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Patterns of the public discourse on anti-Semitism. The example of the reception of the study "Anti-Semitism as a problem and a symbol"

Kurzfassung: Die Studie „Antisemitismus als Problem und Symbol“ untersuchte die divergierenden Sichtweisen auf Antisemitismus bei Akteuren aus Berlin, die auf verschiedene Konzepte, Beobachtungsfelder, Organisationslogiken und Auseinandersetzungen um die symbolischen Aufladungen des Themas Antisemitismus zurückzuführen sind. Die Rezeption der Studie durch Massenmedien und politische Akteure war ebenso divers und ist Gegenstand des Aufsatzes. Trotz aller Divergenz in den Lesarten offenbarten sich in der Rezeption positionsübergreifende Deutungsmuster einer ritualisierten öffentlichen Kommunikation über Antisemitismus. Dies wird in drei Aspekten ausgeführt: Dominanz der Quantifizierung antisemitischer Phänomene (Quantitätsframe) und inhaltliche Entkonkretisierung (1), vage Antisemitismusdefinitionen und Dichotomisierung des Feldes (2), Entdifferenzierung von Antisemitismusphänomenen und Unterschätzung ihrer Symboldimension (3). Die Autoren schlussfolgern, dass es einer wissenssoziologisch ausgerichteten Antisemitismusforschung bedarf, die die Analyse von antisemitischen Phänomenen (Problemdimension) einbettet in die Analyse ihrer Thematisierungsweisen (Symboldimension).

Abstract: The reception of the Study „Anti-Semitism as a problem and a symbol“ (2015), examining perceptions of Anti-Semitism among stakeholders in Berlin was diverse. Despite this diversity in the study’s reception underlying communicative patterns of a ritualized public communication regarding anti-Semitism become obvious: the dominance of quantifying anti-Semitic phenomena (1), vague definitions of Antisemitism and dichotomization of the debate (2), dedifferentiation of anti-Semitic phenomena and the neglect of their symbolic meanings (3). The authors conclude that there is an urgent need for a sociology of knowledge approach to Anti-Semitism, embedding the analysis of anti-Semitic phenomena (problem dimension) into their communicative preconditions in the different approaches to anti-Semitism (symbolic dimension).

1 Debates on anti-Semitism

Interpretations of anti-Semitism are hotly contested in Germany’s public discourse. At one end of the spectrum of opinions, many voices are currently warning of a serious threat from anti-Semitism, which they say is increasing in extent and intensity. They point to indicators including, besides the routine attitude surveys and crime statistics, studies on the spread of “everyday anti-Semitism” and current events such as the anti-Jewish incidents at anti-Israel demonstrations or court decisions which in the view of many observers use a very narrow conception of anti-Semitism.² Especially many anti-Semites themselves, but occasionally also some radical representatives of pro-Palestinian groups deny the existence of anti-Semitism or avoid addressing it (Ullrich 2008: 175 ff., in particular 178 ff.). Some feel vilified by an *accusation* of anti-Semitism, which in their view is leveled too often and unjustly and which they interpret as an “instrument of power” or “character assassination” (Zuckermann 2010; Gehrcke 2015). Between these poles there is a multitude of further appraisals. But it is not only the extent of anti-Semitism that is contested. Debates arise on the issue of dominant groups of carriers (Right-wing extremists? Muslims? Leftists? The centre?), on authoritative definitions, on potential moral and

¹ We thank Felix Axster and the anonymous reviewer for remarks on an earlier version. Also we would like to thank Felix Pahl for his thorough translation from German. All quotes from German sources throughout the text are our own translations.

² An example is afforded by the decision in the right-wing publicist Jürgen Elsässer’s lawsuit against the left-wing politician and publicist Jutta Ditfurth. According to the decision of a district court (*Landgericht München I*) from October 8, 2014, Elsässer may not be called an “ardent anti-Semite”, since in the context of Germany’s historical situation this would presume an affirmation of the National Socialist genocide of the Jews by the plaintiff (Elsässer). Ditfurth’s appeal was rejected by a higher district court (*Oberlandesgericht München*) in September 2015. In November 2015, Jutta Ditfurth filed a constitutional complaint with the Federal Constitutional Court, which has not been settled yet (as of October 2016). Regardless of the question of the original decision’s (in)adequacy from the perspective of research on anti-Semitism, the criticism leveled against it also illustrates a difference in the processing of anti-Semitism in different functional systems of society. In contrast to the dominant public treatment of the National Socialist genocide of the Jews in the form of moral communication, the legal treatment already by virtue of its form leads to a “moral cooling” (Bergmann/Erb 1986: 241; cf. also Ullrich 2016).

