

An Overview of Contemporary Antisemitism

Adi Kantor | January 27, 2022

Adi Kantor, a research associate on Contemporary Antisemitism in the United States at the INSS, reviews the development of the concept of antisemitism in scholarly discourse and the treatment of the theoretical and ideological sources on which antisemitism is based. She describes the ways that the concept of antisemitism has changed and the main issues that have accompanied and shaped the scholarly discourse about it in the contemporary era. This article aims to provide a theoretical and conceptual basis and infrastructure tools for those seeking to examine and characterize the phenomenon of contemporary antisemitism.

*We expected that the Holocaust would make antisemitism unacceptable.
We were wrong.*

Historian Deborah Lipstadt (Lord, 2020)

Introduction

More than seven decades have passed since the sounds of artillery during World War II were last heard. Seventy-seven years have gone by since the gas ovens in Auschwitz-Birkenau were extinguished, following the liberation of the death and concentration camps by the Allied soldiers, who were stunned by the unfathomable murder of millions of European Jews. A burning hatred of Jews, only recently loyal citizens of their native countries, caused their enemies to regard them as sub-humans and vermin, fit only for extermination. More than anything else, Europe under the National Socialist regime, demonstrated the power of words and how far ideology could go in exceeding the limits of discourse, if

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allowed to do so should the conditions be right; unrelenting and targeted antisemitic ideology thus slowly turned into concrete and abominable acts of murder.

Indeed, for a short time after the war ended, some contended that such a horror—endless hatred for Jews leading to their systematic destruction—could never recur. Winds of change were already beginning to arise from the ruins as well as throughout the entire Western world, heralding a shift in direction and movement toward a united Europe, intent on advancing values of liberalism and equality before the law, and guaranteeing human dignity and freedom. Encouraging slogans, such as “Never again Auschwitz,” were heard from all sides. Many had a strong wish to erase the 12 years of Nazi Germany’s terror.

The historical pendulum, however, has its own logic. Hatred of Jews has continued to leave its mark, even long after the horrors of the Holocaust have passed. Like lava, which simmers and erupts from the depths of the earth when the conditions are right, the hatred is always there, simmering and waiting for an opportunity in the next crisis. At the beginning of the second decade of the 21st century, the hatred of Jews seems to be growing stronger and has assumed truly alarming proportions throughout the world. Antisemitism is making its way back to the center of the global political and public discourse and is attracting a great deal of attention, not just in the margins, but at the very center of the political arena. Antisemitism, Holocaust denial, distortions of history, and hatred pursue anyone identified with the Jewish state. These phenomena are now common and well established, figuring prominently throughout the political spectrum from both the right to the left; within fundamentalist Islam; state and religious institutions; courts of law; university and college campuses; and especially on the social media. “Left and right find common ground where hatred of Jews is involved,” the historian Deborah Lipstadt said in a keynote lecture to the Global Forum to Combat Antisemitism in Jerusalem in July 2021. She added that “the source of the hatred is the same source; it merely expands afterwards in different directions” (Lipstadt, 2021).

On January 27, 2021, International Holocaust Remembrance Day, the historian and Holocaust scholar Yehuda Bauer said, “It must be revealed that the antisemites everywhere in the world are above all the enemies of the societies in which they operate. They sow hatred, which later returns like a boomerang to the society in which they live . . . They are against progress. They act against the interests of their countries. They are against civilization. The lie behind their actions must be exposed” (Levy, 2021). Exposure of antisemites requires that we first ask what antisemitism is; how should it be defined; are the Jews a factor in

any way in its spread; in what ways it is expressed; what types of antisemitism are there; and what characterizes the tension between antisemitism and anti-Zionism in the contemporary era?

This article is a theoretical and conceptual introduction to the phenomenon of antisemitism. It describes the development of the concept of antisemitism and how it has evolved. This article then discusses the theoretical and ideological sources on which it is based, its various manifestations, and the key issues that have developed and shaped the scholarly discourse about antisemitism in the contemporary era. The primary goal of the article is to provide infrastructure—work tools—for those seeking to examine and characterize the phenomenon of contemporary antisemitism.

