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Robert S. Wistrich

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Anti-Judaism, Antisemitism, and Delegitimizing Israel

Edited by

Robert S. Wistrich

Published by the University of Nebraska Press, Lincoln and London, for the
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In Memoriam



Robert Solomon Wistrich

1945–2015

It is with great sadness that we must record here the passing of Professor Robert Wistrich on May 19, 2015 in Rome, where he had been invited to address the Italian Parliament.

Robert Wistrich had a distinguished career, bringing out important studies on Austrian Jewry, the Holocaust, and on the history and current reality of antisemitism. He held the Neuberger Chair for Modern European History at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem; and was head of the Vidal Sassoon International Center for the Study of Antisemitism from 2002 to 2015.

Born in Kazakhstan in 1945, Prof. Wistrich's family returned to Poland after World War II, later moving to France, and then settling in England, where he grew up. At age 17, he won an Open Scholarship to Cambridge University, where he received his BA and MA degrees. His Ph.D. was awarded by the University of London in 1974.

Along with his academic career, Prof. Wistrich was an advisor for a number of documentaries and films, including the Thames Television 3-part series, *The Longest Hatred* (1993, directed by Rex Bloomstein), which provided a historical overview of anti-Jewish persecution; the BBC's *Blaming the Jews* (2003) about present-day Muslim antisemitism; and for *Obsession: Radical Islam's War against the West* (2006). He served from 1999 until 2001 as one of six scholars appointed to a special international Catholic-Jewish historical commission to review the wartime record of Pope Pius XII. He also served as a rapporteur on antisemitism and related issues for the U.S. Department of State, the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), the Council of Europe (Strasbourg), and the United Nations Commission on Antisemitism and Human Rights and the Human Rights Commission in Geneva.

Among his notable publications were *Socialism and the Jews* (American Jewish Committee Award, 1985), *The Jews of Vienna in the Age of Franz Joseph* (Austrian State Prize for Danubian History, 1989), *Antisemitism: The Longest Hatred* (1991, H. H. Wingate Prize for Non-Fiction, UK), *Hitler and the Holocaust* (2003); *Laboratory for World Destruction: Germans and Jews in Central Europe* (2007); and *From Ambivalence to Betrayal: The Left, the Jews, and Israel* (2012). His monumental study of antisemitism, *A Lethal Obsession: Antisemitism from Antiquity to the Global Jihad*, appeared in 2010 and was named Best Book of the Year by the *Journal for the Study of Antisemitism*. He was editor of *Holocaust Denial: The Politics of Perfidy* (2012), and of the present volume, *Anti-Judaism, Antisemitism, and the Delegitimization of Israel*.

On behalf of the Simon Wiesenthal Center, Prof. Wistrich wrote the text to accompany the exhibit “People, Book, Land: The 3500 Year Relationship of the Jewish People with the Holy Land” which was first displayed at UNESCO Headquarters, Paris in 2014, and afterwards in other venues. It was a project of particular interest to him as an advocate for the Jewish people and Israel.

Working with Prof. Wistrich at the Vidal Sassoon Center was a great privilege. We appreciated his expertise and his example of dedication and determination. His wide knowledge of European and world history made a great impression on those of us who worked closely with him, and his sense of humor and personal anecdotes made cooperation in his many projects a pleasure. He will be greatly missed, and it is hoped that this final volume which he edited will be part of his lasting legacy.

*The Vidal Sassoon International Center
for the Study of Antisemitism
Jerusalem, May 2016*

Preface

The articles contained in this volume on *Anti-Judaism, Antisemitism, and Delegitimizing Israel* are representative of the discussions that were part of a conference held at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem in May 2014. The current collection is not a presentation of the papers given, but rather are essays requested by Professor Robert Wistrich which illustrate many aspects of the current surge in anti-Jewish and anti-Israel rhetoric and violence. Contributors to this volume include academics, independent researchers, journalists, political scientists, and representatives of Jewish organizations. It should be noted that the views presented in these papers are those of the authors, and do not represent the Vidal Sassoon International Center for the Study of Antisemitism, which is a non-political research institute.

