

## 2.

# The Gaarder Debate Revisited

## *Drawing the Demarcation Line between Legitimate and Illegitimate Criticism of Israel*

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**ABSTRACT** This chapter explores the afterlife of the newspaper op-ed article “God’s chosen people”, written by Jostein Gaarder in 2006, and the intense and heated debate it sparked off. In this debate, Gaarder was accused of antisemitism due to his portrayal of the Jewish religion as archaic and violent and his indication that Israel, following its brutal warfare in the region, had lost its right to exist. The chapter looks into how the opening of the Norwegian Center for Holocaust and Minority Studies and a growing public awareness of the Holocaust may be seen as possible reasons for the fierce criticism of Gaarder and how his op-ed became the prime example of criticism of Israel crossing the line to antisemitism. The chapter argues that the “Gaarder debate”, despite Gaarder’s own attempts to free himself from the stigma of antisemitism, lives a life of its own as a *narrative abbreviation*. As such, the allusion to Gaarder is used to mark the red line between criticism of Israel and antisemitism. The “Gaarder trope” is even used to discuss latent antisemitism in contexts outside Norway.

**KEYWORDS** antisemitism | criticism of Israel | communication latency | Gaarder debate | Norway

## 1. INTRODUCTION

“The outcome of this debate will say a lot about Norwegian culture.”

*Odd-Bjørn Fure, interview with VG, August 8, 2006<sup>1</sup>*

The above quote from Odd-Bjørn Fure, at the time director of the Norwegian Center for Holocaust and Minority Studies (CHM), gives an idea of the significance the “Gaarder debate” had for one of its main participants. Nothing less than “Norwegian culture” was at stake in this controversy, which began when the internationally renowned Norwegian author of *Sophie’s World*, Jostein Gaarder, published an op-ed article with the title “God’s chosen people” in the Norwegian newspaper *Aftenposten* on August 5, 2006.<sup>2</sup>

The article, in which Gaarder fiercely criticised the ongoing Israeli warfare in Lebanon against Hezbollah, is held in a “prophetic”, judgement-day style, opening with a statement indicating that Israel’s right to exist had ceased:

There’s no turning back. It’s time to learn a new lesson: We no longer recognise the State of Israel. We could not recognise the apartheid regime of South Africa, nor did we recognise the Afghani Taliban regime. Then there were many who did not recognise Saddam Hussein’s Iraq or the Serbs’ ethnic cleansing. We need to get used to the idea: The State of Israel, in its current form, is history.<sup>3</sup>

Throughout the entire op-ed, Israeli warfare is characterised with attributes associated with the Old Testament and Judaism as confronted by a collective voice (“we”), which is identified as humanist and Christian:

We do not recognise the old Kingdom of David as a model for the 21st century map of the Middle East. The Jewish rabbi claimed two thousand years ago that the Kingdom of God is not a martial restoration of the Kingdom of David; the Kingdom of God is within us and amongst us. The Kingdom of God is compassion and forgiveness. Two thousand years have passed since the Jewish

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1. Odd-Bjørn Fure, “Gaarder viser farlig kunnskapsløshet”, *Verdens Gang*, August 6, 2006, <https://www.vg.no/nyheter/innenriks/i/OL7nA/gaarder-viser-farlig-kunnskapsloeshet> (accessed 14.05.2019). This and all following translations from Norwegian have been provided by the authors.
  2. Jostein Gaarder, “Guds utvalgte folk”, *Aftenposten*, August 5, 2006, <https://www.aftenposten.no/meninger/kronikk/i/weW34/Guds-utvalgte-folk> (accessed 14.05.2019); translation, <http://emanzipationhumanum.de/downloads/israel.pdf> (accessed 14.05.2019).
  3. Gaarder, “Guds utvalgte folk.”

rabbi disarmed and thoroughly humanised the old rhetoric of war. Even in his time, the first Zionist terrorists were operating.<sup>4</sup>

The antagonism between Jewish/anti-humanistic and Christian/humanistic culminates in expressions such as: “We do not recognise a state founded on anti-humanistic principles and on the ruins of an archaic national and warlike religion”, or “For two thousand years, we have rehearsed the syllabus of humanism, but Israel does not listen.” In this last statement, the state of Israel takes the place of Judaism as confronted with the Christian/humanist “we”.

This overall tone is accompanied by classical anti-Judaist stereotypes. Expressions like “We call baby killers baby killers” or “we reserve the right to not eat Jaffa oranges as long as they are foul tasting and poisonous”, resonate the myths of Jews poisoning wells and drinking the blood of children.

All this builds up to the *leitmotiv* of the op-ed, held in a prophetic language: Israel has lost its legitimacy and therefore has already ceased to exist, with all the consequences this must have for the civilian population:

If the entire Israeli nation should fall to its own devices and parts of the population have to flee their occupied areas into another Diaspora, then we say: May their surroundings stay calm and show them mercy.<sup>5</sup>

During the intense debate that was kicked off by the op-ed, Gaarder’s scenario of displaced Jews being without a country of their own at the mercy of other people was met with the most intense criticism. This “prophecy” was interpreted as a legitimisation of yet another persecution of the Jewish people.

An important aspect of the debate is its immediate internationalisation. Gaarder was internationally known for his famous children’s book *Sophie’s World* and recognised as a moral authority. The news that he had authored an antisemitic pamphlet gained interest in the international media. The reactions in Israeli media were especially stark. *Haaretz*, on August 11, 2006, quoted Professor Dina Porat, head of the Stephen Roth Institute for the Study of Contemporary Anti-Semitism and Racism at Tel Aviv University as follows:

This is a classic anti-Semitic manifesto, which cannot even disguise itself as criticism of Israel.<sup>6</sup>

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4. Gaarder, “Guds utvalgte folk.”

5. Gaarder, “Guds utvalgte folk.”

6. Assaf Unai, “Norway Up in Arms After Author Claims Israel Has Lost Its Right to Exist”, *Haaretz*, August 11, 2006, <https://www.haaretz.com/1.4861209> (accessed 14.05.2019).

Gaarder's defenders, on the other hand, insisted that he only had chosen the drastic rhetoric necessary to highlight the severity of Israeli war atrocities. One of the most prominent intellectuals on the left, Thomas Hylland Eriksen,<sup>7</sup> came to his defence in *Aftenposten*<sup>8</sup> four days after Gaarder's op-ed had been published:

As I read it, the op-ed is neither more or less than a hard criticism of the Israeli regime's Apartheid-like politics against the Palestinians and bombardments of civil targets in Lebanon, formulated in a language with associations to the Bible.<sup>9</sup>

At the end of the day, went Hylland Eriksen's argument, it was Israeli politics, not Gaarder, which was putting the existence of the Jewish nation at risk.