political implications (Solidarity with Israel as German *raison d'état*?) and on the assessment of approaches to combating anti-Semitism. In view of this diagnosis, the assertion that struggles are being waged over the interpretation of the subject of anti-Semitism that follow their own "dynamics of a discursive field" (Ullrich 2014; cf. also Jäger 2005) is almost trivial. Accordingly, it makes sense to study in detail the diverging problem assessments, the terminology used, the fields of observation and the experiences of those concerned with anti-Semitism.³

We did this for the State of Berlin in the study "Anti-Semitism as a Problem and a Symbol. Phenomena and Interventions in Berlin", thereby triggering some discussions that were at times heated (Kohlstruck/Ullrich 2015).⁴ However, it is our impression that most of the existing reactions by political actors, journalists and scientists hardly measure the study in the light of its own research question.⁵ It is noteworthy that the specific structure of their modes of reception constitutes an interesting research topic in its own right. Without taking into account the entire reasoning, namely the conception of the study as a sociological "*observation of observers*" (Luhmann 2012: 87) of anti-Semitism, that is, as a meta-analysis of the actors of political disputes, they mostly picked out individual considerations and provided either blanket support or brusque criticism.⁶ However, the partly contrary reactions unintentionally confirm both the original research question and the findings of the study and thus point to fundamentally problematic patterns of a public treatment of anti-Semitism that is highly ritualised and sometimes lacks differentiation. Three aspects of these communication patterns will be set forth in the following: dominance of the quantification of anti-Semitic phenomena (quantity frame) and deconcretisation of content (1), problems of definitions of anti-Semitism and dichotomisation of the field (2) and dedifferentiation of phenomena of anti-Semitism and underestimation of the symbolic dimension of the discourse on anti-Semitism (3).

As the authors of the study, we take the case of its reception as an exemplary point of departure for further developing our own research perspective for research on anti-Semitism and moreover offer explanatory comments on some interpretations (cf. also Kohlstruck/Ullrich/Bergmann/Schüler-Springorum 2015 & Ullrich 2015).

2 Quantity frame and deconcretisation

Besides compiling the existing problem diagnoses of anti-Semitism, the research question of our study mainly aimed to focus on the 'analysts' themselves and to portray the various *observers of anti-Semitism*, their respective institutional status, their conceptual tools and empirical fields of observation in assessing anti-Semitism. This draws *inter alia* on Luhmann's sociology of knowledge, which focuses on *second-order observations*. These are 'observations of the observers'. They are not necessarily more 'objective' or 'realistic' with respect to the original object of observation, but they provide insight into the premises of the first-order observations. As it were, second-order observations focus on the blind spot of the first-order observers, on distinctions immediately assumed by them (and not observable to them).⁷ For example, the individual actors diverge with respect to the degree and/or the kind of their personal association with the subject, their field of activity in the social space, their political positions, their organisational type, their funding, etc.

³ The controversies over the authoritative establishment of narrower or broader conceptions e.g. of "violence", "extremism" or "racism" are similar in structure. The explosive nature of such disputes over interpretation is closely linked to the implications of the respective conceptions for societal acceptance or potential exclusion.

⁴ Michael Kohlstruck/Peter Ullrich, „Antisemitismus als Problem und Symbol. Phänomene und Interventionen in Berlin“, 2nd ed., *Berliner Forum Gewaltprävention*, No. 52 (2015), https://depositonce.tu-berlin.de/bitstream/11303/4866/1/kohlstruck_et-al.pdf, (accessed on 21.10.2016).

⁵ We assume the existence of *relatively* independent fields with diverging goal orientations and practices of communication and action, and we regard this as normatively appropriate. Political activity is primarily geared towards shaping society, journalistic activity towards current reporting and scientific activity towards knowledge production. Of course, these fields influence each other, independent of the topic. Anti-Semitism appears to be one of those topics in which there is a particularly strong interpenetration of the scientific field by the political.

