Werner Bergmann

Antisemitism in Europe Today: the Phenomena, the Conflicts

Proceedings / International conference
"Antisemitism in Europe Today: the Phenomena, the Conflicts"
8–9 November 2013

Organized by
the Jewish Museum Berlin,
the Foundation "Remembrance, Responsibility and Future"
and the Center for Research on Antisemitism Berlin

Jewish Museum Berlin

Antisemitism in Europe Today: the Phenomena, the Conflicts

Werner Bergmann

Hostile attitudes toward Jews are part of a syndrome that according to the findings of a series of national empirical studies also includes xenophobia, racism, Islamophobia, homophobia, sexism, exclusion of the homeless, etc.[1] Antisemitism,[2] however, also displays very specific characteristics, which distinguishes it from attitudes toward other groups that suffer discrimination. The cause of this difference must be sought in the deep historical roots of the categorization of Jews. It derives less from the current group status of Jews or in contact or conflict with Jews presently living in the respective country, who make up a dwindling share of the population in many European countries.[3] In order to understand today's attitudes toward Jews it is necessary to examine the long history of religious anti-Jewish hostilities and in particular the specific social position of Jews in the nation-states emerging in nineteenth-century Europe. The national antisemitism that was developing at that time viewed Jews not only as foreigners, that is, as immigrant members of another country, but also as those who did not assimilate into the national pattern. Jews were outside of the national order of the world, therefore embodying its counter-principle: a "national non-identity."[4] According to Zygmunt Bauman, the Jews were an unclassifiable group, because they went beyond the dichotomous logic of friend/foe, inside/outside. "The world tightly packed with nations and nation-states abhorred the non-national void. Jews were in such a void: they were such a void."[5] Correspondingly, Bauman cited the verdict of the German philosopher Friedrich Rühs, that "the Jew does not truly belong to the country in which he lives, for as the Jew from Poland is not a Pole, the Jew from England is not an Englishman ...."[6] Accordingly, the Jews were predestined to

---

1 According to early studies on the authoritarian personality (see Theodor W. Adorno, Else Frenkel-Brunswik, Daniel J. Levinson, and R. Nevitt Sanford, The Authoritarian Personality [New York: Harper and Row, 1950]), antisemitism is part of a general syndrome that is ethnocentric and prejudiced; on this see more recently the concept of group-focused enmity; see Wilhelm Heitmeyer (ed.), Deutsche Zustände, vols. 1–10 (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2002–2011).

2 Because the term "Semitism" does not exist, which would be preceded by the hyphenated prefix "anti-" to form its opposite, the convention used here will be to write "antisemitism" as one word, contrary to common usage.

3 There is therefore sometimes mention of "antisemitism without Jews." On this see the early article by then Secretary General of the Central Council of Jews in Germany Hendrik G. van Dam, "Antisemitism without Jews," Die Zeit (January 8, 1960); Paul Lendvai, Antisemitism without Jews (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1971). On Spain in the interwar period, see Manfred Böcker, "Antisemitismus ohne Juden: Die zweite Republik, die antirepublikanische Recht und die Juden in Spanien 1931–1936 (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2000).

4 Klaus Holz, Nationaler Antisemitismus. Wissenssoziologie einer Weltanschauung (Hamburg: Hamburger Edition, 2001), 543.

5 Zygmunt Bauman, Modernity and the Holocaust (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1989), 53.

6 Cited in Bauman, ibid., 54. A concrete, current case exists in Hungary, where Imre Kertész is "classified" in right-wing circles especially as a "Jew" and not as a representative of Hungary: "Imre Kertész, a writer from Hungary, received the Nobel prize this year. We could say: finally the Hungarian language, people and nation have been honored with this long-deserved recognition. But we cannot say this because Imre Kertész – contrary to the opinion of the Stockholm award committee – has not presented universal concerns and reflections of mankind ..., but almost exclusively the emotions surrounding the Jewish fate and fatelessness" (János Dési and András Gerö et al. (eds.), Antisemitic Discourse in Hungary 2002–2003, Report and Documentation (Budapest: B'nai B'rith, 2004), 193.

embody supranational, modern phenomena such as cosmopolitanism,[7] capitalism (international financial markets, globalization), communism, and liberal, universalist values.[8] Their rapid social advancement in most European societies brought them into leading economic, academic, cultural, and political positions, thus making them rivals of established or emergent Christian middle classes. This and their links since the Middle Ages to finance and money have been read as a confirmation of this image of Jews, at the heart of which is a suspicion of covert economic and political world domination.[9] While the category "Jew" thus gleans its meaning in a current context, its roots lie in historically pre-formed notions. Therefore, today's prejudices are, first of all, strongly influenced by specific historic traditions of hostility toward Jews in each country. Secondly, especially the problems that have emerged in each country with respect to that country's discourse on its own position in the persecution of the Jews in the Second World War play an important role.[10] According to this structure of prejudices, Jews are perceived as a group that is powerful and threatening in many ways and distinct from the national collective. Based on this perception, there are various levels at which Jews are viewed to have a detrimental influence on the societies in which they live:

- *political*: by betrayal to external enemies; as a revolutionary force within; as a risk to peace between nations or by covertly controlling or strongly influencing the politics of the country, both from within and without
- *economic*: by financial exploitation or international finance manipulations
- *moral*: by using their victimization in the Holocaust to paint a negative picture of the country or to derive demands for compensation from this
- *religious and cultural*: such as by supporting secular views. In this conception, Jews are an enemy of Christianity and pose a threat to the national culture through their universalistic values and ideas.

In Europe we therefore encounter antisemitism in very different manifestations. This is usually concealed by the fact that research on antisemitism was and is primarily conducted within a national framework, examining antisemitism in only

---

7 In the eyes of antisemites, the Jews possessed an "inborn and evidently irreparable cosmopolitanism" (Bauman, Modernity and the Holocaust, 53).

8 See Bauman, ibid. The founding of Israel as a Jewish state did not serve to change this ambivalence very much. Jews in European countries are often identified as "Israelis," a label which they in fact reject for themselves, but the old identification of Jews with international financial power and fantasies of world domination has remained. This applies also for the old accusation of dual loyalties, which now are sometimes viewed in connection with Israel.

9 Krzeminski has described it for Poland as follows: "Anti-Semites ... assume that Jews cryptically strive for power, put their own group before all other commitments, and strive to gain control over world finance and economy" (Ireneusz Krzemiński (ed.), Czy Polacy są antysemitami? Waniki badania sondażowego [Warsaw, 1996], p. 300).

10 Surveys conducted in Czechoslovakia after 1990 have shown that even after decades of existing as a combined state, attitudes of Czechs and Slovaks towards Jews continued to show great differences (Robin Cohen and Jennifer L. Golub, Attitudes toward Jews in Poland, Hungary, and Czechoslovakia: A Comparative Survey (New York: American Jewish Committee, 1991); Zora Bútorová and Martin Bútora, Attitudes toward Jews and the Holocaust in Independent Slovakia (New York: American Jewish Committee,1995).

one country. A comparative perspective of the manifestations of this phenomenon in other countries is rarely considered. The few existing Europe-wide studies on antisemitism show that antisemitic attitudes do not only vary with respect to the amount of agreement on specific questions, but that differences between countries are also apparent in the individual dimensions of antisemitism.[11] For example, the Middle East conflict plays a lesser role in eastern European countries than in western and northern Europe, and this in turn has an impact on figures regarding agreement on Israel-related antisemitism.

The articles published here developed out of the talks presented at the conference on Antisemitism in Europe Today: the Phenomena, the Conflicts, which was held on November 8–9, 2013, in Berlin, jointly organized by the Foundation Remembrance, Responsibility, and Future (EVZ), the Jewish Museum Berlin, and the Center for Research on Antisemitism at the Technical University of Berlin. These papers focus on five manifestations of present-day antisemitism. The juxtaposition of several national studies yields a comparative perspective. Particular emphasis was placed on contrasting effects. The articles each concentrate on one manifestation, but put it within the context of the other forms of antisemitic prejudice that exist in the respective country.

The ideas characterized here as *"classical" or political antisemitism*, which continue to exist in politics, the public sphere, and popular opinion, interpret Jews as a dominant power that is active—ostensibly to the detriment of the respective nation—especially in certain sectors of society, that is, in politics, (finance) economy, and the mass media. This complex of ideas includes a conspiracy theory presuming that "the Jews" are pursuing these harmful activities covertly, whereby this could refer either to Jews within the country, to "World Judaism," or to Israel. There are, however, also extensions of the conspiratorial network, which ostensibly include the United States or the European Union, as it were a Brussels–New York–Tel Aviv axis.[12] The articles on Hungary and Sweden focus on this form of antisemitism. András Kovács shows that the appeal of Jobbik, an openly antisemitic, far-right party, mobilizes political prejudice, which as a consequence has led to a rise in antisemitic attitudes in certain settings and regions of Hungary. The extreme Right in Sweden still regards Jews to be the main enemy. According to

---

11 Anti-Defamation League (ADL), Attitudes Toward Jews in Ten European Countries (New York, 2012); Andreas Zick, Beate Küpper, and Andreas Hövermann, Die Abwertung der Anderen. Eine europäische Zustandsbeschreibung zu Intoleranz, Vorurteilen und Diskriminierung (Berlin: Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, 2011); for a comparative analysis of the items used in the respective national studies see also: Werner Bergmann, "Antisemitismus-Umfragen nach 1945 im internationalen Vergleich," Jahrbuch für Antisemitismusforschung 5 (1996): 172–195; ——, "Anti-Semitic Attitudes in Europe: A Comparative Perspective," Journal of Social Issues 64/2 (2008): 343–362.