Defining Antisemitism

Esteemed philosopher and sociologist Theodor W. Adorno et al. (1950/2019) defined the term “antisemitism” as follows: “stereotyped negative opinions describing the Jews as threatening, immoral, and categorically different from non-Jews, and of hostile attitudes urging various forms of restriction, exclusion, and suppression as a means of solving ‘the Jewish problem’” (p. 71). The International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) defined the term as follows:

Antisemitism is a certain perception of Jews, which may be expressed as hatred toward Jews. Rhetorical and physical manifestations of antisemitism are directed toward Jewish or non-Jewish individuals and/or their property, toward Jewish community institutions and religious facilities . . . Manifestations might include the targeting of the State of Israel, conceived as a Jewish collectivity (IHRA, 2018).

It should be noted that a vigorous argument is currently taking place among institutions, organizations, and experts around the world about how antisemitism should be defined.²

Evolution of the Concept: From “Jew-Hatred” to “Modern Antisemitism”

Scholarly research about antisemitism in the contemporary era is comprehensive and began over 100 years ago (Engel, 2020). Scholars around the world have analyzed the phenomenon and have approached it from a number of perspectives. In the opinion of the late renowned historian and scholar Shmuel

² For further reading on the argument about the definition see the Jerusalem Definition of Antisemitism, <https://jerusalemdeclaration.org/>, and the working definition of the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA), <https://www.holocaustremembrance.com/he/resources/working-definitions-charters/hgdrh-hbwdh-lntysmywt>.

Ettinger, antisemitism is not merely a prejudice but a cultural phenomenon with deep roots in ancient Hellenistic culture, as well as Christian and Muslim culture (Ettinger, 1998; Bauer, 1993). Modern antisemitism is a new incarnation of a hatred that was already familiar in ancient times. Hatred for the Jewish people began as soon as the Jews encountered the Hellenistic world in the third century BCE. Since then, throughout history, as Ettinger wrote (1998), hatred of the Jews has repeatedly recurred, accompanied at times by persecution and murder, but varying according to characteristics, such as the place of residence, way of life, and cultural level of the Jews and the people around them. Bauer added in this context (2020a) that the origin of Jew-hatred began with “a difference between the developing Jewish culture and the ‘global’ Hellenistic civilization that aspired to cultural, social, and political unification within its territory.” Bauer argued (2020a) that this was also reflected in the Book of Esther: “As the Book of Esther (written by Jews, not antisemites) says, ‘and they do not keep the king’s laws (i.e., customs).’ The Jews could not accept deification of the ruler-king and idol worship. Christianity, and later Islam also, increased this polarization” (2020a). In this context, other scholars have disputed the idea of a single continuous phenomenon of antisemitism throughout history. These scholars propose abandoning the use of the term as an “analytical category” and suggest finding “new frameworks for analyzing its traditional elements” (Engle, 2017, p. 28; Feldman, 2018).

Ettinger (1998) writes that during the Middle Ages, “hatred of the Jewish people and the commandment to oppress them became a fundamental principle of the ruling Christian church and a basis for defining the legal status of the Jews by the countries” (p. 111); large segments of the ancient Christian holy scriptures and saying of the church fathers “were saturated with hatred of the Jewish people”; the Jew was “a symbol of treachery and evil”; his image was shaped by pagan and Christian cultures, and he was regarded as “evil” because of his stubborn rejection of the revealed God; the image of the Jew usually appeared in the church “in the context of the image of the devil,” “with a devil-like tail or horns,” “connected by witchcraft to the dark forces of evil,” “a murderer of Christian babies for satanic ritual purposes,” or as “Judas Iscariot, who betrayed Jesus according to the Christian tradition,” which is portrayed in Christianity “as his nature” (pp. 114–115). It should be noted that despite the hatred for Jews taught by the Christian church, Jews always lived in close proximity to Christians and sometimes even prospered.

Although there were periods replete with “cruel persecution and the destruction of entire Jewish communities” (Ettinger, 1998, p. 111), Ettinger asserted that there was never any claim that “the fate of the peoples, and even the very fate of the world, depended on their attitude toward the Jews and the definition of their

status by the nations among whom they resided—as is alleged by the contemporary antisemites” (1998, p. 111). In the 1870s and 1880s, antisemitism underwent a fundamental and unprecedented change in the way it was expressed all over Europe, which has since been called “modern antisemitism.” This was antisemitism that spread as “an ideology and a political and social movement” (Ettinger, 1998, p. 111). Bauer (2020a) further stated that “Nazi antisemitism was also a continuation and a mutation of Jew-hatred that made it the central political motif at a time when nationalism was evolving into racism in the latter half of the 19th century and the first half of the 20th century.”