Ben Cohen's opening essay points to the hyperawareness of Jews worldwide to threats of antisemitic violence. Yet he points out that:

In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, when modern antisemitism crystallized, the Jewish experience of it was defined by three factors: first, the existence of discriminatory legislation; second, a marked tendency towards mass violence, either sanctioned, or colluded in, by the state and the authorities; and third, the absence of Jewish sovereignty, which meant that Jews as minority communities were dependent for their security upon the states in which they lived.

Early Zionist thinkers had perhaps naively suggested that with sovereignty, anti-Jewish persecution would end, yet anti-Zionism became one form of the "new" antisemitism. Jews themselves contributed to the demonization of Zionism, a history described in detail in Robert Wistrich's essay, "Anti-Zionism: From Critique to Delegitimization." Exploring this theme further, Alvin H. Rosenfeld asks, "What Exactly is 'Criticism of Israel'?" and Joel Fishmen examines "Anti-Zionism as Political Warfare."

Other writers in this volume look at specific areas of the world in which anti-Jewish rhetoric, activism (as with the Boycott, Divest, and Sanction movement), and deadly violence have taken place. Melanie Phillips, Bat Ye'or, Manfred Gerstenfeld, and Lesley Klaff review the situation in Europe, citing specific cases. R. Amy Elman points up the failure of the European Union to deal effectively with antisemitism. Maurice Samuels and Michel Gurfinkiel focus on France. Milton Shain reviews the situation in South

Africa; Matthias Küntzel brings his expertise on Iran, and Efrat Aviv takes a look at the situation in Turkey manifested during the 2014 Gaza war. Samuel Barnai provides valuable insight into three trends in the Former Soviet Union, including the influence of Alexander Dugin and his “Eurasian Project” on the thinking of Vladimir Putin. On a more optimistic note, Laurence Weinbaum reviews the recent history of Poland, yet he, too, adds a cautionary note in his postscript.

Two writers focus on historical issues: Stephen H. Norwood looks back to the radical rhetoric of figures from both the far left and far right in the United States, showing the convergence of their anti-Jewish and anti-Israel thinking. Guy Millière provides an overview up to the present of the nationalist and Islamic trends that emerged in the Muslim world, which by the nineteenth century seemed to be on the verge of collapse in the face of the expansion of Western influence throughout the Middle East, Africa, and Asia.

Efraim Sicher and Clemens Heni examine the prevalence of anti-Jewish and anti-Zionist thinking in academia. Sicher describes the peculiar inversion within postcolonial theory that has come to see Jews, formerly the quintessential “Other” of European society, as Judeo-Christian oppressors, and notes that:

Postcolonial theory forms the basis for much academic work and teaching nowadays, and it enters the classroom as an agent of political activism.

Clemens Heni, writing from Germany, points to the phenomenon of pro-Hitler statements heard at public rallies in the wake of the Gaza war of July 2014:

They have fused seamlessly with radical left-wing anti-Zionism, Islamist Jew-hatred, and the inversion of the Holocaust. At the same time in academia we find a growing relativization, minimization, and reductionism when it comes to the Holocaust and the evaluation of Nazi antisemitism. . . . Moreover, this is happening at a time when the defamation of Israel and Zionism is itself being normalized—a dangerous combination particularly visible in the academic world.

Nelly Las looks at the subject from the perspective of feminism and gender studies.

Shimon Samuels and Giovanni Matteo Quer address the issue of identity theft by Palestinian propagandists. Shimon Samuels takes note of Palestinian propaganda efforts to deny any Jewish connection to Israel and Jewish holy place. Giovanni Matteo Quer focuses on the religious dimension of Palestinian replacement theology, in which it is now claimed that Jesus was

an oppressed Palestinian—and this at a time when many Christian denominations are renewing their interest in the very Jewishness of Jesus.

Concluding this volume is Robert Wistrich’s essay on “Gaza, Hamas, and the “New” Antisemitism,” in which he demonstrates the thread that links the vicious anti-Jewish and anti-Zionist rhetoric found in radical Islamist preaching and the current jihad in Europe that targets not only Jews but European institutions as well.

Thus, this volume offers a variety of viewpoints and insights into current disturbing trends worldwide, providing a basis for further discussion and efforts to counter the increasingly vocal and violent hatred of Jews and Israel.