Looking back at the debate, one can get the impression that neither Gaarder nor his defenders realised that something new was happening: the emergence of a new awareness in the Norwegian public that certain expressions of criticism of Israel are problematic because they are loaded with generalisations, drawn on negative stereotypes against Jews and implying justifications of violence against Jews. In this way, Gaarder, who would define himself as anything but a Jew hater, found himself being the author of what was seen as the iconic text crossing the red line towards antisemitism. This shift calls for an explanation.

To a certain extent, the answer can be found in the choice of stylistic means in Gaarder's article. But even if anti-Judaist stereotypes became starker and more obvious due to the "prophetic" style of this text, many other provocative elements were already familiar from previously expressed criticism of Israel. Neither the comparison with the South African Apartheid regime and its downfall, nor the accusation of "child murder" and the allusion that Israeli military operations followed an archaic "revenge" logic of the Old Testament, were really new in the Norwegian debate. But in 2006, a new public constellation had emerged related to Holocaust commemoration and the public awareness about its ideological roots. In Norway, this was related to the establishment of the Center for Holocaust and Minority Studies (CHM), which was to be officially opened at the end of August, only a few weeks after the publication of Gaarder's article.

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7. Hylland Eriksen is a social anthropologist and was at the time the research leader for a research project on cultural complexity in Norway (CULCOM) at the University of Oslo.

8. There were fewer contributions in defence of Gaarder in the rather conservative *Aftenposten* than in the left-wing newspaper *Klassekampen*, which was an important platform for the pro-Palestinian political spectrum.

9. Thomas Hylland Eriksen, "Den vanskelige kritikken", *Aftenposten*, August 10, 2006, <https://www.aftenposten.no/meninger/kronikk/i/47k4G/Den-vanskelige-kritikken> (accessed 14.08.2019).

This chapter argues that one of the main reasons for the critical reactions and interpretations of Gaarder's text can be found in the fact that the Holocaust had become a strong frame of interpretation – both in Norway and internationally. We will first show how references to the Holocaust contributed to the widely spread opinion of Gaarder's text being antisemitic and, thus, unacceptable. Besides the impact of the Holocaust as a frame of interpretation, the particular constellation of the Lebanon war in 2006 needs to be taken into consideration. Israel fighting against Iranian-supported Hezbollah – and thereby against a strong power representing a real threat against the existence of the state of Israel – did not fit into previously established patterns of interpretation of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

We will then demonstrate how Gaarder's article was turned into a symbolic red line marking the boundaries between legitimate criticism of Israel and antisemitism. References to the Gaarder debate can be understood as *narrative abbreviations*,<sup>10</sup> meaning a narrative fragment which only needs to be alluded to in order to recall an entire story and its "morals". The morals in this case are related to the red line towards antisemitism being crossed. The ongoing reference to this boundary has the discursive function of establishing and upholding an anti-antisemitism norm. The Gaarder op-ed and the debate following it have thus become one of those turning points in public discourse that, according to Bergmann and Erb, contribute to establishing communication latency.<sup>11</sup>

## MATERIAL AND METHODOLOGY

The material used for analysis is a corpus of Norwegian newspaper articles from 2006 to 2018 retrieved from the search engine Retriever.<sup>12</sup> The analysis focuses on the most important contributions to the debate by going through the biggest national and regional newspapers in Norway, with the criteria of having more than

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10. Jürgen Straub, *Narration, Identity, and Historical Consciousness*, Vol. 3 (New York: Berghahn Books, 2005).

11. Werner Bergmann and Rainer Erb, "'Kommunikationslatenz, Moral und öffentliche Meinung. Theoretische Überlegungen zum Antisemitismus in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland'," *Kölner Zeitschrift für Soziologie und Sozialpsychologie* 38 (1986): 223-246; see also chapter 1 in this volume, written by Christhard Hoffmann.

12. The media archive Retriever is a research tool that contains the original issues of national, regional and local newspapers, including magazines and journals. One types in the desired search word combination, e.g., "Gaarder + Israel", and chooses a date range for the search. The result will contain every article, including paper versions and online versions, that contains that specific search combination. Retriever also provides the opportunity to see different graphs and other statistics about the search such as hits over time or which paper provides the most hits for your search. Retriever is owned by NTB and TT.

ten article hits on a keyword combination to be included in the analysis.<sup>13</sup> The initial search comprised the keywords Gaarder + antisemitism, Gaarder + antisemite, Gaarder + antisemitic, Gaarder + Israel, Gaarder + Israeli criticism, Gaarder + Jew hater, Gaarder + chronicle, Gaarder + Holocaust in order to try and get the broadest picture of the debate.<sup>14</sup> As the approach towards the material was qualitative, this combination of keywords secured to catch as many contributions to the debate as possible. Possible double hits represent no methodological problem as no quantitative calculations are intended. The corpus of our research consists of op-ed articles and articles where these keywords appeared together within the text.

The analysis showed that these keywords had several peaks in the time after its publication. Most of the hits were from 2006, the year of publication, but other important peaks were in 2009 and 2014.<sup>15</sup> Because of this initial observation, the analysis looks into the contexts in which these combined references to Gaarder, antisemitism and the Holocaust recurred. It is quite striking that the focus on the Holocaust had a major impact on the outcome of the Gaarder debate in 2006, just weeks before the official opening of the Norwegian Center for Holocaust and Minority Studies. Further, debates related to intensifications in the Middle East conflict (escalation between Israel and Hamas in the Gaza strip in 2008-2009 and 2014), as well as a population survey on attitudes towards Jews in Norway conducted in 2011 were identified as triggers for references to the debate from 2006. Each of these contexts is explored in this chapter.

More specifically, the chapter also analyses which actors in these debates have had particular impact by promoting viewpoints and arguments that shaped the entire debate. As perspectives and arguments expressed by journalist Mona Levin and the director of the CHM Odd-Bjørn Fure were taken up by other contributors throughout the debate, they proved decisive for how the article was received. Therefore, searches with extra keywords Gaarder + Levin and Gaarder + Fure were run in order to follow and mirror the afterlife of the original debate. The analysis pays particular attention to these two contributors, their positions and arguments, as well as to Gaarder's responses, which in some cases were directly addressed to them.

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13. For an overview over these newspapers, see Annex, this chapter.

14. Keywords in original; Gaarder + antisemittisme, Gaarder + antisemitt, Gaarder + antisemittisk, Gaarder + Israel, Gaarder + israelskritikk, Gaarder + jødehat, Gaarder + kronikk, Gaarder + Holocaust.

15. In total, the search resulted in approximately 4,000 hits using these keywords in Retriever. The specific numbers for the peaks were: 2006: 3,178 combined hits; 2008/09: 239 combined hits; 2011: 174 combined hits; 2014: 90 combined hits.

