹ H.-J. Hahn, *Parodie, Dilettantismus, Wissenschaft*. Fritz Mauthners politische Sprachkritik, in *Meine Sprache ist Deutsch. Deutsche Sprachkultur von Juden und die Geisteswissenschaften 1870-1970*, ed. by S. Braese – D. Weidner, Berlin, Kadmos, 2015, pp. 36-53: 45.

⁵⁰ He does not so in the final remarks of the *Wörterbuch* article on *Patriotism* (Mauthner, *Wörterbuch* 2, p. 526), but retracts this view e.g. in *Muttersprache und Vaterland*.

⁵¹ See Hainscho, *Fritz Mauthners Heimatbegriff*, pp. 55-56.

⁵² *Ibidem*, p. 64.

⁵³ F. Mauthner, *Zum Kampfe der Deutschen in Böhmen*, «Berliner Tageblatt», 14.3.1884. *Fritz Mauthner Collection* (AR 3392) – Archives of the Leo Baeck Institute (LBI), Center for Jewish History, New York. (AR-Z.800 3764, F.I.e.: Zeitungen und Zeitschriften; Aufsätze von Mauthner; Berliner Tageblatt 1880-1884) [«Ein Volk, das dem anderen seine Sprache nehmen will fordert es zum Kampf heraus»].

⁵⁴ Comments on Teweles, e.g. the «Pain over the corruption of our mother-tongue» [«Schmerz über die Verhunzung unserer Muttersprache»], are used in his later writings.

that tells the story of a Jewish protagonist affected by antisemitism. In the plot, conflicts arise because the protagonist – to some extent an alter ego of Mauthner⁵⁵ – regards himself as a German, but is considered a Jew (and therefore not a German) by others. He explains that he is German e.g. by referring to the books that he reads⁵⁶, which is not accepted as a sufficient justification.

The examples show how Mauthner explains that national conflicts are fights about the dominance of a particular language. Nevertheless, a crude nationalist reading can be undermined by the idea that language is speech. Following his nominalist critique of ‘language’, the suppression of a language minority in the first example is not the suppression of a language itself, but of people’s speech. If mutual understanding is given, conflicts about ‘taking the language’ might not arise. The social bond that is created by understanding each other is regarded as the origin of nations by Mauthner. This bond is, however, not linked to a nationalist myth-making about a common ancestry, the ‘purity of language’ or ‘race’⁵⁷, but simply to speech, which is interchangeable. Mauthner states that somebody who moves to a country where a foreign language is spoken will begin to think in the language spoken abroad. The person therefore changes their individual language; it is possible to forget the mother-tongue, it is possible to change the mother-tongue⁵⁸. Justifying being German by referring to reading German books, provides support for this assumption. It does, however, also illustrate that Mauthner was aware that his view was not generally accepted. He knew about the symbolic power of speaking a particular language. Although the idea of social cohesion through mutual understanding undermines that nations emerge from monolingual language communities, it does not dissolve a fundamental distinction between the self and the Other. This distinction is a precondition for nationalism, and Mauthner clearly accepts it. But, considering that language is a social practice, speech might be regarded as the ability to understand each other, independent of using the same language. A fluid transition of belonging to different communities is possible if belonging to a group is determined by mutual understanding. Likewise, by their way of speaking, a person is associated with a certain community.

⁵⁵ See J. Thuncke, *Assimilation in der Krise. Die Thematisierung der ‚Judenfrage‘ in Fritz Mauthners Roman „Der neue Abasver“ (1882)*, in: *Auseinandersetzungen um jiddische Sprache und Literatur. Jüdische Komponenten in der deutschen Literatur – die Assimilationskontroverse*, ed. by W. Röhl – H.-P. Bayerdörfer, Tübingen, Max Niemeyer, 1986, pp. 139-149.

⁵⁶ Mauthner, *Der neue Abasver*, p. 202.

⁵⁷ Mauthner, *Muttersprache und Vaterland*, pp. 51-53.

⁵⁸ Mauthner, *Beiträge 1*, pp. 195-197.

Mauthner's approach to social communities can be understood as 'anti-essentialist'. Typical identity markers – such as religion, nationality, physical features etc. – are not decisive for the question of belonging to a community, but only language, which is considered changeable. If social cohesion arises from mutual understanding, belonging to a community is a social decision. Whether someone belongs to a community is not decided by that person alone, but by others: by those who judge on the basis of their understanding of that person's speech. The discussed example of *Mauscheldeutsch* illustrates these mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion. As a social choice, the willingness to understand someone is just as important as the question about the basic possibility of communication⁵⁹. Mauthner brings attention to the idea that language alone, or respectively mutual understanding, can be the basis for social cohesion. He does not overcome any exclusion mechanism or identity conflicts with this, but provides a linguistic-philosophical explanation.