Modern Antisemitism

In its modern form, the term “antisemitism” was first coined in 1879 by Wilhelm Marr, a 19th century German antisemitic thinker (Bauer, 1993; Zimmermann, 1982/1986), replacing the term “*Judenhass*” (Jew-hatred). According to Bauer (1993), Marr’s intention was to adapt the term to the modern, supposedly scientific, ultra-nationalistic, anti-Christian, and racist ideology (p. 39) that developed in the second half of the 19th century. Bauer described the new Jew-hatred as having developed in “an atmosphere that required adherence, or alleged adherence, to sciences such as biology, genetics, anthropology, and medicine, i.e., the ‘life sciences.’ At the same time, however, as Bauer notes, “a new hatred for Jews [...] arose in an atmosphere that required adherence, or alleged adherence, to sciences such as biology, genetics, anthropology, and medicine, i.e., the ‘life sciences.’ At the same time, it appeared that the new hatred for Jews in Europe could not disavow the heritage from its traditional Christian-infused predecessor. Precedents for the assertion that ‘the Jew’ is substantially different from others because of ‘his blood’ can be found in Christian ideology” (p. 39). According to Bauer, however, the main difference between these two historical phenomena was that the ancient Jew-hatred was based primarily on religious foundations, while modern antisemitism was based more on ultra-nationalism and racism, which rested on a prominent genetic foundation. According to Bauer, “the Jew remains a Jew and could not be changed by baptism, assimilation, or acculturation” (p. 40).

The negative aspect of “the Jew” appeared as part of many social theories that arose during the 19th century as a result of economic and political developments, the rise of the nation-state, and the emancipation processes that took place in Europe. According to Ettinger (1998), population growth and “intensifying competition for a livelihood” made the greatest contribution to the new type of antisemitism, which provided an explanation or supposed “redemption” of the individual’s suffering in society (p. 130). Ettinger stated that in Germany, “human

suffering and social tension increased when crowded, filthy, and poor neighborhoods were located next to the wealthy neighborhoods of the middle and upper class . . . the urbanization process aroused social unrest” (p. 130).

In other theories, “social Darwinism” was a central foundation and had a far-reaching influence. According to social Darwinism, competition between people is a biological necessity, and necessitates “survival of the fittest,” meaning that there is no room for “weak foundations in society.” It therefore follows that “someone incapable of supporting himself should not be supported” (Ettinger, 1998, p. 126). Physiological characteristics began to be used as a pseudo-scientific criterion for assessing a hierarchy of the races and comparing between them; this, in effect, constituted the “theory of race” (Ettinger, 1998, p. 126). Trendsetting antisemitic theorists at the time, such as French theorist Arthur de Gobineau in his book, *An Essay on the Inequality of the Human Races*³ and English thinker Houston Stewart Chamberlain, wrote about the difference between the races. Chamberlain went so far as to attribute the difference between the races not only to genetics but also to spiritual traits, claiming that “the corrupt and parasitic race is the Jew” (Ettinger, 1998, p. 127).

Volkov asserted that modern antisemitism was turned into a “cultural code” (Volkov, 1978, 2006). She focused her research on German society towards the end of the 19th century, stating that

(Antisemitism) was used as a code, as a sign of a great political and cultural phenomenon of the time: anti-modernism. An entire segment of German society was very disturbed at that time about the consequences of advanced industrialization and the system of values and way of life associated with it . . . It appears that all the characteristically non-modern elements, and not only in Germany, were also tainted by antisemitism. For them, the Jews represented modernism, the success under its auspices . . . while destroying every remnant of the old world (Volkov, 2006, p. 52).