## 2. THE HOLOCAUST AS A FRAME OF INTERPRETATION

Jostein Gaarder published “God’s chosen people” when the short but intense military conflict between Lebanon/Hezbollah and Israel in 2006 was at its culmination point. Following military provocations by Iranian-supported Hezbollah against Israel in July 2006, Israel responded with massive airstrikes, a ground invasion and a naval and air blockade against Lebanon. As the airstrikes and blockade hit the Lebanese civil population heavily,<sup>16</sup> Israel was accused of disproportionate brutality and war crimes. The Norwegian debate about the war followed an established “David and Goliath” narrative, in which Israel figures as a reckless giant and oppressor, while its enemies are inferior, but brave in their resistance. Even more dominant was the focus on innocent civil victims, which in some way remained unrelated to the military provocations that time and again triggered Israel’s counterattacks. It is within this morally loaded climate of debate, establishing clear lines between guilty and innocent, that Gaarder’s text has to be situated.

However, another interpretative framework was about to emerge and gain strength. From the early 2000s, Holocaust remembrance was institutionalised in many Western countries. The Declaration of the Stockholm International Forum on the Holocaust (“Stockholm Declaration”), which led to the establishment of the Task Force for Holocaust Remembrance (today: International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance/IHRA), stressed the obligation to prevent antisemitism:

With humanity still scarred by genocide, ethnic cleansing, racism, antisemitism and xenophobia, the international community shares a solemn responsibility to fight those evils.<sup>17</sup>

The Norwegian Center for Holocaust and Minority Studies (CHM) was established in 2001 “as a consequence of the historical and moral settlement related to the handling in Norway of the financial liquidation of the Jewish minority during the Second World War.”<sup>18</sup> The process of economical restitution of the Norwegian Jews, whose assets had been expropriated by the Norwegian state in 1942, resulted in the foundation of the CHM and had contributed to an awareness of the co-responsibility of Norwegian actors in the persecution and deportation of the Norwegian Jews in 1942/43. In this way, Norway became part of an international

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16. Middle East crisis: Facts and figures. BBC news, August 31, 2006, [http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle\\_east/5257128.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/5257128.stm) (accessed 14.05.2019).

17. <https://www.holocaustremembrance.com/stockholm-declaration> (accessed 14.05.2019).

18. <https://www.hlsenteret.no/english/about/statutes/> (accessed 14.05.2019).

trend not only to remember the fate of the Jews, but also to acknowledge co-responsibility and antisemitism among perpetrators and bystanders in German-occupied countries.<sup>19</sup>

## THE OPENING OF THE NORWEGIAN CENTER FOR HOLOCAUST AND MINORITY STUDIES

Gaarder's op-ed was published three weeks before the official opening of the CHM at its new premises on the peninsula of Bygdøy.<sup>20</sup> The opening ceremony on 26 August was attended by the Queen and the Crown Princess, and a range of foreign politicians and diplomats. Foreign Minister Jonas Gahr Støre gave one of the main speeches, underlining the responsibility of Norwegian society to come to terms with the active participation of Norwegians in the Holocaust.<sup>21</sup> Arguably, the public attention to the establishment of the CHM and the emphasis on the discourse of responsibility had a crucial impact on the reception to Gaarder's article. With the Holocaust as a frame of interpretation, the destructive power of antisemitism came into focus as it had served to legitimise the persecution and genocide against Jews. This interpretative framework added a moral dimension to the debate, which made it much more difficult to downplay references to antisemitism as deviations of pro-Israel propaganda, as had happened in previous debates.<sup>22</sup> This also gave a particular authority to some of Gaarder's critics.

One of those critics, who very early contributed towards setting the agenda for the debate, was journalist Mona Levin. Levin is daughter of the pianist and composer Robert Levin and belongs to one of the Norwegian Jewish families who escaped Nazi persecution and survived in Sweden during World War II. As a long-standing journalist and theatre critic for the newspaper *Aftenposten*, Levin is a well-known person in Norwegian cultural life. She was one of the first to strongly criticise and accuse Gaarder of antisemitism after the publication of the article. In an article from 5 August (the same day that Gaarder's article was published), in

19. Elazar Barkan, *The Guilt of Nations: Restitution and Negotiating Historical Injustices* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001).

20. The centre had been operative since 2006, with its director Odd-Bjørn Fure and a small administrative and scientific staff in place and being a part of public discourse about issues related to the Holocaust and antisemitism.

21. Claudia Lenz, "Linking Holocaust Education to Human Rights Education – a Symptom of the Universalization and De-Nationalization of Memory Culture in Norway?" In *From Patriotic Memory to a Universalistic Narrative?* ed. Arnd Bauernkämper et al. (Münster: Klartext Verlag, 2014), 87-103.

22. See chapter 1 by Christhard Hoffmann in this volume.



which *Aftenposten* had interviewed a number of Norwegian authors about their reactions to the article, she is quoted as saying: “This is the ugliest thing I have read since *Mein Kampf*.”<sup>23</sup> Levin put the Nazi stamp on Gaarder’s text, interpreting it as a call for violence against Jews.

He attacks (...) each and every Jew in the world, in the USA, Norway or the Middle East. (...) He knows what he is doing. I feel more damage and threat against myself and those close to me by Jostein Gaarder than anyone who smears the Synagogue.<sup>24</sup>

She interpreted Gaarder’s “prophecy” of the destruction of the state of Israel, with the consequence of Jews being expelled and living at the mercy of other countries, as a *threat* against the entire Jewish people. Given the historical background of the 1930s when many Jewish refugees met closed doors in other countries, this reaction is not at all astonishing. This historical frame of interpretation adds an uncomfortable notion to Gaarder’s “literary device”. Director of the Holocaust centre Odd-Bjørn Fure, too, drew upon historical references in his reaction to Gaarder.

It is awkward to play with concepts such as the evacuation of refugees and ‘final solution.’ This touches upon really grave tragedies in Europe.<sup>25</sup>

In a longer interview published a few days later, Fure elaborated his criticism:

His statement ‘We no longer acknowledge the state of Israel’ and ‘Israel does not exist’ are irresponsible word games, which can be exploited by circles who wish to erase Israel from the map. (...) Most problematically, Gaarder contributes towards moving boundary lines – towards deconstructing constraints in describing Judaism and Israel.<sup>26</sup>

Here, we find many of the elements of criticism that were reiterated throughout the debate. In this way, Fure had a strong impact on the discourse. However, in

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23. Mona Levin, “Styggeste jeg har lest”, *Aftenposten*, August 5, 2006, <https://www.aftenposten.no/kultur/i/wOzzG/--Styggeste-jeg-har-lest> (accessed 30.04.2019).

24. Levin, “Styggeste jeg har lest.”

25. Odd-Bjørn Fure, “Gaarder viser farlig kunnskapsløshet”, *Verdens Gang*, August 6, 2006, <https://www.vg.no/nyheter/innenriks/i/OL7nA/gaarder-viser-farlig-kunnskapsloeshet> (accessed 30.04.2019).