Alifa Saadya
Publications
The Vidal Sassoon International Center
for the Study of Antisemitism

CHAPTER ONE

Antisemitism in the Age of Jewish Empowerment

Ben Cohen

INTRODUCTION

The fact that antisemitism continues to exercise such an agonizing hold upon the collective imagination of Jewish communities today stems as much from the memories of the past as the experiences of the present. At the level of pure emotion, it seems inconceivable, less than a century after the Holocaust, that Jews should once again face mass violence, or be subjected to the kinds of wild calumnies that afflicted those generations who lived prior to 1945. Hence, there is an understandable tendency to filter reports of present-day episodes—a baying mob assaulting a synagogue in Paris,¹ a series of bricks lobbed through the windows of a Dutch rabbi’s home²—through the images and narratives accumulated by Jewish history. Consequently, an attack on a Jewish individual or institution never seems like an isolated instance, but another link in a chain without end, defying understanding and thereby fueling the common description of antisemitism as “irrational”—a word that is simultaneously comforting and devoid of meaningful insight.

These acute Jewish sensitivities are exacerbated by two factors. Firstly, the awareness that antisemitism is truly an international phenomenon, manifesting in countries as culturally different as, for example, Venezuela and Iran, yet incorporating similar thematic obsessions in both. The ease with which antisemitic sentiment in different locations can be instantly publicized and shared, by uploading texts, still images, and videos onto social media platforms, merely bolsters this sense of a threat that is immediate and global.

Secondly, there is the discursive aspect of today’s antisemitism, which frequently strikes at Jewish collective memory through word and picture associations. Most of the time, the target is Israel, the Jewish state whose nature and actions are analogized to villains both historic (such as Nazi Germany, or the former apartheid regime in South Africa) and current (like the “Islamic

State” terrorist organization, which began a genocidal rampage through Syria and northern Iraq during the summer of 2014). This putatively anti-Zionist rhetoric often rests upon more established, familiar antisemitic notions, as when Jewish communities stand accused, through their continued support for Israel, of placing tribal loyalties above fealty to the nations in which they live. Furthermore, non-Israel related challenges confronted by diaspora Jewish communities—most obviously, the campaign among parliamentarians and animal “rights” groups in several European states to outlaw, in the name of humanitarianism, essential Jewish rituals such as *shechita*, the slaughtering of animals so that they are fit for kosher consumption, and *brit milah*, the circumcision of eight-day-old male infants in accordance with the Abrahamic covenant—summon the ghosts of old and compel the question of why, exactly, legislative measures enacted by the Nazi regime are once again being proposed in democratic states.³

Memory, however, is not always the best guide to the contemporary expression of a problem. Hence, the above summary would be sorely compromised without an important qualifier. Without making light of the persistence of antisemitism in our own time, and without denying that there are certain trans-historical antisemitic tropes that we still encounter today, such as the longstanding slur in the Islamic world that the Jews are the “descendants of apes and pigs,” it is vital that any discussion of contemporary antisemitism not be restricted to the realms of ideas and discourse. To properly grasp the nature of the threat, our point of departure should begin with the material and political status of Jewish communities themselves. For it is precisely here that we can appreciate the critical difference between present and past: namely, that the Jewish people now are freer and, critically, more empowered than at any other time since the American and French Revolutions ushered in a new era of representative government at the close of the eighteenth century.

AN AGE OF EMPOWERMENT

In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, when modern antisemitism crystallized, the Jewish experience of it was defined by three factors: first, the existence of discriminatory legislation; second, a marked tendency towards mass violence, either sanctioned, or colluded in, by the state and the authorities; and third, the absence of Jewish sovereignty, which meant that Jews as minority communities were dependent for their security upon the states in which they lived.

Those three factors are very hard, though not impossible, to detect in our own time. The vast majority of Jews live without antisemitic legislation, and with full civil and political rights. To be exact, this status is not completely universal. There are smaller Jewish communities living in countries like Venezuela, Hungary, Turkey, and Iran, where antisemitic sentiments are stoked, or in other ways encouraged, by governments and political leaders. And there are regimes who manipulate the charge of antisemitism for their own political ends—the most pertinent example can be seen in Vladimir Putin’s invocation of right-wing Ukrainian antisemitism as a partial justification for the invasion of Ukraine in 2014.⁴

Most significantly, there is a Jewish state that provides sanctuary to Jews facing threats to their security. It is a state that is reassuringly capable of protecting the Jews who live there, as citizens of Israel, from external aggression. Moreover, under the “Law of Return” passed by the Knesset, Israel’s parliament, on July 5, 1950, “[E]very Jew has the right to come to this country as an *oleh*”—a Hebrew term for a new Jewish citizen of Israel. This measure, perhaps more than any other, represents the link between the legacy of the Holocaust and the existential purpose of the State of Israel: to ensure that no Jew will, in future, be persecuted on the grounds of ethnicity, religious belief, political sympathies, or any of the other pretexts that have been mobilized by antisemitic movements.