Nonetheless, Volkov further stated that “anti-Jewish views were not especially **important** for most of these people . . . but because they were marginal to their general outlook . . . expressing [anti-Jewish views] could be used as a sign of a radical view on other and more important matters” (Volkov, 2006, p. 52). In this manner, she says that antisemitism became a “political symbol” and a “cultural choice” that prevailed among German groups at that time. Bauer also argued that antisemitism could flourish in specific areas where Jews were not physically

³ The book was written in French as *Essai Sur L'inégalité des Races Humaine*. For an English translation of the book, see <https://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/37115>.

present and even in societies without any Jews at all—what he calls “antisemitism without Jews” (Bauer, 1993, p. 48).⁴

In addition to the above, in the late 19th and early 20th century, modern antisemitism was not confined only to conservative and ultra-nationalistic rightwing circles. The late Robert Wistrich, a historian and scholar of antisemitism, wrote that “socialist, radical, and populist traditions were always an important element in antisemitic movements in Western and Central Europe after 1880” (1998a, p. 139). According to Wistrich, modern concepts of race and blood also appeared in anti-capitalistic ideologies of the political left. He stated that

Even when advocating the general principle of Jewish civil equality, as in the writings of Hegel and Marx, the hostility toward Jews and Judaism tended to nullify the effect of the principle . . . The radical criticism of Judaism, which was rooted in the theories of the Enlightenment movement . . . built a bridge to the new antisemitic theories—the racism—of the period after 1870 (1998a, p. 140).

'Redemptive Antisemitism'⁵: Nazism and the 'Final Solution'

The rise to power of the National Socialist Party (NSDAP) in Germany, the persecution of Jews throughout the 1930s and 1940s, and the systematic murder of European Jewry have been the most extreme expressions of antisemitism. The uniqueness of German antisemitism under the Nazi regime should be studied, if only because of its tragic results, which remain inconceivable to this day. This is well described in a book by the late historian Boaz Neumann (2007), who wrote that “even though the Nazi regime was responsible for a wide variety of crimes against various groups . . . it appears that a special place is reserved for the final solution of the Jewish problem in Nazi Germany” (p. 22). As Wistrich wrote, “Underlying the Nazi race-based antisemitism was the claim that the entire history of the world was a life and death struggle between the Nordic Aryans and the Jewish spirit” (1998b, p. 4). “According to the Nazi worldview (Weltanschauung)” he added, “the otherness of the Jew became absolute, and even more, a harbinger of evil, because it invaded the very core of German culture” (p. 4). According to Nazi theory, this “otherness” could not be defined, because it was conceived as “amorphous,” “completely fluid,” and “having infinite adaptability, while supposedly preserving its unchanging racial integrity. The Jew, who was believed to comprise the essence of evil in its various forms, was therefore viewed by the Nazis as an embodiment of the forces of darkness” (p. 4). The Nazi ideology

⁴ As an example of this phenomenon, Bauer cites Czarist Russia before 1772. According to Bauer, even though no Jews had yet been annexed to Russian territory, Russian Orthodoxy frequently used antisemitic images.

⁵ The term 'Redemptive Antisemitism' was first coined by the late historian Saul Friedlander (1997).

conceived of the Jews as “both a superhuman threat and subhuman” who were compared to “worldwide bearers of death, whose elimination was a necessary condition for human salvation” (p. 4). The late historian and Holocaust survivor Saul Friedlander (1997) referred to this as “redemptive antisemitism,” which was the basis for the ensuing systematic slaughter of the Jews (Wistrich, 1998b). In this context, Bauer (1982) extended the discussion when he asserted that the centrality of the Jewish people in the murderous Nazi ideology had a decisive influence on the beginning and development of World War II, because the desire for war was above all ideological and social:

According to the Nazi concept, true human progress was possible only if humanity were released from the satanic chains with which the Jew had fettered it. The war against the Western powers, and later especially against the Soviet Union, was perceived primarily as an ideological war focusing on the struggle against international Judaism . . . Among the causes of the world war, the attitude toward the Jews, or the role of the Jewish people in the Euro-American culture, was an extremely important motive (p. 9).

Unlike the anti-Jewish pogroms and riots that took place in previous centuries in some locations in Europe, Nazi antisemitism was unique in decreeing absolute destruction for **all European Jewry**. Religious conversion was of no use in this case, because the concept was based on genetics and race, from which there was no escape. Bauer (1982) described this well:

For the first time in history, a death sentence was issued against someone whose crime was being born as the son of a particular parentage . . . This decision by the Nazis was based on an ideology in which the Jews was defined as anti-race . . . an expression of absolute evil . . . the Jew thus became the devil in opposition to their Jesus—Hitler (p. 72).