26. Odd-Bjørn Fure, “Ansvarsløst spill med ord”, *Aftenposten*, August 10, 2006, <https://www.aftenposten.no/norge/i/6kGbO/--Ansvarsløst-spill-med-ord> (accessed 30.04.2019).

contrast to Levin, he did not assume that Gaarder consciously alluded to genocidal fantasies. Rather, he attributed Gaarder with a pitifully low level of understanding and awareness of the historical and cultural context.

So far, we have highlighted the impact of the Holocaust as a frame of interpretation gaining strength both internationally and in Norway at the beginning of the 2000s. Of course, the significance of the Holocaust was not the only aspect that contributed to the enormous furore after the publication of Gaarder's article: It has to be seen as one strong parameter, interconnected to others, not least the situation in international politics in which Norway's role and reputation as "peace nation" related to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict was at stake. A Norwegian celebrity publishing what could be interpreted as a legitimization of violence against Jews and the destruction of the state of Israel, and being regarded as representing mainstream or even official Norwegian positions, was a serious problem for Norway's international reputation.

### GAARDER'S RESPONSES

It quickly became obvious that the reactions to Gaarder's article were different from the reactions towards previous expressions of anti-Zionist rhetoric. Even if Gaarder's text, as we have shown, didn't contain a substantially different *criticism of Israel* than, for example, the one the extreme left wing (AKP-ml) had been promoting for years, the political context and Gaarder's position as an internationally recognised author seemed to enforce a different normative coordinate system in this case. The dynamics in the public debate were different this time, and Gaarder's piece was read as proof of a more widespread and mainstream antisemitism *hidden* behind the criticism of Israel.<sup>27</sup>

Still, the heavily attacked author made attempts to (re)gain interpretative power. His first reaction to the criticism was published in *Aftenposten* on 7 August, only two days after the publication of the original article. With its title "Response from Gaarder: Dear Mona Levin",<sup>28</sup> the very short text addresses his most outspoken critic directly and personally – but also as a representative of "Jews in Norway", whom he was allegedly anxious to avoid hurting.

While underlining that he acknowledges the Holocaust and the right of the Israeli people to their nation, and apologising for having mocked the Jewish reli-

27. Manfred Gerstenfeld, *Behind the Humanitarian Mask: The Nordic Countries, Israel, and the Jews* (Jerusalem: Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs, 2008).

28. Jostein Gaarder, "Svar fra Gaarder: Kjære Mona Levin", *Aftenposten*, August 07, 2006, <https://www.aftenposten.no/meninger/debatt/i/PoGRX/Svar-fra-Gaarder-Kjare-Mona-Levin> (accessed 14.05.2019).

gion, he expressed hurt feelings about Levin's comparison with *Mein Kampf*. This response, in which Gaarder presents himself as a victim of misunderstandings and bad-will interpretations, gives the impression that at this point Gaarder had not yet grasped the dimension and bearings of the debate he had sparked.

The second, longer response, with the title "Attempt at clarification", was published on August 12, one week after the original article.

As the debate was raging, Gaarder tried to explain that he had been misunderstood due to the stylistic devices he had used under the emotional impact from the news about Israeli war atrocities. He underlined that it was his wish to fiercely criticise the state of Israel, but on the point about Israeli civilians, he announced:

Of course, I do not call for Israeli citizens to leave their country. I do not even regard this to be a possibility. When I evoked the image of Israeli civilians fleeing 'occupied territories' (as Jerusalem or the West Bank), I understand that this might trigger strong emotions. But the message is crystal clear: Regardless of context (...) we can never tolerate violence against civilians.<sup>29</sup>

Gaarder's further line of argument in this second response was entirely based on the attempt to make a conceptual distinction between his strong but misunderstood criticism of Israel and "real" antisemitism, which he exclusively associated with Nazism.<sup>30</sup> He indicated that accusing him of antisemitism would trivialise the problem and could even result in more antisemitism. This rhetorical strategy shows that at that time Gaarder was unable to grasp that the debate was about to change the notion of antisemitism from exclusively denoting hatred of Jews to also covering the underlying and even unintended negative and stigmatising portrayal of Jews and Judaism.<sup>31</sup> At this point, Gaarder, insisting on the difference between the rhetoric he had used and his real felt attitudes, felt like a victim of misunderstandings.

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29. Jostein Gaarder, "Forsøk på klargjøring", *Aftenposten*, August 12, 2006, <https://www.aftenposten.no/meninger/kronikk/i/x8j3j/Forsok-pa-klargjoring> (accessed 14.05.2019).

30. Communication researcher Marie Lund is not convinced by Gaarder's "attempt to separate stylistic and literary devices from the 'real message'." She rather interprets the style as an integral part of the "line of argument that Gaarder stood by in his clarification." Marie Lund, *An Argument on Rhetorical Style* (Aarhus: Aarhus University Press, 2017), 174.

31. In this respect, we see parallels to the debate in 1983, analysed by Hoffmann in this volume: In 1983, however, the issue of generalised anti-Jewish notions in forms of criticism of Israel as highlighted by Leo Eitinger was not acknowledged, despite the fact that Eitinger was a Holocaust survivor.

## REFERENCES TO HOLOCAUST BY GAARDER'S DEFENDERS

It is interesting to see that those who defended Gaarder also actively referred to the Holocaust as an interpretative framework, albeit with the opposite conclusion as that drawn by Levin and Fure. Far from accepting that certain forms of criticism are problematic in the light of the historical genocide, the reference to the Holocaust is regarded as an emotional obstruction to rational argumentation. The newspaper *Klassekampen* had previously labelled attempts to explore contemporary antisemitism as “pro-Israeli propaganda”.<sup>32</sup> Now, it doubted that Gaarder’s equating of Israel and Judaism was at all problematic, as the following quote by Sandra Lillebø shows:

It is not unusual to wish an in-depth debate on Islamic ideology and its impact on the politics of Muslim countries. While this is regarded as legitimate, participants in the debate about Israel are seeing that all references to Judaism as a religion are strongly rejected as antisemitic. Does the shame about World War II make it difficult to criticise Israel today?<sup>33</sup>

Here, Lillebø suggested that the reference to the Holocaust serves to create a double standard, restraining *all forms* of criticism of Israel. So, while the critics of Gaarder asked: Do *certain forms* of criticism of Israel go too far? his defenders continued to ask: Do the *reservations* against criticism of Israel go too far?

This indicates an ongoing discursive struggle about what is acceptable/unacceptable with regard to criticism of Israel *despite* the strong impact of the Holocaust as a frame of interpretation. Following Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe,<sup>34</sup> the contest about the demarcation line between criticism of Israel and antisemitism constituted a *hegemonial struggle*, in which the power of definition is linked to far-reaching questions of political legitimacy, authority and influence.