12 Antisemites in Hungary believe in a Tel Aviv–New York–Brussels axis as a synonym for a Jewish, western, globalized world conspiracy against Magyardom; see Magdalena Marsovszky, "Antisemitismus in Ungarn nach 1989. Demokratiedefizit und kultur-politische Herausforderung für Europa," http://www.zeithistorische-forschungen.de/zol/_rainbow/documents/pdf/asm_oeu/marsovszky_asm.pdf (2005): 9–10, accessed August 19, 2014.

Henrik Bachner, notions of conspiratorial power that the extreme Right attributes to the Jews also exist, in a more subtle form, within the political mainstream.

As a result of the Second World War and the Holocaust, on the one hand, Jews make up only a small minority in most European countries. On the other hand, a fundamentally new configuration has emerged: Jews will (must) be remembered as victims of the Holocaust, whereas other members of the respective country were either also victims of Nazi or Stalinist crimes or else were more or less involved in these crimes, benefited from them, or offered little or no help. Owing to this situation, some countries, to the extent that they too were victims of Nazi crimes, see themselves in competition with the Jewish citizens of their respective country. If they themselves were guilty of having committed crimes, they are confronted with accusations of their complicity and/or demands for compensation. Here we see *secondary or guilt-rejecting antisemitism*, in which memories of the Holocaust are rejected and the suffering of one's own country is offset against them. This can go as far as completely denying the Holocaust (the so-called "Auschwitz lie").

A special situation exists in some eastern European countries that came under Soviet rule after the Second World War. There, communist rule and the crimes committed during this time have led to a kind of perpetrator-victim reversal. Jews are accused of being supporters or at least henchmen of the communists in power (Judeocommunism), which has led in some of these eastern European countries to a divided memory. The countries selected within this context each represent a specific configuration of this victim-victim or victim-perpetrator relationship. For Poland, Jolanta Ambrosewicz-Jacobs discusses the competition between Poles and Jews as victims of Nazi crimes, but also indicates that "secondary antisemitism" is less common in the younger generation. In Lithuania, where after 1990 a major focus was placed on nation-state building, as Gintare Malinauskaite describes in her article, the aspect of "two different cultures of remembrance" is more significant: the marginalization of the Holocaust as compared with Stalinist crimes ("Soviet genocide") and charges that Jews who fought in the resistance against the German occupiers had killed Lithuanian civilians. Austria, for its part, had long assumed the role of "Hitler's first victim," thereby rejecting any responsibility for the crimes of the Nazis. Not until after the "Waldheim affair" did the country accept its responsibility, as Margit Reiter writes.

"New Antisemitism"—Criticism of Israel or Antisemitism

Discussion on "new antisemitism"[13] started at the latest with the second Intifada and the subsequent international criticism of Israel's policies toward the Pales-

---

13 Ulrich Bielefeld and Nikola Tietze, "Editorial: neuer Antisemitismus oder neue Judeophobie?" Mittelweg 36, no. 2 (2004); Timothy Peace, "Un antisemitisme nouveau? The Debate about a 'New Antisemitism'

tinians. In the concept of "new antisemitism," Israel assumes the role of the "collective Jew." This concept sees classical antisemitism has having gone through a transformation and tending to be supported today also by the new base of the more left-wing, antiracist, anticolonialist spectrum.[14] Opponents of this conception view it as a strategy for using charges of antisemitism to immunize Israel against critics of Israeli policies.[15] In a number of especially western countries, the public conflicts on antisemitism have generally been triggered by statements or actions relating to Israel (e.g., military confrontations between Palestinians and Israelis, the Günter Grass poem, boycott campaigns, the Judith Butler controversy, the Gaza flotilla).

David Feldman has analyzed for Britain the publicly waged dispute among intellectuals, in which the liberal British elite and the radical Left see themselves as being faced with accusations of antisemitism and anti-Zionism. They reject this simple formula equating anti-Zionism and antisemitism, behind which they suspect a political agenda. The article by Peter Ullrich shows for Germany the existence of a guilt-rejecting antisemitism within the right-wing political spectrum and a partly anti-Zionist, partly classical antisemitism within the organized Islamist milieu.[16] It concentrates primarily on attitudes toward Israel within the left-wing political spectrum, in which criticism of Israel meanwhile contains elements of an antisemitic discourse, even though this is not necessarily intended by the actors. Ullrich claims that to some extent a learning process can be seen within this spectrum. In Turkey, Dilek Güven confirms a rise in antisemitism in the last decade, which especially since the Iraq war has assumed an increasingly anti-Israeli thrust in the media as well as in government rhetoric.