⁶ Here we concentrate largely on the quantitatively far more extensive reception by political and journalistic actors. Criticism was most prominently highlighted by: AJC Berlin Ramer Institute for German-Jewish Relations (ed.), *Antisemitismus im Deutungskampf. Anmerkungen zur Studie „Antisemitismus als Problem und Symbol – Phänomene und Interventionen in Berlin“ des Zentrums für Antisemitismusforschung* [Anti-Semitism in the interpretive struggle. Comments on the study "Antisemitism as a Problem and a Symbol – Phenomena and Interventions in Berlin" of the Centre for Research on Antisemitism], Berlin 2015, <http://bit.do/AJC-ASB> (accessed on 05.02.2015). Cited in the following as "AJC 2015".

⁷ "[A]n observation of the second order is present whenever the focus is on distinctions or, to use a more pointed formulation, when one's own activity of distinguishing and indicating refers to further distinctions and indications. To observe in the mode of second-order observation is to distinguish distinctions" (Luhmann 2000: 60; years ago Werner Bergmann already applied this to the observation of anti-Semitism 2002).

Moreover, we assumed that the subject of anti-Semitism not only poses a problem for Jews as well as democracy and human rights in general but is also, particularly in post-National Socialist Germany, charged with a multitude of layers of meaning and has a high *symbolic significance* as a special negative foil in German political culture (cf. e.g. Lepsius 1989). For anti-Semitism and the National Socialist genocide of the Jews are closely associated. At least since the 1980s, they have been regarded as a "central symbol for the National Socialist era" (Bergmann/Erb 1986: 227, 239). The analysis of all these (meta-)aspects mainly served the purpose of generating more transparency in the public debate and making the respective diverging assessments *more discussable* on the basis of more precise knowledge about their respective 'speaking positions' and the concrete manner in which they came about.

This perspective of the study was often overlooked or even explicitly rejected, as it appears to be contrary to the mode in which the political-moral public discourse treats the subject. The reception of the study is remarkable in that nearly all reactions indicate an expectation of mainly finding results on the *actual extent* of anti-Semitic phenomena in the study.⁸ Those reading the study in this light came to different findings, even diametrically opposite accounts and assessments of our statements, which nevertheless reveal *one* specific pattern of communicative selectivity.

At one end of the spectrum of receptions, the study is thought to assert that "the number of anti-Semitic attacks and insults (...) [is] apparently considerably higher than the known statistics show".⁹ This view is represented in a number of publications, including "Tageszeitung", "Süddeutsche Zeitung", "Jüdische Allgemeine" and "Neues Deutschland"¹⁰, and relies in particular on our analysis of the police statistics on offences related to anti-Semitism. Their categories for registering anti-Semitism and other crimes against the state are indeed inconsistent; and the practice of registration in everyday police work is being criticised by organisations representing those affected. The police reporting service's statistics for "politically motivated crime" (*politisch motivierte Kriminalität*, PMK) can only register actionable offences known to the police. A crucial selection in the statistical registration occurs because when several crimes have been committed, only the offence that carries the highest penalty is taken into account. This leads to a conservative assessment of the situation if these PMK statistics are erroneously used as an indicator for the total extent¹¹ of anti-Semitism (Kohlstruck/Ullrich 2015: 30-35).

At the opposite pole of reception lies the view that the study downplays the extent and intensity of anti-Semitism and in some passages constitutes "a relativisation of anti-Semitism" (AJC 2015:7). Some of the reporting embraces this view (Küntzel 2015). While this diagnosis of low levels of anti-Semitism that we supposedly made is a key point of criticism for the Berlin office of the American Jewish Committee (AJC), the Salaam-Schalom Initiative, a cooperation of Jews and Muslims in Berlin-Neukölln, draws a similar assessment from the study; but in contrast to the AJC, the Salaam-Schalom Initiative agrees with the supposed result of the study and defends the study against the AJC's criticism, stating that both the initiative and the study find "no increase in anti-Semitism" (Salaam-Schalom Initiative 2015).