The parameters defining Jewish existence today are not those of a zero-sum game: empowerment does not eliminate prejudice, nor does prejudice render empowerment without significance. In the age of Jewish empowerment, then, antisemitism persists with a disarming slipperiness. For some, it is frighteningly concrete, a reminder of the observation made by Max Nordau to the first Zionist Congress in 1897, that Jewish “emancipation should first have been completed in sentiment before it was declared by law.”⁵ But a broad swath of opinion, surveying the transformations of Jewish existence brought about after 1945, remains unconvinced that there is a problem to begin with; or, if there is one, that it will be resolved once there is a final settlement of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, which is regarded by many as the principal cause of global antisemitism.

Crucially, the broad empirical truths of Jewish existence now—successful integration in democratic societies, in addition to the option of living under Jewish sovereignty—have led some analysts to question the continuing relevance of “antisemitism” as a descriptor. For example, Anshel Pfeffer, widely respected as a level-headed and sober contributor to the liberal Israeli daily, *Haaretz*, wrote in February 2014:

Something funny happened to anti-Semitism on the way to the 21st century. It stopped being about persecution and open vilification of Jews, which was something the *goyim* did to us and we had no control over. It became something we define ourselves, something we discover and too often invent where it isn't at all clear it even exists.⁶

This statement begs many questions, foremost among them what is defined by the word "it." In that sense, it is helpful to examine the relationship between antisemitism in its tangible, physical forms and its intangible, ideational, or discursive forms. For while there is little doubt that Jews are the target of tangible forms of antisemitism, such as violence, harassment, vandalism, and verbal abuse, the grievously polarized debate over its *intangible* forms—in essence, the question of whether or not these and similar offenses are underpinned by a negative, hostile Judeocentric worldview—frequently leads to the conclusion that the Jews of Israel, as a sovereign collective, are through their actions responsible for the misfortunes heaped upon Jewish communities in the diaspora.

In this schema, therefore, we are facing not antisemitism as classically understood—the organization of anti-Jewish sentiment and activism by external forces preying on Jewish communities—but something more akin to a self-inflicted wound which results in worsening relations with other ethnic groups, most prominently the various Muslim and Middle Eastern-origin communities in Europe and Latin America. "The sentiment that a large section of black and Arab French youth feel towards the Jews is something quite different, having nothing in common with historic anti-Semitism," assert the French leftists Alain Badiou, Eric Hazan, and Ivan Segré in *Reflections on Anti-Semitism*. "The hostility of these young people towards Jews is fundamentally bound up with what is happening in Palestine. They know that, over there, Jewish Israelis are oppressing the Palestinians, whom they consider, for obvious historical reasons, as their brothers."⁷

The influence of this explanation, which recasts antisemitism as anger towards the foreign affiliates of a state that was created through the original sin of dispossessing the indigenous population, has been registered not only in France. Much the same analysis has been applied to other European countries, among them Germany, the crucible of the Nazi Holocaust, and the United Kingdom, the former mandate power in Palestine. As in France, violent episodes elsewhere in Europe accompanied the frosty public response to Israel's decision, in July 2014, to launch its third military response in six years to the slew of missile attacks from the Hamas-controlled Gaza Strip.

