

Yale University  
Institution for Social and Policy Studies

**Seminar on Antisemitism in Comparative Perspective**

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Featuring

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**Advance Reading:**

Pages 11-14 from *EUMC - Manifestations of Antisemitism in the EU 2002-2003*  
(The full text can be found at <http://eumc.eu.int> )

And

An independent text on the  
“Working Definition of Antisemitism,” that was ratified in Cordoba on June 2005

## **THE HISTORICAL CONTEXT - ANTISEMITISM IN EU COUNTRIES SINCE 1945**

The review of the historical development of antisemitism in the EU countries since 1945 and of the existing literature on the subject showed that research on the subject is lacking for several EU countries. It also pointed out the need for comparative studies on antisemitism, which could help us grasp the European dimension of developments that can only be understood in trans-national terms in many respects.

## **DEFINITIONS, CONCEPTS AND THEORIES**

If we look into the literature dealing with the phenomenon of antisemitism, it becomes evident that several problems relate to the usage of the term “antisemitism”.

- The first problem is a terminological one: Is “antisemitism” (as opposed to other terms like for example “Judeophobia”) the right term to describe those attitudes and acts that are seen as a threat to Jews and to society as a whole?
- The second problem refers to the question of how those terms that are in use shall be defined: When exactly can a certain belief, attitude, or act be called “antisemitic” or “Judeophobe”?
- A third set of questions relates to whether a “new antisemitism” has emerged in recent years and whether anti-Zionism and/or an unbalanced criticism of Israel and/or the equation of Israel and Jews represents per se a form of antisemitism or not.

In the present report, the term “antisemitism” will be used when referring to anti-Jewish thinking as well as attitudes and acts of prejudice and/or hostility against Jews (as Jews) after 1945. The notation “antisemitism” will be given preference to the notation “anti-Semitism”. This allows for the fact that there has been a change from a racist to a culturalist antisemitism, and in this context helps to avoid the problem of reifying (and thus affirming) the existence of races in general and a “Semitic race” in particular.

## DEFINING ANTISEMITISM

If we look for commonalities between different approaches to defining antisemitism, we find two recurring aspects:

- First, almost all definitions of antisemitism refer to hostile attitudes and/or activities towards Jews;
- Second, a significant number of definitions contain the additional remark that the hostility is directed towards Jews “as Jews”<sup>2</sup>, or towards Jews “because they are Jews”<sup>3</sup>, or towards Jews “because of their actual or perceived religious or racial background or identification”.<sup>4</sup>

It is the second aspect that is in fact the key premise for an accurate definition and identification of antisemitism. **It is not until the remark “as Jews” is added that we come to the basic conclusion that one can only speak of antisemitism, if Jews (or Non-Jews) are attacked because they are (perceived as) Jews.** We will further elaborate on this below, but two important implications are obvious: First, not every hostility towards Jews is to be classified as antisemitic; and second, Non-Jews can also become the target of antisemitism (e.g. if they are perceived as Jews or associated with a pro-Jewish stance).

In the past, some traits commonly attributed to Jews have become for the antisemites a constituent part of their (imaginary) ‘Jew’. In an analysis of German antisemitic literature of the 1930s and 1940s, i.e. of the period of National Socialism, which provides a condensed image of the ideological system of racist antisemitic beliefs, Alexander Pollak and Nina Eger established six categories of the racist antisemitic stereotyping of ‘the Jew’.<sup>5</sup> These antisemitic stereotypes concern:

- the ‘deceitful’, ‘crooked’, ‘artful’ nature of ‘the Jew’;
- the ‘foreign’ and ‘different’ essence of ‘the Jew’;
- the ‘irreconcilability’, ‘hostility’, ‘agitation’ of ‘the Jew’;
- the ‘commercial talent’ and ‘relation to money’ of ‘the Jew’ (construction of ‘the Jew’ as the worst possible incarnation of a capitalist);
- the ‘corrupt’ nature of ‘the Jew’;
- Jewish ‘power and influence’ and a Jewish ‘world conspiracy’.

<sup>2</sup> Helen Fein: Dimensions of Antisemitism: Attitudes, Collective Accusations and Actions. In: Helen Fein (ed.): The Persisting Question. Sociological Perspectives and Social Contexts of Modern Antisemitism. (Current Research on antisemitism, vol. 1, ed. by Herbert A. Strauss and Werner Bergmann). Berlin, New York: de Gruyter, 1987, p. 67.

<sup>3</sup> Martin Luther King Jr.: “Letter to an anti-Zionist friend”. *Saturday Review*, 47, August 1967, p. 76. Reprinted in M. L. King Jr., This I Believe: Selections from the Writings of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. (New York, 1971), pp. 234-235.

<sup>4</sup> See UK RAXEN 4 Racial Violence Report, 2003 (unpublished - forthcoming).

<sup>5</sup> See Alexander Pollak and Nina Eger: Antisemitismus mit Anspielungscharakter. In: Anton Pelinka, Ruth Wodak (ed.): Politik der Ausgrenzung. Vienna: Czernin, 2002, pp. 187-210.