The exceptions in the press reports include the Berliner Zeitung, which reports in the spirit of the study's actual research question under the title "Observers under observation" and pointedly summarises a finding of the study: "It is not actually known how anti-Semitic Berlin really is."¹² Meanwhile, in summarising or explicitly criticising the study, the bulk of the reports and comments themselves practice a highly ritualised form of speaking about anti-Semitism, which the study focused on in its analysis and comments. This requires an explanation.

⁸ Along these lines, one critical comment defines "what would have been their own task and what they [the authors of the study] apparently didn't do: investigating and surveying the widespread anti-Semitism in Berlin" (Apabiz/MBR 2015: 79). In fact, our study does report all assessments of the extent of anti-Semitism in the city that we found, but without a conclusive determination of a "true extent".

⁹ Volksstimme (Magdeburg), 27.04.2015.

¹⁰ Marlen Gurgun, "Der Preis des Friedens" ["The price of peace"] in: *Die Tageszeitung*, 08.01.2015; Martin Köger, "Neue Studie zu Judenfeindschaft" ["New study on hostility towards Jews"] in: *Neues Deutschland*, 08.01.2015; s/n, "Deutlich mehr antisemitische Vorfälle in Berlin" ["Considerably more anti-Semitic incidents in Berlin"] in: *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 07.01.2015; s/n, "Problem und Symbol" ["Problem and symbol"] in: *Jüdische Allgemeine*, 11.01.2015.

¹¹ A complete picture would also have to include the incidents that did not come to the attention of the police and in particular the incidents that are not actionable but nevertheless anti-Semitic, such as expressions of opinions, etc.

¹² Julia Haak, "Beobachter unter Beobachtung. In Berlin kümmern sich so viele Initiativen um Antisemitismus, dass man den Überblick verlieren kann. Forscher der TU versuchen nun, Klarheit zu schaffen" ["Observers under observation. In Berlin, so many initiatives deal with anti-Semitism that it's easy to lose track. TU researchers are now trying to clear things up."] in: *Berliner Zeitung*, 08.01.2015.

Despite disagreeing on the content with respect to the study's findings and assessment, most of the readings presented so far seem to be based on a uniform structuring principle. This manifests not only in an abstract and dedifferentiating manner of speaking about anti-Semitism (cf. Section 3). Rather, a characteristic interpretive frame of the public communication, of the discourse on anti-Semitism emerges.¹³ Frames serve as discursive filters that select from the multitude of communicated or communicable pieces of information those that are relevant for continuing the discourse, i.e. that are particularly connective or 'resonant' (Snow/Benford 2008). We call the frame in the communication on anti-Semitism that is becoming apparent here the "quantity frame".¹⁴

This frame is supraindividual and – this is crucial – is not bound to concrete political positions or assessments of the subject at hand.¹⁵ In this frame across positions, which also noticeably plays a part in structuring the reception of the study, the focus on the *quantitative extent of anti-Semitism* establishes the connectivity of the communication. In the quantity frame, relevance is ascribed to contributions to the communication that can be understood as an answer to the question of how high (or low) the level of anti-Semitism is. Either a high societal relevance of anti-Semitism is assumed *per se* and other assessments are therefore perceived as relativising; or the high relevance is perceived as a hegemonic interpretation and rejected, so that other assessments appear as exaggerated. Both alternatives can be used as a source of legitimacy for political actions.¹⁶

This is not the place to discuss or doubt the justification of this frame. It is beyond dispute that anti-Semitic phenomena represent a societal problem – for society in general, and in particular for Jews as immediate *objects of anti-Semitism*.¹⁷ The analysis and strategies for action potentially derived from it may also include a quantitative assessment of the prevalence and the risk potential (also in comparison with other forms of group enmities). However, the prominence of the quantity frame in the German discourse on anti-Semitism has implications. Due to a ritualised treatment of the subject of anti-Semitism *primarily* under the aspect of quantification, concrete realistic assessments of the *qualitative* dimensions of the problem and of a suitable treatment of the problem tend to be impeded. For the communicative selection in terms of the quantity frame assumes, at least implicitly, a consensus on the qualitative determination of the measured object. But this agreement on content is not at all given with regard to the subject of anti-Semitism. An analysis of the *substantial* content of the different treatments of anti-Semitism is apparently registered as a break and an irritation, even a disturbance. As our analysis shows, this is partly due to the conceptions of anti-Semitism that are applied in the field.