In the United Kingdom, where the size of the Jewish population is estimated at approximately 300,000, a total of 302 antisemitic incidents were

recorded in July 2014, the highest monthly number since the Community Security Trust (CST), the official Jewish body handling communal security, started keeping records in 1984. Significantly, the CST's previous highest monthly total, 289, was recorded in January 2009, at the height of Operation Cast Lead, Israel's first serious attempt to cancel out the Hamas missile threat since withdrawing its forces from the Gaza Strip in 2005.⁸ Similarly, in Germany, where the Jewish population has increased from 30,000 immediately after the Second World War to around 150,000 now, government agencies recorded 131 antisemitic incidents in July 2014.⁹ Given the relative size of the respective Jewish and Muslim communities in these two countries, Jews are actually much more likely to be targets of hate crimes than are Muslims—a trend already observable in France since 2012, when the Service de Protection de la Communauté Juive (SPCJ), the French equivalent of the CST, issued a report which noted that 55 percent of racist violence during that year was directed at Jews.¹⁰

This dovetailing of the frequency of antisemitic attacks in Europe with the troughs and peaks of the Palestinian conflict with Israel is a major factor behind the view that it is Israel's actions which are the primary cause of violence towards Jews. Such an analysis is amplified by the excessive media coverage which this conflict attracts, along with the habit of many press and broadcast outlets alike to portray Israel's military response as a deliberate attempt to wipe out the basic conditions of existence for the Palestinian civilians of Gaza. Empirical research that suggested otherwise, such as that conducted by an Israeli think-tank which pointed out the inherent unreliability of data on fatalities collected by the Hamas-controlled Health Ministry in Gaza, as well as the disproportionately high number of casualties among Gazan males of military age, barely dented this viewpoint.¹¹

The net effect of this interpretation was to depict attacks on diaspora Jews as understandable, if misguided. Any analyst examining the character of antisemitism in the early part of the twenty-first century is, sooner or later, compelled to ask: is antisemitism these days a phenomenon that is all in the mind, the phantom creation of a fevered, historically traumatized collective memory? And if the answer to that question is no, then how do we make a credible case that rising antisemitism presents a serious challenge to twenty-first-century civilization?

CONTESTED DEFINITIONS

A large part of the problem, as I have indicated already, resides in the fact that the term "antisemitism" is the most contested of all the terms in the

lexicon of prejudice. When we hear the word “racism,” we generally know what is meant, and we understand that it can manifest against people of color in different ways. Even “Islamophobia,” a relatively recent term coined by Muslim advocacy organizations, enjoys a wide consensus as to its meaning, even though that meaning includes forthright critiques of Islam as a faith as well as crudely bigoted attitudes towards Muslims. Consider: in the context of non-Muslim attitudes towards Muslims, the right to reject religion, the right even to engage in blasphemy, an integral right in western societies, is now regarded as a form of racism!¹²

But antisemitism is different. To simplify, whereas there is a consensus recognition of antisemitism as, historically, a presence in the lives of Jews who are now dead, there is no similar consensus recognition of its presence in the lives of Jews who are currently alive.

Why is this case? I want to suggest two principal reasons. First, the perspectives and experiences of minorities who suffer from prejudice tend to be privileged in our understanding of how these prejudices function. It is generally assumed that if a person of color complains of racism, there is likely to be a credible basis for such a claim, or at the very least a recognition that we are dealing with a claim that cannot be dismissed out of hand. Crucially, minorities “own” the definition of these descriptors, so that we automatically infer that the victims of what is called “racism” are people of color. This is not always the case with the Jews. With growing frequency, it is assumed that the real victims of what is called “antisemitism” are not Jews, but those who are unfairly branded as antisemites.

This brings me to the second, related, reason: Jews do not own the term “antisemitism” in the way that people of color own the term “racism.” Indeed, they never have. When the term emerged in Germany in the late 1870s, its authors proudly described themselves as “antisemites”—a term they coined because, they believed, it encapsulated a scientific instead of a theological approach to what was known as the “Jewish Question” or the “Jewish Problem.” The first generation of antisemites portrayed themselves not as prophets of hate and bearers of unreason, but as agents of liberation. Under the cover of a discourse of freedom, antisemitism shaped up as a social and political program that aimed at the control or outright removal of Jewish influence from non-Jewish polities.

Within less than a century, however, the term antisemitism was widely regarded, including by antisemites themselves, as a term that had outlived its usefulness, and moreover one used for the purposes of moral blackmail by Jewish and non-Jewish critics of anti-Jewish discourse. These days, we often hear anti-Zionists protest that they are accused of antisemitism in order to

deflect attention away from their critiques of what they call Israeli, or Zionist, apartheid.