Contemporary Antisemitism: Ideological and Theoretical Aspects and Their Application in the Political Realm

In the “new antisemitism,” which some believe emerged in the late 20th century but has dominated the current era (considered new for this reason, although its roots and manifestations existed much earlier), traditional views and conceptions of the image of “the Jew” have been utilized to attack Israel, considered representative of the Jewish collective. According to Kenneth L. Marcus, traditional definitions of antisemitic ideology are therefore also completely applicable to antisemitism in its new garb (Marcus, 2015). Relying upon Adorno’s definition of antisemitism cited earlier, Marcus writes that the new antisemitism contains “stereotyped negative opinions describing the Jews as threatening, immoral, and

categorically different from non-Jews and of hostile attitudes urging various forms of restriction, exclusion, and suppression as a means of solving the Jewish problem” (Marcus, 2015, p. 23). Marcus asserts that “anti-Israelists do not harbor animus against the actual State of Israel,” and do not address the historical ideology of Zionism at all. Instead, he claims, they direct their hostility to “complex social constructs that stand in for the State of Israel and for the idea of Zionism, just as classical antisemites direct their hostility at false constructs of the Jewish people” (Marcus, 2015, p. 24).

Another excellent description of the new antisemitism is by the late scholar Manfred Gerstenfeld (2005), who writes that anti-Zionism seeks to isolate Israel from the other peoples in the world and bring about its destruction as a Jewish state. According to Gerstenfeld, the new antisemitism developed to a large extent in the Soviet Union in the years following the Six-Day War in 1967. Under the camouflage of anti-Zionism, the Soviet Union blamed Israel for all the evil deeds committed under European colonial rule. Gerstenfeld divides the new antisemitism into three main types according to the communities in which it is common. **The first type** characterizes the Arab and Muslim communities, which, according to Gerstenfeld, has imported the most toxic and malicious variety of antisemitism. they “do not differentiate between Israelis and Jews. Their hate literature includes the 19th-century forgery, *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, which alleges that all Jews conspire to rule the world. Other major sources of hatred spread by Arabs—including governments—propagate the libel that Jews use the blood of non-Jewish children to make matzoth” (p. 16).⁶ **The second type** of antisemitism characterizes the extreme right and among neo-Nazis, and **the third type** is common on the extreme left. The following is a detailed description of each of these types of antisemitism.

1. Islamic Fundamentalism

According to Wistrich (2009), the antisemitism expressed in the discourse of radical Islam is currently the gravest threat to both Jews living in Israel and Jews in Europe and the United States. He states that Muslim antisemitism is connected to “jihad” (holy war), the terrorist networks that have spread throughout the world, and the acknowledged aim to achieve “Muslim hegemony.” Wistrich says that Islamic fundamentalism also features a combination of “a death cult and jihad terrorist suicides” and “messianic fanaticism.” As Wistrich writes, “these give it a dangerous dimension: a combination of willingness to commit suicide and the intention of committing genocide. In Iran, for example, extremist Islam is

⁶ For more information on Arab antisemitism, see Achcar (2010).

connected to both planning genocide (with Israel constituting a principal target), i.e., a second Holocaust, and denial of the Holocaust that has already occurred” (p. 179). The image of “the Jew” created by the Arab Muslim world features classic stereotypes: The Jews are described as “merciless exploiters,” “devious,” “selfish and cruel,” “always plotting and planning,” and “basically corrupt, evil, and satanic” (p. 180). While they were previously accused of “subverting Christianity,” they are now alleged to be subverting Islam and “seeking to crush and destroy the belief in Allah” (p. 180). In other words, while the “national,” “territorial,” and “political” dispute previously constituted the grounds for hatred between Israel and the Palestinians, radical Islamists today believe that the conflict is even worse and more dangerous, because it is based on traditional-religious elements (Wistrich, 2009; Achcar, 2010). In his article, Wistrich mentions the fundamentalist idea of a “world without Israel.” He contends that this constitutes a “multidimensional conspiracy attributed to Israel and the Jews that is inaccessible to any rational discourse,” which makes it extremely dangerous (Wistrich, 2009, p. 179).