6. *Assimilation and Homelessness*

Mauthner's remarks on assimilation can be regarded as the most controversial of his œuvre as they contain his antisemitic statements. His use of Jewish stereotypes and the term *mauscheln* – which cannot be regarded as a neutral term in his writings – appear to be antisemitic retrospectively; his views on Jewish assimilation had already been considered controversial at the time. In order to talk about Jewish assimilation it needs to be presupposed that assimilation is an option, i.e. that Jews represent a kind of Other. Mauthner certainly accepted this precondition and refers to Jews as a kind of people living among other people, using the term *Wirtsvolk* (host nation)⁶⁰ for the latter, which was established as an antisemitic trope in the late 19th century⁶¹. In his short, untitled contribution to the 1912 volume on *Judentaufen*, he aims to explain antisemitism and refers to the love of the mother-tongue as a possible explanation: this love is hurt by the corruption of *mauschelnde*

⁵⁹ What Mauthner writes about the 'ductus of his brain' that he cannot and will not change and that somehow determines his 'Jewish way of speaking' (see *Briefwechsel Landauer–Mauthner*, p. 282.) can be explained by referring to the social dimension of language as well: As the 'way of speaking' is not a self-attribution, Mauthner cannot change it himself, but only through the attribution of others.

⁶⁰ F. Mauthner, in: *Judentaufen*, ed. by W. Sombert, München, Georg Müller, 1912, pp. 74-77: 74.

⁶¹ A. Bein, *The Jewish Parasite. Notes on the Semantics of the Jewish Problem, with special Reference to Germany*, «Year Book of the Leo Baeck Institute», IX (1964), 1, pp. 3-40: 11.

*Juden*⁶². Antisemitism and assimilation are both linked to language. From this premise, he derives the antisemitic suggestion to close the German borders for migrating Jews from Russia and Poland who cannot speak German and therefore prevent the assimilation of Jews in Germany⁶³.

In the 1882 novel *Der neue Ahasver*, the assimilation of Jews is compared to the absorption of foreign terms into the language by using an analogy⁶⁴. Given the literary nature of the passage, the analogy might have less value for theoretical consideration – and the dispensable remark about the ‘right to exist’ must not be read as a philosophical statement – but it allows for a better understanding of how Mauthner links social cohesion to language. The Otherness of Jews is for him analogues to the foreignness of an incomprehensible language. As long as mutual understanding is not given, the separation among different groups will remain. A remark from the *Beiträge* confirms that Jews become ‘full German’ when they stop using an incomprehensible jargon:

if, e.g. the Jews in Germany were to pay closer attention to themselves, they would have to realise that they form a tribe for themselves as long as they speak more or less a jargon that is incomprehensible to non-Jewish Germans. The Jew only becomes a full German when *Mauschelausdrücke* have become a foreign language to him or when he no longer understands them⁶⁵.

Nothing is said about why becoming a ‘full German’ shall be considered as something desirable or whether it is an empirical fact that Jewish jargon is incomprehensible for non-Jewish Germans. The analogy introduced explains

⁶² Mauthner, in *Judentaufen*, p. 75 [«die Liebe zur Muttersprache [empfindet] die Verhuzung dieser Muttersprache durch mauschelnde Juden wie eine Kränkung»]; he comments on the Jewish influence on German in the same way as he did on the Czech influence in the newspaper article *Zum Kampfe der Deutschen in Böhmen*.

⁶³ *Ibidem*, p. 76.

⁶⁴ Mauthner, *Der neue Ahasver*, p. 306 [«Die Juden – jetzt paß mal auf, jetzt kommt mein Vergleich – erscheinen mir unter den Deutschen wie die Fremdworte in der deutschen Sprache. Es gibt einzelne darunter, die gar keine Existenzberechtigung haben – andere, die sich noch ein wenig anpassen müssen – viele aber, die so vollständig mit dem Stamm der Sprache verwachsen sind, daß sie ohne Schaden gar nicht entfernt werden können. Es wäre nicht einmal besser für Volk und Sprache, wenn sie ohne jede Berührung mit den Fremden geblieben wären. Unsere Sprache und unser Leben wäre nicht so reich, so groß geworden, wenn nicht von allen Seiten befruchtende Elemente herangekommen wären»].