In fact, this discursive technique is not new. In 1921, in an article for the *Dearborn Independent* on Jewish influence over the American financial system, Henry Ford asserted, “It was inevitable that the publication first to open the discussion of this Question should be compelled to meet the degrading charge of ‘anti-semitism’ and kindred falsehoods.”¹³ Degrading, because for Henry Ford in 1921 as for the former Mayor of London, Ken Livingstone, who in 2008 accused his critics of “playing the antisemitism card,” the invocation of antisemitism is equivalent to an ad hominem attack. It is taken to be a means to demean the substance and focus of a speaker’s argument, by portraying him or her as somehow superstitious or irrational or motivated by bigoted malice.¹⁴

All this brings to mind George Orwell’s prescient remark in a 1948 essay, that “there is widespread awareness of the prevalence of antisemitic feeling, and unwillingness to admit sharing it.”¹⁵ Now, it is true that Orwell misunderstood several important aspects of antisemitism, such as its relationship to political Zionism. Nonetheless, the above observation of Orwell’s was based on his assertion that “above a certain intellectual level, people are ashamed of being antisemitic and are careful to draw a distinction between ‘antisemitism’ and ‘disliking Jews.’” This distinction provides, I would submit, an ideal entry point into understanding the character of antisemitism in our own century.

ANTISEMITISM AS A SOCIAL MOVEMENT

However consistent the foundational themes of modern antisemitism may be, in our own time we are being sorely tested when it comes to pinpointing the agency behind its present resurgence. Consequently, predicting the next steps in what Robert Wistrich has described, using the case of France, as the “endgame” is a science of the most inexact sort.¹⁶ It is not enough to say, as many do, that the culprit—in France or in any other country—is “the left,” or “nationalist extremism,” or “the Muslims,” or “the internet,” or some combination of these. That is to confuse the multiple, overlapping expressions of the problem with the problem itself.

Inevitably, this understanding has important consequences for probing what antisemitism constitutes in the age of Jewish empowerment. Looked at from this perspective, what stands out are not the similarities with the past hundred years, but the differences.

Hence, the experiences of the Jews during the last time that a grand ideal came crashing down—in this case, the promise of the Enlightenment—can sometimes hinder, rather than enable, a nuanced understanding of the current predicament. In the twentieth century especially, antisemitism was intimately bound up with the ideological imperatives and institutional manifestations of totalitarian political movements. True, the themes they summoned may be eerily familiar to our eyes and ears—we see today the revival of both the Nazi image of the Jew as an unctuous predator, and the Soviet image of the Jew as a conniving tribalist—but the physical embodiment of the complex of beliefs that now compose antisemitism adopts a thoroughly modern (some might say “post-modern”) form.

In the twentieth century, both Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union, the two states that did more to advance antisemitism than any of their democratic peers, converted mob vilification of the Jews into government policy. The meshing in these two countries of party and state, and of executive and judiciary, under the tutelage of a supreme leader, effectively closed down the possibility for autonomous, societally-based, political action. Antisemitism was, in this incarnation, a series of gruesome policy measures shaped and implemented from on high, even as it struck an agreeable chord with many, perhaps even a majority, of non-Jewish subjects.

But no European government today directs state-driven antisemitic policies. Many, in fact, have designed and strengthened legislation in the opposite direction, while leaders like German Chancellor Angela Merkel have declared: “Jewish life is part of our identity and culture. It hurts me when I hear that young Jewish parents are asking if it’s safe to raise their children here or the elderly ask if it was right to stay here.”¹⁷ In several countries, the absence of a constitutional instrument like the First Amendment in the United States means that Holocaust denial or even distortion is illegal (among the eight convictions which French courts have handed down to Dieudonné M’bala M’bala was a 7,000-Euro fine, in June 2008, for referring to Holocaust commemorations as “memorial pornography”).¹⁸ In the same vein, more general hate speech towards Jews can place the offender on the wrong side of the law.

What all this demonstrates is that however much governments legislate and seek to educate against antisemitism, they cannot eliminate it. And the reason they cannot do so is that, today, antisemitism thrives within the very same democratic spaces that its totalitarian practitioners of yesteryear set about eradicating.

These limits on government action permit us to grasp the profound change in the expression of antisemitism in our century. It is no longer the preserve

of a specific political party or state. Rather, antisemitism has broadened its appeal and cut across traditional political divisions by becoming a social movement. In essence, what was vertical in the last century has become horizontal in this one.