To these six categories of racist antisemitic beliefs one could add a seventh category, the Christian anti-Judaist myth of ‘the Jew’ as “Christ-Killer”<sup>6</sup>.

For the antisemite, ‘the Jew’ as the imaginary figure outlined above, is the (only) real Jew. Following some of the remarks of Brian Klug, who argues that antisemitism “is best defined not by an attitude towards Jews but by a definition of ‘Jew’” and who regards antisemitism as “the process of turning Jews into ‘Jews’”<sup>7</sup>, we understand the core of antisemitism to be:

Any acts or attitudes that are based on the perception of a social subject (individual, group, institution, or state) as “the (‘deceitful’, ‘corrupt’, ‘conspiratorial’, etc.) Jew”.

The perception of a social subject as ‘the Jew’ (as characterised by the six or seven categories of stereotypical beliefs outlined above) goes far beyond the categorisations and generalisations we all do in everyday life when dealing with social subjects. Believing in the stereotypical construction of ‘the Jew’, means, at its extreme, appropriating a closed belief system about how ‘the Jew’ is and about how he manipulates the world – a belief system that has no exit door, because all arguments against antisemitism are then seen as resulting from Jewish power and a Jewish world conspiracy.

#### ARE ANTI-ISRAELI AND ANTI-ZIONIST EXPRESSIONS ANTISEMITIC?

If we turn to the crucial question of defining the point where anti-Israeli and anti-Zionist expressions are to be considered as antisemitism, then we could conclude, on the basis of our definition of antisemitism, that anti-Israeli or anti-Zionist attitudes and expression *are* antisemitic in those cases where Israel is seen as being a representative of ‘the Jew’, i.e. as a representative of the traits attributed to the antisemitic construction of ‘the Jew’.<sup>8</sup>

But what if the opposite is the case and Jews are perceived as representatives of Israel? What if Jews are criticised or offended for Israel’s policies toward the Palestinians? If we stick to our definition, then, strictly speaking, we would have to qualify hostility towards Jews as ‘Israelis’ only then as antisemitic, if it is based on an underlying perception of Israel as ‘the Jew’. If this is not the case, then we would have to consider hostility towards Jews as ‘Israelis’ as *not* antisemitic, because this hostility is not based on the antisemitic stereotyping of

<sup>6</sup> The myth of “the Jew” as “(bloodthirsty) Christ Killer” has been perpetuated to the present through the myth of Jewish ritual murder. See Marvin Perry and Frederick M. Schweitzer: *Antisemitism: Myth and Hate from Antiquity to the Present*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003, pp. 2ff.

<sup>7</sup> Brian Klug: *The collective Jew: Israel and the new antisemitism*. In: *Patterns of Prejudice*, Vol. 37, No. 2, June 2003, Routledge, pp. 122ff.

<sup>8</sup> The antisemitic view of Israel as being representative for the (stereotypical) “Jew” is not to be confused with the view of Israel as a Jewish state, which is, in fact, the way, Israel defines itself.

Jews. However, this does not mean that such a hostility towards Jews should be excluded from monitoring. There are three good reasons why hostility towards Jews as 'Israelis' should in any case be carefully monitored:

- First, for the victims of such hostility, it does not make an immediate difference, if they are attacked as 'the Jew' or as 'an Israeli'.
- Second, it is a very difficult – and in most cases an impossible – task to look into peoples' heads and grasp their thinking and their "real" intentions behind launching hostile activities against Jews.
- Third, those physical or verbal attacks on Jews, which are based not on antisemitic stereotyping but on the (false) generalisation of Jews as 'Israelis', are to be regarded, in the words of the EUMC, as "attitudes and social behaviours that constitute a serious threat to basic European values and democracy".

What should *not* be considered as antisemitic and therefore does not have to be monitored under the heading of 'antisemitism', is hostility towards Israel as 'Israel', i.e. as a country that is criticised for its concrete policies. Hostility towards Israel as 'Israel' (as opposed to criticism of Israel as representative of the stereotypical 'Jew') should only then become a matter of general public concern, when there is explicit evidence that criticism of Israel as 'Israel' produces attacks on Jews as either 'the Jew' or 'Israeli'. If there is no such evidence, the case of criticism and hostility towards Israel as 'Israel' should not be part of monitoring activities under the heading of 'antisemitism'.

One crucial problem, however, is that of clearly identifying whether, for example, an attack on Israel in the press is aimed at Israel as 'the Jew' or Israel as 'Israel'. We will be confronted with cases, where no clear analytical distinction can be made, but some of the suggestions and guidelines provided by those who have already dealt with the problem of developing analytical tools and finding markers, indicating that Israel is attacked as 'the Jew' and not as 'Israel', may help us in distinguishing these two cases. What is in any case indispensable in order to be able to draw any valid conclusions about the character of texts that criticise Israel, is the need for a thorough and systematic analysis of these texts, pointing out to different possible interpretations, accounting for their context of production as well as their context of reception, and making systematic use of methodological tools as provided by different social scientific disciplines.