## BULLETS AGAINST THE SYNAGOGUE – FROM WORDS TO DEEDS?

During the night of 17 September 2006, 13 gunshots were fired at the synagogue in Oslo. No humans were injured, but the shots left visible marks on the walls of the synagogue building. The attack was shortly after classified as antisemitic and

32. Hoffmann, “A fading consensus?”, chapter 1, this volume, 44.

33. Sandra Lillebø, “Raserer debatten”, *Klassekampen*, 11 August 2006, <https://www.klassekampen.no/38517/article/item/null/-raserer-debatten>.

34. Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics*. (London: Verso, 1985).

an act of terrorism.<sup>35</sup> Four persons from the Islamist scene, among them the well-known Islamist activist Arfan Quadeer Bhatti, were arrested shortly after the attack.

Searching for the deeper causes of the attack, some public voices immediately referred to Gaarder and his op-ed article. Mona Levin placed the attacks in the broader societal context, which she regarded to be hostile towards Israel and Jews in general. Without blaming Gaarder as directly co-responsible for the shootings, she referred to his article as the most recent and most drastic example of a climate of debate that can encourage others to take the step towards violence:

Gaarder's articles, the debates accompanying them, and the Norwegian left wing's one-eyed criticism of the entire Middle East complex (...) have contributed to acts of violence against Jews.<sup>36</sup>

The bullets fired against the synagogue confirmed the perception that Gaarder's words could be read and *had been* read as a legitimization of acts of violence against Jews *in general*. In this way, the notion of Gaarder's text being antisemitic was reinforced.

### 3. THE GAARDER DEBATE AND THE MIDDLE EAST CONFLICT

In late December 2008, armed conflict erupted in the Middle East, lasting for three weeks between 27 December and until a ceasefire was agreed upon on 18 January 2009. This conflict between Israel and Hamas, which mainly took place in the Gaza strip, gained a lot of attention in Norway and led again to a strong public debate. In Oslo, violent demonstrations took place outside the Israeli embassy for several days. The demonstrations led to riots in the city centre, with large-scale vandalism against houses, cars and shops nearby as the police fired the crowd with tear gas.<sup>37</sup> With the Gaza conflict gaining so much public attention and raising so many passions, the question of how to criticise Israel became relevant again.

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35. Camilla Ryste, "Fire terrorsiktet etter synagoge-skudd", *Aftenposten*, September 23, 2006, <https://www.vg.no/nyheter/innenriks/i/odEjV/fire-terrorsiktet-etter-synagoge-skudd> (accessed 22.08.2019).

36. Harald S. Klungtveit, "Jeg har aldri sagt at Gaarder har skylden", *Dagbladet*, September 24, 2006, <https://www.dagbladet.no/nyheter/jeg-har-aldri-sagt-gaarder-har-skylden/66255900>.

37. Dennis Ravndal, "Demonstranter raser mot støttemarkeringen for Israel: Politiet bruker tåregass mot demonstranter", *VG*, Januar 8, 2009, <https://vg.no/nyheter/innenriks/i/a5qeA/demonstranter-raser-mot-stoettemarkeringen-for-israel-politiet-bruker-taaregass-mot-demonstranter>

In this debate, the issue of defining the line between criticism of Israel and antisemitism also came up again. The basic positions in the public debate had not changed. However, it now became evident that Gaarder and his article figured as negative examples and a narrative abbreviation, indicating the red line that should not be crossed.

### A NEW SENSITIVITY?

At the same time as the Gaza conflict rumbled on, US president-elect Barack Obama appointed Rahm Emanuel as the White House Chief of Staff.<sup>38</sup> Former Norwegian prime minister Kåre Willoch judged the appointment as *worrying*, and later explained there was reason to believe that by being an American Jew who had served as a (civilian) volunteer in the Israeli Army, Emanuel would be pro-Israel. Willoch's statement was criticised for being antisemitic, especially by Mona Levin, who labelled him a Jew hater.<sup>39</sup> In an interview with *Aftenposten* on 15 January 2009, Gaarder re-entered the debate, claiming that the labelling of anybody criticising Israel as an antisemite was derailing the debate.

None of those who participate in the debate, neither Willoch nor myself, are anti-Semites, but every time we talk about Israel, we have to distance ourselves from the Holocaust. It shouldn't be necessary.<sup>40</sup>

The borderline between criticism of Israel and antisemitism was discussed with Gaarder once again at the heart of the debate, despite him having withdrawn from it before. He claimed that the accusation of antisemitism is a planned and calculated derailment, stating that "the Israel lobby and the religious right wing in the US are contributing to an inflation of the word."<sup>41</sup>

Interestingly, Gaarder again brought in the Holocaust as a frame of interpretation in order to accuse his opponents in the debate of abusing the term. From the outset of the uproar between Willoch and Levin, the Gaarder debate was lingering in the background. Through Gaarder's intervention, it became a new edition of the battle about legitimate and illegitimate criticism of Israel – and Gaarder's culpability.

38. <http://edition.cnn.com/2008/POLITICS/11/06/emanuel.reaction/index.html>.

39. Ole Berthelsen, "Kåre Willoch er rasist og jødehater", *TV2*, January 19, 2009, <https://www.tv2.no/a/2509336> (accessed 04.05.2019). The debate between Willoch and Levin flared up again in 2015: Mona Levin, "Klassisk antisemittisme", *Dagsavisen*, February 23, 2015, <https://www.dagsavisen.no/nyemeninger/klassisk-antisemittisme-1.451162>.

40. Flemming Trondsen, "Willoch er ikke en jødehater", *Aftenposten*, January 15, 2009, <https://www.aftenposten.no/norge/i/O3r4E/--Willoch-er-ikke-jodehater> (accessed 04.05.2019).

41. Trondsen, "Willoch er ikke en jødehater."

## GAARDER AS A STIGMATISED PARTICIPANT IN THE PUBLIC DEBATE

In late 2008, the interference of Manfred Gerstenfeld from the Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs, an Israeli think tank focusing on Israeli security, regional diplomacy and international law, took the debate to an international level. Gerstenfeld gained attention in Norway in 2008 when he published the book *Behind the Humanitarian Mask: The Nordic Countries, Israel, and the Jews*, in which he vehemently criticised Norway and Sweden, claiming that parts of the social elites were responsible for “many pioneering efforts in demonising Israel.”<sup>42</sup> Gerstenfeld also wrote in the *Jerusalem Post* that “Norway has a long history of anti-Semitism”,<sup>43</sup> and accused prominent Norwegians, such as comedian Otto Jespersen, of being antisemitic. Gerstenfeld mentioned Gaarder in particular as a prime example of latent Norwegian antisemitism, writing that the “op-ed by Jostein Gaarder [...] until this day remains the vilest anti-Semitic article published in a European mainstream paper since the Second World War.”<sup>44</sup>

Gerstenfeld’s harsh criticism of Norway caused quite a stir in Norwegian media, leading to a small but fierce debate. Per A. Christiansen, Middle East correspondent for *Aftenposten*, and Thomas Hylland Eriksen were among those who questioned Gerstenfeld’s methods and understanding of the Norwegian debate culture.<sup>45</sup> Gerstenfeld replied in his article “Latterliggjøring av Holocaust” (Ridiculing the Holocaust)<sup>46</sup> by saying that both Christiansen and Hylland Eriksen toned down and whitewashed what were clearly antisemitic actions. Furthermore, Dore Gold, Chairman of the Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs, advised Norway to use Gerstenfeld’s “disturbing findings” for self-examination.<sup>47</sup>

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42. Gerstenfeld, *Behind the Humanitarian Mask*.