The term “social movement” is very much a creature of the post-1968, New Left-dominated theoretical landscape. In very simple terms, while social movements may adopt organizational forms—Greenpeace is a product of concerns about the environment, PETA of concerns about the treatment of animals—their broader purpose centers more upon the changing of popular sensibilities, rather than the creation of enduring political vehicles. To identify with a social movement is to adapt one’s beliefs and behavior in accordance with the vision set out by the movement in question. A core belief (that, say, we are ruining the environment for which we are all responsible) leads to material outcomes (eating certain foods and not others, recycling renewable materials, avoiding gas-guzzling modes of transportation, and so forth.) Once the sum of these individual behaviors reaches critical mass, what originally seemed revolutionary and novel becomes established as a social norm that can then, in some cases, be enshrined in legislation. As Dietz, Abel, Guagnano, and Kalof explain:

[M]ovement success depends on movement activists and organizations building support by activating or reshaping personal norms to create feelings of obligation. Many social movements, including the environmental movement, are aimed at producing public goods that are advocated by reference to altruistic values. Such movements work to activate personal norms tied to those values. It is also possible, however, for a social movement to try to activate personal norms based on other kinds of values. For example, some conservative social movements, which see traditional values of duty, family loyalty, and the like as essential for providing public goods such as social order, refer to these values in attempting to activate feelings of personal obligation to support movement objectives.¹⁹

What, then, is the core belief of antisemitism in its guise as a social movement? What is the grand idea that enables the coming together of disparate, contradictory, political forces—the extreme left, neo-fascists, Islamists, even large numbers of liberals—in common cause? In my view, it centers upon opposition towards the notion of Jewish national self-determination and suspicion of collective Jewish political efforts—the dreaded “*communitarisme*,” or “communalism,” identified by Robert Wistrich in the French situation.²⁰ Put another way, the very real, empirically-verifiable empower-

ment of the Jews in the post-1945 era is regarded as a profoundly negative development with global implications.

The embrace of this overarching idea, whether in the name of the “Palestinians,” the “people,” the “*umma*,” or the “nation,” has generated common, standardized rhetoric and behavior. To begin with, those who detest Jewish “communalism” usually detest the term “antisemitism” for the same reason, regarding it as a device to censor discussions of the Zionist present by invoking the sufferings of the Jewish past. “The word ‘antisemitic,’” as Badiou, Hazan, and Segré insist, “is not only the most violent choice, but also the one with the least bearing on the present reality.”²¹

Then there is the tendency to elevate the Palestinian cause—a local struggle not dissimilar from the myriad other national conflicts in the world today—into what might be called the ideology of “Palestinianism.” From this vantage point, the Palestinians become iconic, transcendental victims, rather like the Jews were for a brief period after the Second World War. Those who kneel before the altar of Palestinian suffering with almost spiritual fervor can be relied on to traffic in the kinds of themes that have now gained a foothold in mainstream discourse: that Israel, the Jewish state, is a carbon copy of South Africa’s old apartheid regime, that it consciously mimics the practices of the Nazis, that it is—as formulated in the perverse Twitter hashtag #JSIL—a Jewish reflection of the Islamic State terrorist gang that has raped, murdered, enslaved and decapitated thousands of innocents in Syria and Iraq.

Because we are dealing with a social movement, there are no restrictions of education, or ethnicity (appropriately anti-Zionist Jews can participate, thereby assisting the wider movement in deflecting charges of antisemitism) or social class, or political affiliation, when it comes to getting involved. Similarly, there are no requirements to pay membership dues, or sell publications, or any of the drab imperatives that characterized earlier generations of political activism. Instead, the emphasis is on spectacle. Supporters of the Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS) movement are increasingly prone to raiding supermarkets and forcibly removing Israeli goods from the shelves, filming themselves as they do so and displaying the results on blogs, websites and other social media platforms. Young people, especially, can make a statement by photographing themselves performing the “quenelle,” the inverted Nazi salute popularized by Dieudonné, and posting the image online; as Dave Rich observed in an article about the quenelle phenomenon, “this may be the first individualist mass movement of the social media age.”²² Through such practices, slowly but surely, what was once taboo becomes normalized for large sections of the population.