Traditional Anti-Judaism

Modern antisemitism has been expressly defined since the late nineteenth century as nonreligious, but some popular religious and cultural ideas have remained alive in parts of the population and sometimes also in the churches. The articles on this manifestation treat the question as to the extent this religious Christian base still plays a role in present-day antisemitism in some European countries today. In Poland (article by Lara Benteler, Michał Bilewicz, and Mikołaj

---

in France," Patterns of Prejudice 43/2 (2009): 103–121; Robert Fine, "Fighting with Phantoms: A Contribution to the Debate on Antisemitism in Europe," Patterns of Prejudice 43/5 (2009): 459–479.

14 Pierre-André Taguieff, Rising from the Muck: The New Anti-Semitism in Europe, trans. Patrick Camiller (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2004); Doron Rabinovici, Ulrich Speck, and Nathan Sznajder (eds.), Neuer Antisemitismus? Eine globale Debatte, Frankfurt am Main 2004.

15 Brian Klug, "The Collective Jew: Israel and the New Antisemitism," Patterns of Prejudice 37/2 (2003): 117–138.

16 On this see the report of the independent group of experts on antisemitism: Expertenkreis Antisemitismus, Antisemitismus in Deutschland. Erscheinungsformen, Bedingungen, Präventionsansätze (Berlin 2011), pp. 42ff; Klaus Holz, Die Gegenwart des Antisemitismus. Islamische, demokratische und antizionistische Judenfeindschaft (Hamburg, 2005); Klaus Holz and Michael Kiefer, "Islamistischer Antisemitismus. Phänomen und Forschungsstand," in: Konstellationen des Antisemitismus. Antisemitismusforschung und pädagogische Praxis, ed. Wolfram Stender, Guido Follert, and Mihri Özdogan (Wiesbaden, 2010). pp. 109–138.

Winiewski), antisemitism studies have determined the continued existence of religious, traditional antisemitism in parts of the population. The same is true for Spain. Anna Menny's article describes the continuation of popular cultural and religious images strongly influenced by Catholicism, which portray Jews as usurers and deicides and of committing blood libel. This does not, however, exclude anti-Israel attitudes and sociopolitical, xenophobic antisemitism targeting immigrants.

Antisemitism within the Context of Racism/Xenophobia against other Minorities

Studies have shown for many European countries a clear connection between xenophobic/racist and antisemitic attitudes within both right-wing extremist parties and organizations and the public at large. Immigrant populations as well as long-established national minorities can be viewed as "foreign," as demonstrated by Lenka Bustikova and Petra Guasti in their article on Slovakia. To be sure, antisemitic and racist attitudes are by no means limited to the autochthone majority population. Instead, they also exist among members of immigrant ethnic groups. There is debate, on the one hand, on antisemitism among Muslims in Europe, and, on the other hand, on the unique features of antisemitism as compared with other racist or xenophobic attitudes, such as Islamophobia.[17] There are conflicts in the Netherlands and France between the majority population and immigrant minorities, but also within the minorities themselves; antisemitic prejudices and attacks by Muslims, for example, have taken place. In Slovakia the majority population fosters negative attitudes toward the minorities of the Hungarians, Roma, and Jews, who have lived in the country for centuries. While right-wing extremists and usually also the right-wing populist parties in Europe are both xenophobic and antisemitic, some of them, such as Front National in France, the FPÖ in Austria, and the Partij voor de Vrijheid (Party for Freedom, PVV) of Geert Wilders in the Netherlands (on this see the article by Evelyn Gans), explicitly claim not to be antisemitic. Instead, they "avail themselves of anti-antisemitism as an instrument in their campaigns against Islam." Geert Wilders even purports to be decidedly pro-Israel, whereby he identifies in particular with Israel's right and extreme-right wing. Evelyn Gans suggests the term "selective philosemitism" for such an attitude.
Translated by Allison Brown

Werner Bergmann: Antisemitism in Europe Today: the Phenomena, the Conflicts, 30.09.2014,
www.jmberlin.de/antisemitism-today/Bergmann.pdf

17 Wolfgang Benz, Juliane Wetzel (eds.), Antisemitismus und radikaler Islamismus (Essen: Klartext, 2007); Günther Jikeli, Antisemitismus und Diskriminierungswahrnehmungen junger Muslime in Europa. Ergebnisse einer Studie unter jungen muslimischen Männern (Essen: Klartext, 2012).