43. Manfred Gerstenfeld, “Norway – a paradigm for anti-Semitism”, *Jerusalem Post*, December 13, 2008, <https://www.jpost.com/Opinion/Op-Ed-Contributors/Norway-a-paradigm-for-anti-Semitism> (accessed 14.04.2019).

44. Gerstenfeld, “Norway – a paradigm for anti-Semitism.”

45. Per A. Christiansen, “En nasjon av jødehatere?”, *Aftenposten*, December 19, 2008, <https://www.aftenposten.no/meninger/kommentar/i/Ewyx2/En-nasjon-av-jodehatere>. Thomas Hylland Eriksen, “Ingen løsning i sikte”, *Aftenposten*, January 07, 2009, <https://www.aftenposten.no/meninger/i/m1P0E/Ingen-losning-i-sikte> (accessed 15.05.2019).

46. Manfred Gerstenfeld, “Latterliggjøring av Holocaust”, *Aftenposten*, January 27, 2009, <https://www.aftenposten.no/meninger/debatt/i/175OQ/Latterliggjoringen-av-Holocaust> (accessed 15.05.2019).

47. Dore Gold, “Grunnløs kritikk”, *Aftenposten*, January 03, 2009, <https://www.aftenposten.no/meninger/debatt/i/04VqB/Grunnlos-kritikk> (accessed 15.05.2019).

## 2014 – THE USE OF GAARDER AS NARRATIVE ABBREVIATION

In 2014, when tensions in the Middle East escalated once more with new hostilities between Israel and Hamas, Gaarder's original article was again read and shared on social media for a few weeks. This was the first time that the content and message of the article were discussed to any degree for quite a long time. However, newspapers and, in particular, Ervin Kohn, vice director of the Norwegian Center against Racism (Antirasistisk Senter) and president of the Jewish Community in Oslo, were keen to stress that the op-ed was already eight years old, thereby playing down its relevance and credibility. Many might have felt that the article described the current climate of the conflict, but Gaarder's article was now seen as an example of unacceptable criticism of Israel. In many ways, Kohn shut the debate down before it started again by saying that the original text was a "horrible, antisemitic article" that we were all now finished with.<sup>48</sup>

The conflict of 2014 did, however, attract much attention in the media and in Norwegian politics and reignited a debate about how to criticise Israel. In an article, Snorre Valen, a high-ranking politician in the Socialist Left party (SV), claimed that "of course we should expect more from Israel" and that "we should hold Israel to a higher moral standard."<sup>49</sup> The Socialist Left party, now no longer a junior partner in a coalition government after the coalition lost the election in 2013, had long since been critical of Israel's policies towards Palestine and especially its support for the settlements. Valen's criticism of Israel made active use of Gaarder's article by labelling it "*criticism that misses the target*" and showing where the line between legitimate and illegitimate criticism should be drawn. By doing so, Valen's article shows how Gaarder now serves as a well-established marker of failing criticism of Israel – and to place one's own position within the realm of legitimate criticism. Gaarder's article is neither explained nor discussed, merely referred to, leaving Gaarder in the position of an ever-present and stigmatised participant in the debate – even if he does not take active part in it.

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48. Maren Ørstavik, "Gammel Israel-kronikk vekker nytt engasjement", *Aftenposten*, July 22, 2014, <https://www.aftenposten.no/kultur/i/L0OL4/jostein-gaarders-israel-kronikk-vekker-nytt-engasjement> (accessed 15.05.2019).

49. Snorre Valen, "Så klart vi forventer mer av Israel", *Verdens Gang*, July 24, 2014, <https://www.vg.no/nyheter/meninger/i/49Xb6/israel-er-et-av-verdens-mest-utviklede-land-og-vi-maa-holde-israel-til-en-hoeyere-moralsk-standard-enn-avskummet-i-isil-skriver-sv-politiker-snorre-valen-kronikk-saa-klart-vi-forventer-mer-av-israel> (accessed 15.05.2019).



#### 4. GAARDER AND THE QUESTION OF ANTISEMITISM IN NORWAY

As indicated in the introduction, the Gaarder debate had also brought up the question of antisemitism as being a part of mainstream discourse in Norway and, as a consequence, the question of how widespread antisemitic attitudes were in the Norwegian population.

In 2010-12, the Holocaust Center conducted a population survey investigating attitudes towards Jews and other minorities. This was the first population survey of this kind in Norway, and was commissioned by three ministries: the Ministry of Children, Equality and Inclusion, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and the Ministry of Justice.<sup>50</sup> The support of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs can, among other things, be interpreted as a consequence of the “bad reputation” Norway had gained through international media coverage of alleged antisemitism related to the Middle East conflict.

An article in the newspaper *Aftenposten* from January 2011, covering the work with the survey, underlined that “Norway has been criticised for an alleged rising antisemitism by individuals and media in Israel.” Higher Education Minister Tora Aasland is quoted saying that “the Council of Europe has requested more information about attitudes towards Jews in the Norwegian population.”<sup>51</sup>

Accusations of antisemitism had become an issue of international reputation for Norway, and there can be no doubt that the “Gaarder affair” was an element in this.

In the same article, the director of the Holocaust Center, Odd-Bjørn Fure, referred to the Gaarder article as the very symbol of an antisemitic incident:

We’ve had a number of problematic issues. We need to ask if they are a result of an environment of anti-Jewish attitudes, or if these are more random cases.

Fure further highlighted Gaarder’s article as an indicator of these attitudes, in addition to the shooting at the synagogue or the bullying of Jewish school children.<sup>52</sup> The examples given by Fure here show that Gaarder’s article is placed in a “line of events” culminating in the shooting at the synagogue and is

50. <https://www.hlsenteret.no/forskning/jodisk-historie-og-antisemittisme/holdningsundersokelse/> (accessed 15.05.2019).

51. Olav Olsen, “Kartlegger nordmenns holdninger til jøder”, *Aftenposten*, January 26, 2011, <https://www.aftenposten.no/norge/i/Qmmxq/Kartlegger-nordmenns-holdninger-til-joder> (accessed 31.08.2019).