3 Definitions of anti-Semitism and dichotomisation of the field

The study empirically showed in which manner different actors with their own respective conceptions observe anti-Semitism or do educational work. We coupled this with statements on the respective specific capacities of the observation instruments. This includes our observations, empirically based on interviews and document analyses, that some of the actors studied work with very broad, sometimes also diffuse conceptions of anti-Semitism and also that some have no explicit definitions, or flatly reject the necessity of definitions, even while regularly making assertions on the prevalence of anti-Semitism. Thus, this problem is far from restricted to the terse and narrow, necessarily individualising police definition of anti-Semitism as "hate crime" committed "out of an anti-Jewish attitude".¹⁸ Rather, it is found in all types of organisations studied and is expressed not least in the

¹³ Following Foucault, by "discourses" we mean the rule-governed practices that "systematically form the objects of which they speak" (Foucault 1972: 49).

¹⁴ A dominance of the quantity frame can be asserted for the public observation of different social phenomena. Numbers suggest definiteness and promise a clear sense of orientation. Like with other topics (cf. fn. 3), the fact that the subject matter itself depends on the conceptions formed of it also leads to specific problems for the measurement of anti-Semitism.

¹⁵ On the concept of frames and their function in structuring discourses (thematically but not necessarily evaluatively), cf. Ferree, Gamson, Gerhards, Rucht (2002) and Ullrich (2008: 21 ff.).

¹⁶ Bergmann and Erb (1991, see also Bergmann 2002) already pointed out the phenomenon of competing over- and underestimations in their seminal studies on communication latency. They showed that assessments in the population on the subject of anti-Semitism and the danger arising from it are shaped by observations of the "climate of public opinion". But there are systematic distortions at the margins. Both anti-Semites and explicit critics of anti-Semitism, or "pessimists" – the antagonists in the field, as it were – have very strong preconceptions on the prevalence of anti-Semitism, so that their positions are hardly jarred by events and developments in the climate of public opinion. Rather, both groups are "selectively looking out for confirming events" (ibid. 517).

¹⁷ We speak of "objects of anti-Semitism" since it is characteristic of anti-Semitism as a worldview to homogenise and denigrate the enemy group and thus to turn it into an object (cf. Klug 2013: 473).

¹⁸ This focus derives from the criminological mode of operation of the individualising attribution of responsibility. From the perspective of the social sciences, such conceptions are not sufficient for capturing anti-Semitism, at least not as far as anti-Semitism is understood as a social and cultural, hence as a supraindividual phenomenon.

prevalence of the “working definition of antisemitism” of the EUMC/FRA (2005) as a working basis of NGOs in the subject field. For this is, contrary to what its name suggests, not a clear definition but an attempt to describe *possible* (but not necessary) modes of expression of anti-Semitism, which is rather more suitable for raising awareness. This leads to systematic fuzziness in the existing analyses of anti-Semitism.¹⁹

To illustrate this, we listed pertinent example cases that could not be designated as anti-Semitic phenomena on the basis of the available information *alone*. This included the reporting in a Berlin daily on the attack on an Israeli living in Berlin-Kreuzberg. We take the reference to the earlier reporting, which classified this incident as anti-Semitic without sufficient concretisation, as evidence for our hypothesis of an *a priori* high willingness to label current events as anti-Semitic.²⁰ The cases of Jewish students switching from a state school to a Jewish school are similar (Kohlstruck/Ullrich 2015: 42). While our interview partners in Jewish schools reported that there were individual cases of school changes due to anti-Semitic hostility in the past, but that a general tendency could not be observed, the part of the criticism that assumes a high or very high level of anti-Semitism presumes that such a change of school could only have occurred due to anti-Semitism (AJC 2015: 7). The fact of this unproven claim in turn supports the hypothesis that besides more complex, more precisely contextualising and balancing positions, “pessimistic positions” can be observed within the discourses on anti-Semitism (see Section 3), which seem to be hardly jarred even by empirical findings. Not least with respect to this topic, the criticism of the study further justifies our recommendation to use language and categories carefully.