And “normalization”—a word, ironically, that is associated with Zionist political thought—is precisely what antisemitism as a social movement seeks to achieve. The aim is to persuade the mass of people to reflexively shun Israel in the same manner that they would once have shunned South Africa’s ruling white minority, and to overturn the comparatively philosemitic mood that settled upon Europe in the aftermath of the Second World War in favor of the genuine victims: the Palestinians.

The primary target of twenty-first-century antisemitism, therefore, centers upon opposition to real, tangible Jewish power, the clearest illustration of which is the State of Israel. Hence, one of the reasons that the anti-Zionist, eliminationist agenda of the BDS movement can legitimately be described as antisemitic is that, in its quest to quarantine the State of Israel as an initial stage towards its eventual dismantling, diaspora Jewish communities are weakened through a process of guilt by association, while the Jewish state is cast as a rogue state par excellence. Were this trajectory to be carried to a successful conclusion, the net result would be to restore the status quo ante, by disempowering the Jews through the abolition of Jewish sovereignty.

The organizationally loose, politically promiscuous nature of antisemitism as a social movement raises many questions, but none are more vexing than this one: what will its ultimate effect be? As I have argued, today’s Jews are not living in a rebirth of the year 1933, nervously awaiting the rise to power of antisemitic political party with an antisemitic manifesto (although, of course, such parties, like Jobbik in Hungary and Golden Dawn in Greece, remain in existence and represent an important threat.)

Instead, we are compelled to focus on more intangible factors, like the prevailing political atmosphere, or what we see and read in the media, or the chilling anecdotes we hear from friends and relatives in cities like Stockholm and Antwerp, Santiago and Buenos Aires. Jews feel fear, but they are not entirely sure what it is that they are fearful of. Increased violence? Legalized discrimination? The requirement, in order to maintain safety, to hide visible expressions of Judaism like the wearing of a *yarmulkeh*? Expulsion? Genocide?

Perhaps it is none of these; social movements can be fickle, and antisemitism is no exception. As Dave Rich argued in relation to the quennelle phenomenon, the movement’s ad-hoc nature is also emblematic of its political failure: “this is a mass movement of attitude rather than action, which so far has not translated into formal political power.”²³ Perhaps Jews are fated to live at the mercy of the news cycle, dependent on each degeneration of the conflict between Israel and the Palestinians over the existence of the Jewish state leading to periodic outrages, such as those of

July 2014, which leave the nagging sense that they would be better off elsewhere.

It is often quipped that European governments have a decent record of commemorating dead Jews, as evidenced by the numerous Holocaust memorials across the continent, and a more sobering record when it comes to protecting live ones. Even if Europe's leaders cannot, as I have argued here, legislate antisemitism out of existence, they can make a decisive contribution to combating it by acknowledging explicitly that the continent's culture of Israel-hatred—expressed through boycott campaigns, degrading films and cartoons, the analogizing of Israel with states past and present engaged in endemic human rights abuse—is what lies behind the latest embrace of “the longest hatred.” To do so will not be easy, as it will require the balancing of policy imperatives both domestic (the continuing challenge of integrating Muslim communities) and foreign. This especially applies to Europe's desire to avoid being sucked into the sectarian wars waged by Iran and other powers in the Middle East, powers that are only too ready to traffic in antisemitism. Given the grip that the Palestinian narrative of suffering already exercises on the European liberal conscience, we would be wise not to expect too much.

NOTES

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6. Anshel Pfeffer, “The New Antisemitism Is Whatever Israelis Want It To Be,” *Haaretz*, 7 Feb. 2014.

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11. See “Examination of the Names of Palestinians killed in Operation Protective Edge,” Meir Amit Intelligence and Terrorism Information Center, <http://www.terrorism-info.org.il/>.

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16. Robert Wistrich, "Summer in Paris," *Mosaic Magazine* (Oct. 2014), <http://mosaicmagazine.com/essay/2014/10/summer-in-paris/>.
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20. Wistrich, "Summer in Paris."
21. Badiou, et al, *Reflections on Anti-Semitism*, 41.
22. Dave Rich, "The Unwelcome Arrival of the Quenelle," *Dissent Magazine*, 30 Jan. 2014.
23. *Ibid.*