52. With this he might be alluding to a survey conducted in Oslo in 2010 bringing to the fore the extended use of “Jew” as a swear word among pupils; [http://2v2ae13etcm31s6bzloe3jz1.wpengine.netdna-cdn.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/Rapport\\_UDA\\_7.6.2011.pdf](http://2v2ae13etcm31s6bzloe3jz1.wpengine.netdna-cdn.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/Rapport_UDA_7.6.2011.pdf).

even mentioned as the most prominent example of recent antisemitic incidents in Norway.

Conceptually, this use of the “Gaarder trope” is interesting as it also marks a shift in the conception of antisemitism, bringing it closer to the international discussion and research on the topic. As mentioned before, the perception of antisemitism in the Norwegian public debate tended to be limited to *hatred of Jews*, strongly associated with Nazi ideology. This hatred would only be found in *antisemites*, who most likely would be placed on the extreme right fringes of the political spectre. This, on the other hand, meant that a person who did not hate Jews could not be accused of antisemitism. Even if this perception had been challenged before – e.g. by Holocaust survivor Leo Eitingers<sup>53</sup> – it took the Gaarder debate to significantly change this view in the broader public. Not only the *antisemite* and his or her intentions and attitudes, but the antisemitic *denotation* of utterances or expressions came under the spotlight. As a consequence, it would not be that *any* kind of criticism of Israel would fall under the definition of antisemitism, as claimed by Gaarder’s defenders, but those forms of criticism that carried antisemitic or anti-Judaist stereotypes and generalisations would.

However, Fure’s indication that Gaarder’s article was some of the most striking proof that antisemitism was an issue in contemporary Norwegian society provoked another attempt by Gaarder to rid himself of this stigma. In his article “Not antisemitic attitudes”, Gaarder stressed that his polemic in 2006 had not been an expression of an anti-Jewish sentiment:

In numerous interviews and debate programmes, and in a new article in *Aftenposten* after the first one, I made it crystal clear that my engagement was not an expression of anti-Jewish attitudes. It was an expression of humanism and empathy with the victims of war.<sup>54</sup>

The quote shows that Gaarder’s argument was still informed by an understanding of antisemitism as *anti-Jewish attitudes*. As he considered himself to be accused of such attitudes, he defended himself, emphasising his *real* attitudes as being humanistic and empathic, and then turning into a mode of attack:

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53. See Hoffman, chapter 1, this volume.

54. Jostein Gaarder, “Ikke anti-jødiske holdninger”, *Aftenposten*, January 29, 2011, <https://www.aftenposten.no/mening/kronikk/i/rgAkw/ikke-anti-jødiske-holdninger> (accessed 15.05.2019).

But Odd-Bjørn Fure also knows that those who criticise the politics of Israel are automatically accused of antisemitism. Fure knows this mechanism or master suppression technique.<sup>55</sup>

Unwilling or incapable to accept the distinction between antisemitic expressions and anti-Jewish attitudes, Gaarder used the reoccurring defence strategy of claiming that *any* criticism of Israel would be defined as antisemitic. Consequently, Gaarder positioned himself as a victim of a master suppression technique.

Four months later, Gaarder appeared with yet another attempt at clarification. In an article entitled “Afterthought”, he accepted the point that his stylistic devices and expressions, not his attitudes, had been under scrutiny, and seemed, for the first time, to accept the “verdict” of public opinion.

Moreover, Gaarder *himself* insisted on the necessity of distinguishing legitimate criticism of Israel from expressions of antisemitism:

From my side, the op-ed was not at all an expression of anti-Jewish attitudes. But my way of expressing myself in 2006 could easily be interpreted like that. [...]

We never must express ourselves in such a way that legitimate criticism of the politics of the state of Israel can be confused with an illegitimate and in any regard unacceptable agitation against Jews or Judaism. The first to take the consequences of this insight should be myself. My intention was to draw attention to the victims of war and the responsibility of the state of Israel. Unfortunately, I did not realise in time that I was about to formulate several thoughtless and ambiguous statements, and I apologise for that. It has become a case of conscience for me to be very clear about this issue.<sup>56</sup>

In this response, Gaarder gives the impression of a total turnaround. There are no more traces of self-victimisation and accusations to his critics of purposely misunderstanding and misinterpreting him. Instead, there is an expression of regret for not being aware of the offensive meaning of his text and a sense of moral obligation to take responsibility for his fault. Given the development that had transformed his article into the major landmark indicating the red line between legitimate criticism of Israel and antisemitism, Gaarder changed his position from

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55. Gaarder, “Ikke antijødiske holdninger.”

56. Gaarder, “Ikke antijødiske holdninger.”

denial to embrace, and even to becoming one of the “gatekeepers” himself by exclaiming that “We never must express ourselves in a way that [...]”.

## 5. THE MOVING TROPE: GAARDER REFERENCES IN DIFFERENT CONTEXTS

As shown, altogether Gaarder came up with four excuses, or attempts at clarification in 2006 and 2011. Apparently, the burden of being associated with a “horrible text that cannot be mitigated by anything else than speaking about the text itself”<sup>57</sup> was too heavy to bear for Gaarder. His attempts at exculpation were commented upon rather ironically by the editor of *Bergens Tidende*, Olav Kobbeltveit, a week later:

Recently, almost five years later, Jostein Gaarder found that even more repentance was necessary. Therefore, he came with one more public confession of his sins on 20 April this year. In *Aftenposten*, he writes under the heading ‘Afterthought’: ‘We must never express ourselves in such a way that legitimate criticism of the state of Israel by any means can be confused with absolute illegitimate and unacceptable bullying of Jews.’ Okay, but who sets the boundary marker between justifiable criticism of the state of Israel and unacceptable bullying against Jews and Judaism?<sup>58</sup>

While pointing to the impossible task of defining an indisputable demarcation line between criticism of Israel and antisemitism, Kobbeltveit did not seem to recognise that Gaarder’s article had become the very symbol of such a red line. However, despite Gaarder’s attempt to place himself on the “right” side of legitimate and illegitimate criticism of Israel, the op-ed had started to live a life of its own. It had turned into a narrative abbreviation, telling the story of a failed criticism of Israel and conveying the moral that even unintentionally expressed antisemitism was unacceptable.

Years later, references to the Gaarder debate served to indicate the red line between acceptable and unacceptable rhetoric related to Israel, Jews, and Judaism.