⁶⁵ Mauthner, *Beiträge 1*, pp. 540-541 [«wenn z. B. die Juden in Deutschland genauer auf sich achten würden, so müßten sie erkennen, daß sie so lange einen Stamm für sich bilden, als sie mehr oder weniger einen Jargon sprechen, der für nichtjüdische Deutsche unverständlich ist. Der Jude wird erst dann Volldeutscher, wenn ihm Mauschelausdrücke zu einer fremden Sprache geworden sind, oder wenn er sie nicht mehr versteht»].

how Mauthner understands antisemitism and assimilation. It is quite possible to prove his language-based antisemitism with these passages, as Mauthner's concept of assimilation relies on an evaluative distinction between different languages. Following Magnus Klaue, Mauthner's concept of Jewish assimilation means to reject all connections to anything Jewish⁶⁶.

Following the interpretation of language as speech, Mauthner's analogy explains assimilation by comparing it to the adoption of foreign words. A term's incomprehensibility can be overcome by its use, similar to being present in society. The absorption of foreign words is a sign of a language's vitality; Mauthner emphasises that the adoption of words from other languages is an ongoing and natural process⁶⁷. This is similar to his statement that assimilation is an ongoing process⁶⁸. He rejects language purity and artificial measures to ban foreign words. Turning the metaphor of 'purity' upside down, he states that words coming from other languages are «dirty and fruitful as blessed mud from the Nile»⁶⁹, and they can «receive citizenship among the natives»⁷⁰ by being used in speech. According to this interpretation, assimilation means that both sides willingly adapt to each other, whereas, following e.g. Klaue, assimilations means that one side needs to change in order to fit to the other.

In the autobiographical depiction, Mauthner describes himself as homeless, without 'mother-religion' and mother-tongue⁷¹, indicating that he did not speak a dialect and therefore lacked the ability of vital expression. Consequently, he did not feel rooted in any homeland. Mauthner decided to be a German when he had to state his mother-tongue after a school reform in 1868⁷². It is widely agreed that these life circumstances – his growing up as a German-speaking Jew in Prague and experiencing national conflicts at school and later at the university⁷³ – influenced the development of Mauthner's

⁶⁶ M. Klaue, „... wie die Fremdworte in der deutschen Sprache“. *Antisemitismus, Rassismus und Sprachkritik in Fritz Mauthners „Der neue Abasver“*, «Jahrbuch der Raabe-Gesellschaft», XLVIII (2007), 1, pp. 85-110.

⁶⁷ Mauthner, *Muttersprache und Vaterland*, pp. 17-18.

⁶⁸ Mauthner, *Judentaufen*, pp. 75-76.

⁶⁹ Mauthner, *Muttersprache und Vaterland*, p. 16. [«schmutzig und ertragreich wie einen gesegneten Nilschlamm»], cf. the similar formulation about *befruchtende Elemente* in footnote 64.

⁷⁰ F. Mauthner, [*Fremde Worte*], presumably unpublished manuscript. *Fritz Mauthner Collection*. (AR-C.1355 3426, D.II.: Manuskripte; A.-Z., fremde Handschrift) [«das Bürgerrecht unter den Eingeborenen erhalten»].

⁷¹ Mauthner, *Erinnerungen*, pp. 52-53.

⁷² Mauthner, *Muttersprache und Vaterland*, p. 8.

⁷³ Kosuch, *Missratene Söhne*, pp. 31-58.

philosophical thought. In this case, Mauthner's biography supports the philosophical argument that assimilation and belonging to a community emerges through language use and mutual understanding. An anti-nationalist reading of Mauthner emphasizes that it is possible to change the mother-tongue and to participate in a fluid transition of belonging to different communities. His life decision to be German went hand in hand with his choice of a mother-tongue.

Homeland is therefore something to be found by reaching mutual understanding with others. As the homeless Bohemian Jew who decided to be a German patriot, Mauthner chose to love and to idealize the German language. As the skeptical language critic, he rejected ideals and pointed out that «two people can never understand each other completely»⁷⁴. Through the political dimension of his language critique, Mauthner can thus be understood as the paradoxical character of a patriot without a father-land, who remains homeless.

7. Conclusion

Mauthner's political thought is linked to his language philosophy. His views on 'mother-tongue', 'patriotism', and 'homeland' allow to explore the political dimension of his language critique. It is possible to read Mauthner as a nationalist. That reading can be contrasted by focussing on his understanding of language as a social practice. This allows for an anti-nationalistic interpretation: Communities emerge from mutual understanding. If this view is consequently applied to Mauthner's ambivalent relationship to Judaism, 'being a Jew' means 'being recognised by speech'. Understanding Jewishness through language suggests a concept of assimilation analogous to the absorption of foreign words. Mauthner's controversial statements about assimilation are not any less antisemitic following this interpretation. Overall, Mauthner is too contradictory and multifaceted to be viewed only as nationalist or anti-nationalist.

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⁷⁴ Mauthner, *Beiträge* 3, p. 239.