2. Extreme Right and Neo-Nazism

Extreme rightwing theories usually advocate a view that the “nation” or the “fatherland” is necessarily defined by race. It therefore follows that only those with “pure blood” or belonging to “the white race”—the real “root” of the nation—can be its citizens. According to this theory, Jews are by nature cosmopolitan and are therefore automatically dangerous and threatening to the nation’s continued existence. This theory is both political and cultural and is anti-liberal and anti-multicultural in essence (Belew, 2019; Lipstadt, 2019). Lipstadt (2019) states that the philosophy of the extreme right is based on an ideology of “white power” and “white supremacy.” She argues that such ideologies “contain a basic belief in the evil nature of the Jews, Muslims, and non-whites” (p. 38). In the American context, Lipstadt further writes that

According to the supremacists, these minorities are intent on harming “regular Americans.” They find one another at white power gatherings. They visit websites that promote neo-Nazism, white nationalism, and antisemitism. Many of them adhere to Christian Identity [...] Some of these people are members of anti-big-government “resistance” groups that engage in violent hate crimes, particularly against government institutions and officials (p. 38).

According to Lipstadt (2019), extreme rightwing groups in the United States also typically adhere to a theory that the United States is controlled by a “Zionist Occupation Government (ZOG).” Supporters of this theory believe that there is an

“international group of wealthy Jews intent on ending American sovereignty and bringing about a one-world government that they alone will rule. They contend that “ZOG . . . already controls the media, the banks, and America’s foreign policy, and is now working on world domination” (p. 39).

Holocaust denial is an important and leading element typical of extreme rightwing antisemitic ideology. According to Lipstadt (2019), total identity with National Socialist values, the “Aryan supremacy” concept, and admiration for Adolf Hitler are all also fertile ground for denial of the Holocaust crimes. Furthermore, Lipstadt regards Holocaust deniers on the extreme right as a “new type” of neo Nazism (p. 130). She says that they are “wolves in sheep’s clothing . . . who proclaimed themselves ‘revisionists’—serious scholars who simply wished to revise ‘mistakes’ in the historical record” (p. 131).⁷ Lipstadt claims, however, that a closer look at their research shows great admiration and identification with National Socialist values from the period of the Third Reich: antisemitism, racism, use of antisemitic symbols, and so forth. This amounts to “an extremism posing as rational discourse” (p. 131). Identifying with national socialistic values also sometime features adopting concepts from Nazi ideology for current use, such as “blood and soil” (*Blut & Boden*), “community of the people” (*Volksgemeinschaft*), and the concept of “folk” (*Volk*) in its ethnic sense.⁸ According to Salzborn (2018), the term “community of the people” is ideologically inconsistent with the term “society,” which means an open and heterogeneous form of association containing contradictions. He asserted that in contrast to the term “society,” *Volksgemeinschaft* represents only coercion that oppresses and uses a totalitarian method against both those included in it and those excluded from it (pp. 76–77). Another concept adopted by the antisemitic extreme right is “the great replacement,” according to which “non-white” races are “displacing” the “white race” in its mother countries (Beirich & Via, 2020, p. 6; Cosentino, 2020).

3. Extreme Left “Anti-Zionism”

According to Volkov (2006), anti-Zionism as a “cultural code” in the anti-Zionist discourse of the “new left” emerged after 1967 following Israel’s victory in the Six-Day War and the implementation of a policy in the territories that Israel conquered, which led to severe worldwide criticism. Volkov says that the main elements of this code were anti-colonialism, anti-capitalism, deep suspicion of

⁷ On this point, it should be noted that there are also Holocaust deniers in many other groups that are not part of the extreme right, who are likely to have additional characteristics. These characteristics are discussed later in the article.