In 2015, Gaarder was put under the spot light in connection to the debate about a free speech prize awarded to Kari Jaquesson, a TV personality and journalist known for fitness programs as well as for her outspoken feminist opinions and

57. Inge Lønning, “En tekst og en utblåsning”, *Kirke og Kultur*, no. 03 (2006): 313.

58. Olav Kobbeltveit, “Omstridd antisemittisme”, *Bergens Tidende*, May 2, 2011, <https://www.bt.no/btmeninger/kommentar/i/5bLPz/Omstridd-antisemittisme> (accessed 15.05.2019).

criticism of pornography. Some days before she was to receive the prize at a philosophy festival in southern Norway, Jaquesson posted a comment on a Facebook page in which she insinuated that Israel stood behind IS attacks in Europe. Jaquesson was criticised for playing with old antisemitic rhetoric and a conspiracy theory that led to a whole new debate. The Facebook post caused one member of the jury to step down from her position because she could not persuade the rest of the jury to withdraw Jaquesson's award. The remaining members of the jury believed the opinions from Jaquesson to be "legitimate political utterances", rejecting the proposal to withdraw. Jostein Gaarder was a board member of the festival, and somehow saw himself thrown back into the discussion about antisemitism. Again, in this context of antisemitic utterances, Gaarder's op-ed was used as an example of previous antisemitic posts. Interestingly, even if the criticism of Israel was not an issue here, Gaarder still served as a narrative abbreviation in order to highlight that even subtle and unintended antisemitic expressions need to be addressed as what they are: antisemitic.<sup>59</sup>

The final incident to be analysed here took place during the French presidential elections in 2016. Due to his previous working relation with the Rothschild bank, negative associations to Emmanuel Macron as a representative of moneyed and economic elites circulated. These negative associations had classical antisemitic undertones, such as the "the money Jew". In an article in *VG* explaining this controversy, Gaarder is referred to once again as an example of antisemitism. The article, titled "Den evige påstanden", (The eternal claim) by the Norwegian journalist and media commentator Anders Giæver, explains how the Rothschild bank has held a central role in antisemitic conspiracy theories for over 200 years, and that it was a convenient misunderstanding to think that "if a person is not a racist, he or she cannot make a racist statement."<sup>60</sup> In the discussions of latent antisemitism in contexts outside Norway, Gaarder is used as an analogy or reference.

## 6. CONCLUSION

By exploring some of the main elements of the Gaarder debate in 2006 and following the debate throughout its afterlife for a decade, the analysis has shown that it marks a turning point in several ways. Most obviously, there is a *before* and *after*

59. Didrik Söderlind, "Kunsten "Å bare stille spørsmål", *Verdens Gang*, May 29, 2015, <https://www.vg.no/nyheter/meninger/i/52awK/kunsten-aa-bare-stille-spoersmaal> (accessed 15.05.2019).

60. Anders Giæver, "Den evige påstanden", *Verdens Gang*, March 30, 2017, <https://www.vg.no/nyheter/meninger/i/jWwPb/den-evige-paastanden> (accessed 04.05.2019).

Gaarder when it comes to what is assumed as legitimate and acceptable forms of criticism of Israel and what is regarded to be crossing a red line towards antisemitism. This does not mean that there is an established consensus regarding where exactly this red line lies, or when it is crossed, but there is an awareness *that* such a line exists and that it *should not* be crossed. This shift is particularly interesting in light of previous debates in Norway, such as those related to a hearing on antisemitism held in Oslo in 1983, when the distinction between legitimate and illegitimate criticism of Israel was broadly rejected in the public debate in Norway.<sup>61</sup>

Another insight regards the importance of the Holocaust as interpretative framework internationally, and the impact of the establishment of the Holocaust Center for the shifting boundary between assumed legitimate criticism of Israel and antisemitism in the Norwegian context. In the light of the persecution and murder of the European Jews during World War II, the denial of the right of the state of Israel to exist was interpreted as a legitimisation of violence against Jews – and became more problematic.

The impact of the Gaarder debate on the discourse on antisemitism even goes beyond the issue of criticism of Israel. While Gaarder repeatedly defended himself against the accusation of being a Jew hater, the debate had consolidated the awareness that neither *hatred of Jews* nor an anti-Jewish *intention* are decisive for qualifying utterances or expressions as antisemitic, but the possible interpretations and *consequences* of the expressions are.

The material analysed shows that references to the Gaarder debate have become a discursive trope recalling and re-establishing this boundary, and that it is used as a narrative abbreviation, alluding to the boundary without repeating the arguments that established it.

In these ways, the debate has contributed to a higher sense of alert related to other forms of antisemitism. As references to the Gaarder op-ed, problematising antisemitic allusions to Jewish conspiracy, occur even ten years later, the debate has contributed to the communicative latency of antisemitism.

And Jostein Gaarder? Despite his attempts to explain and whitewash himself, he has become a symbol of non-intentional antisemitism. After having tried to free himself from this stigma, often by accusing his critics of willingly misinterpreting his good intentions, he finally embraced the criticism. Beyond that, he turned into a moral defender of the demarcation line he involuntarily contributed towards establishing.

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61. See Hoffmann, chapter 1, this volume.

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## ANNEX: OVERVIEW OVER INCLUDED MEDIA WITH MORE THAN 10 CONTRIBUTIONS/ BY KEYWORDS

Kilde	Gaarder+ Israel	Gaarder+ antisemittisme	Gaarder+ Kronikk	Gaarder+ antisemitt	Gaarder+ antisemittisk	Gaarder+ jødehat	Gaarder+ Holocaust	Gaarder+ Levin
☐ Aftenposten	120	48	107	16	16	19	30	24
🌐 Aftenposten	0	45	86	17	13	19	26	20
☐ Dagbladet	55	14	37	7	9	9	13	16
☐ Klassekampen	43	19	28	12	4	4	14	11
🌐 Dagbladet	35	15	22	7	7	5	14	9
☐ NTBtekst	34	9	16	5	1	2	5	5
☐ VG	40	10	16	9	5	4	5	7
☐ Bergens Tidende	30	13	18	5	3	8	5	8
🌐 Dagen	23	15	19	2	7	7	4	2
☐ Adresseavisen	23	11	17	8	3	6	6	5
🌐 Norge IDAG	35	7	16	0	2	6	6	2
☐ Dagsavisen	26	6	24	4	1	3	6	1
🌐 Vårt Land	23	9	18	3	3	2	3	4
🌐 VG Nett	18	9	17	6	2	3	4	5
🌐 Bergens Tidende	19	8	17	4	3	4	5	4
🌐 Dagsavisen	23	9	14	5	1	4	6	1
☐ Morgenbladet	14	8	14	8	5	3	3	2
☐ Fædrelandsvennen	18	6	14	3	2	2	6	2
🌐 Nettavisen	21	6	15	2	2	1	3	4
🌐 Tønsbergs Blad	17	6	12	4	1	2	4	1
🌐 Adresseavisen	13	4	10	4	2	2	2	3
☐ Stavanger Aftenblad	20	5	7	2	2	1	3	2
🌐 NRK	14	4	10	2	1	0	4	2
🌐 Fædrelandsvennen	14	4	9	1	2	0	3	0
🌐 Klassekampen	7	6	7	3	2	1	5	2
🌐 Bergensavisen	13	4	8	4	0	1	2	1
🌐 Nationen	10	4	7	2	2	2	2	0
🌐 Sarpsborg Arbeiderblad	11	6	5	3	1	2	1	2
☐ Nationen	9	5	6	2	1	3	2	1