⁸ The German Nazi Party used the term “*Volksgemeinschaft*” to exclude undesirable “others” from the Aryan community. This term is used in the German language and culture as a tool for applying the racist and Fascist ideology in political action (see Volovici, 2016).

anything identified with US policy (the Vietnam War, for example), and ecological arguments. Despite the profound changes that occurred in this cultural code over time, including gravitating from the rightwing-conservative discourse to the leftist discourse, according to Volkov, “a specific form of an anti-Jewish stance was created in order to serve as a symbol—a sign of belonging” (p. 5). In this context, historian Alvin Rosenfeld (2019) has added that the most extreme hostility to Israel alleges a parallel between the Jewish state and a criminal entity, condemning anyone identified with Israel. Comparisons between Israel and Nazi Germany or the apartheid regime in South Africa are ways of expressing this antisemitism in the framework of the anti-Zionist discourse. Rosenfeld argues that in this context, antisemitism—vicious hatred of Jews—conceals itself behind many of the arguments ostensibly referring to Israel. Many people use “the State of Israel” as a substitute for the word “Jews” because they realize that since the Holocaust, antisemitic statements are no longer acceptable in Western countries and that they will immediately be suspected of the old type of hatred for Jews. Hiding behind ostensibly anti-Zionist claims is much safer, thereby “distancing themselves from the embarrassing connection with the old type of hatred for Jews” (p. XI).

Nelson (2019) analyzes in detail the phenomenon of “Israel denial,” which he describes as the demonization of Israel, an expression of distrust in it, and an attempt to render Israel illegitimate, while at the same time supporting a sustainable solution for the Israeli–Palestinian conflict. According to Nelson, the term “denial” contains within it “a range of efforts to deny Israel’s moral and political legitimacy and its right to exist as a Jewish and democratic state, along with the effort to deny its citizens the right to political self-determination” (p. 3).

Another expression of the connection between antisemitism and the views of many on the extreme left is their view of the State of Israel as a symbol of colonialism, imperialism, and the “white man’s” privileges. Here lies the heart of the parallels between oppressors and oppressed, criminals and victims, and so forth. Views of this kind are prevalent today in discourse led by progressive groups in the US (Oreg, 2021). Clearly antisemitic trends can be detected at the edges of this discourse. According to Eilam and Patael (2019), the campaign to negate Israel’s legitimacy as the nation-state of the Jewish people began even before the State of Israel was declared in 1948, then led by the Arab countries. Particularly since 2001, “civil society groups along with various Palestinian organizations, have assumed the leadership in the campaign to delegitimize Israel. These groups are mainly active in the West, with the goal of influencing broad populations and decision makers” (p. 200).

The BDS (boycott, divest, and sanctions) movement—one of the leaders in the delegitimization struggle against Israel—has led the call for boycotting Israeli goods, preventing investments in Israel, increasing sanctions against Israel, and breaking off Israel’s academic and cultural ties with universities and cultural institutions in its fields (Norwood, 2021). The movement’s activity sometimes also included clearly antisemitic statements, such as a conspiracy theory about the deliberate spreading of the coronavirus in the Palestinian territories and the Gaza Strip by Israel (Greenwood, 2020).⁹ According to Norwood (2021), this movement receives support from extreme leftist organizations and serves as fertile ground for antisemitic statements by liberal academics. Norwood writes that supporters of BDS are demonizing Israel; they assert that the Jewish state is a new incarnation of Nazi Germany or South Africa during apartheid and employ means that anti-Fascist activists used in order to isolate those countries. Norwood adds that “today, few on the American left, whether militant or moderate, consider antisemitism a serious problem, and many defame Jews, or act as apologists for Islamists or black nationalists who do” (p. 8). In this context, antisemitic slogans on campuses and universities have spread to an alarming degree. According to Norwood, in recent years campuses and universities have become a key arena for spreading antisemitism combined with malicious anti-Zionism, writing that “on many campuses, leftist groups have forged a ‘Red-Green’ alliance with Muslim students—many of them reactionaries—to demonize Israel, often using antisemitic imagery and invective” (p. 9). Norwood goes on to claim that “American universities are assuring the transmission of antisemitism to the next generation” (p. 10).

These “red-green” alliances epitomize intersectionality between the “green” Islamist organizations and “red” radical leftist organizations. According to Eilam and Patael (2019), the growth of this alliance and its continued existence are based on concepts hostile to Israel and the West. This alliance has “led the anti-Israeli activity in the West during the past two decades and has succeeded in joining forces with additional groups, especially those representing minorities and disenfranchised populations and whose main activity is struggling against the existing order, the elites, and the establishment” (p. 203). The organizations that seek to delegitimize Israel have thus been able to keep the Palestinian issue on the public agenda, while “creating an ‘alliance of the oppressed’ and connecting their struggle with those advancing the the rights of disenfranchised groups. These groups include blacks, LGBTs, migrants, women, environmental activists, human rights activists, labor unions, and more” (p.204). As Eilam and Patael (2019)

⁹ It is important to note, of course, that not all criticism of Israel is antisemitic. In this context, see an article by the Anti-Defamation League: <https://www.adl.org/news/op-ed/when-criticism-of-israel-becomes-anti-semitism>.

claim, the activity of these organizations to recruit the disenfranchised groups “camouflages” their real goal—that of negating the State of Israel’s right to exist as the nation-state of the Jewish people.

Additional Criteria for Characterizing the Phenomenon of Antisemitism

In addition to the above-mentioned three main types of antisemitism, scholars have also proposed other divisions. According to Harrison (2020a, 2020b), a distinction should be made between social antisemitism and political antisemitism. Harrison writes that social antisemitism is a state of consciousness or a mental state of people who do not like Jews because of their Judaism and who wish to drive them out of the public square (from universities, residential neighborhoods, and so forth). In contrast, political antisemitism is not a state of consciousness; rather it involves pseudo-political theories directed against the Jews as a collective. This consists of a fear of Jews and conspiratorial ideas that the Jews control the world and Israel is the source of the world’s evil. According to Harrison, in this context, the goal of political antisemitism is to destroy the Jews, not merely to exclude them, because they are “the source of evil” that should be eradicated. This idea is expressed by anti-Zionism and anti-Israelism, with the allegation that the State of Israel, as an illegitimate collective manifestation of the Jewish people, has no right to exist.

Conclusion

This article sought to outline an introductory theoretical and conceptual understanding of the historical development of the concept of antisemitism and the theoretical and ideological sources on which this phenomenon in the contemporary era is based. The discussion here can serve as a kind of infrastructural “work tool” for those seeking to examine and characterize the phenomenon of antisemitism in our time, with all its manifestations. Throughout history, the phenomenon of Jew-hatred has had unique characteristics and markers, around which the discussion should be devoted, particularly in the contemporary era. Bauer (2020a) recently described this well by stating that “antisemitism has become a fundamental phenomenon of modern society.” In another article, he wrote:

Is there anything that connects the pogrom against Jews in Alexandria in 38 CE, before Christianity gained sway to the attack on the synagogue in the German city of Halle a year ago? Or between the Hasmoneans’ opposition to the efforts by the Syrian Seleucid kings to enforce cultural uniformity and the pogroms in Topolcany

and other places in Slovakia after World War II, not to mention the Nazi antisemitism? If there is, then there is justification for using the same name for their common foundations. **The common denominator is the rejection, persecution, or hatred aimed at a group defined by both its persecutors and by most of its members as an ethnic and/or ethno-religious and/or religious group with shared ethnic characteristics** (emphasis by the author, A.K.) (Bauer, 2020b).

In addition to realizing that antisemitism is a phenomenon that has unique characteristics throughout history, antisemitism is also one of many social, economic, and health developments (such as the global coronavirus crisis) throughout the world in recent years. Bauer (2020a) lists some of these phenomena, which includes the high birthrate in Africa; the political, military, and social crises afflicting the Middle East; the westward flight of refugees and the response of Western countries against what they describe as an “invasion,” of refugees; the increase in extreme discourse on the political right and left; and ultra-nationalism. In addition, there are fundamentalist ideologies —not only religious—that have also established a crucial link between antisemitic manifestations taking place over hundreds of years. Thus, in addition to realizing that antisemitism is an ancient phenomenon, it should always be understood that antisemitism also serves as an ideological common denominator for current fundamentalist and fanatical ideologies and movements that reject the existing order and claim that the Jews control it “from behind the scenes.”

It would be incorrect, however, to regard antisemitism as a purely global phenomenon. Bauer (2021) stated in this context that “if everything is antisemitism, and there is no difference between the abhorrent deeds throughout human history, then everything becomes unorganized chaos, and questions about the origin of the hatred, its spread, and the factors that can restrain it have no meaning.” Later in the same article, he emphasizes that “without understanding the foundation from which hatred for Jews sprung, there is no way to combat the different phenomena of Jew hatred.”

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