In both examples, the criticism of the study appears to be due to a confusion of different dimensions of assessing the analysed events. Our caution in classifying certain events as anti-Semitic seems to be equated with an assessment of these events as unproblematic or inoffensive. This reading is wrong; it corresponds neither to our intentions, nor to our statements, but there are systematic reasons for it. Such reductionism is the consequence of structuring the field of study of anti-Semitism merely on the basis of the distinction between “what is defined as anti-Semitic” and “what is regarded as a legitimate contribution to the public debate” (according to Rensmann 2015: 94). While considering this boundary may indeed be a useful point of departure of the analysis of shifts in the anti-Semitic discourse, as a basic distinction it reduces multidimensional problems to the general contrast anti-Semitic vs. unproblematic (cf. Klug 2013: 479; Kohlstruck/Ullrich 2015: 49). A violent attack in which, as in this case, an individual is held responsible as a representative of a collective and, as it were, “punished” for actions ascribed to this collective, is neither legally nor morally acceptable. This statement is independent of the different aspect whether an attack on an individual Israeli is an anti-Semitic incident. Different causes and meanings are conceivable: The act might for instance be rooted in the context of the Arab-Israeli conflict without also having an anti-Jewish motivation. One might then classify it as nationalist or ethnocentric. We take the position that events and actions should be classified as anti-Semitic in which a “negative attitude towards Judaism” or towards Jews (or others) *as Jews* is documented.²¹ In our view, this captures the core of the content of the conceptions of anti-Semitism widely used in research (Nipperdey/Rürup 1972: 152f., Bergmann/Wyrwa 2011). This negative attitude that is constitutive in our definition can in principle be analysed on different levels: on the individual level of personal *motives*, but also independently of motives in the *form* of the action (e.g. through unconscious, unintended or unknowing use of anti-Semitic topoi), and finally in anti-Semitic *readings* the action allows. Anti-Semitism can be articulated quite openly, or can be masked, for example in anti-Semitic anti-Zionism or other variants of “detour communication” (cf. Bergmann/Erb 1986: 231). With regard to both the motives and the detour communication, the known problems arise: If one is to go beyond mere imputations of motives or the *a priori* assumption that anti-Semitism is a constitutive element of modernity (Salzborn 2010) or of bourgeois capitalist society (Postone 1995), empirical research must provide indicators that allow the anti-Semitic content to be observed intersubjectively.²²

This is why many researchers make great methodological efforts (or at least consider them necessary) in order to show to what extent certain (communicative) acts are to be assessed as anti-Semitic phenomena; this is done for example in intensive hermeneutic sequence analyses (Holz 2001, Globisch 2013). For instance, not every

¹⁹ The (problematic) consequences of also using the EUMC definition as a basis of *scientific* texts would have to be analysed in more detail elsewhere.

²⁰ Cf. Kohlstruck/Ullrich (2015: 84, fn. 58). It is only later press reports that contain further information on the circumstances of the incident that allow it to be classified as anti-Semitic.

²¹ Which constellations of ascriptions precede this (or not) was set out by Brian Klug (2013) in a thought experiment. In his comparison of different constellations of ethnicising ascriptions to a Jew in a London bus, he asks under which conditions of knowledge a possible anti-Semitic content can be attributed to whom.

²²Cf. the proposal of historian Christoph Nonn (2008: 7, 31, 116), who advises scientific studies to focus on “anti-Semitic acts” and holds the assumption of anti-Semitic mentalities to be problematic. On the danger of the construction of an “eternal” ‘anti-Semitism’ in the theorising of critical theory, cf. e.g. Weyand (2016: 67).

utterance that uses “double standards” in assessing the Arab-Israeli conflict is necessarily to be classified as anti-Semitic on that basis alone.²³ Why?

The tendency currently empirically detectable in parts of the educational scene and also among scholars to designate statements on Israel that are perceived to be illegitimate as anti-Semitic *per se by definition*,²⁴ without being able to prove anti-Semitic, i.e. essentially *anti-Jewish*, semantics, leads to a highly reductionist approach. Without doubt, there is anti-Semitism among the opponents of Israel’s occupation policy – as is illustrated by a now extensive literature (e.g. Bergmann/Erb 1986, Kloke 1994, Holz 2001, Haury 2002, Reiter 2005, Späti 2005, Ullrich 2008, Knothe 2009, Globisch 2013). However, the Arab-Israeli conflict remains a real political and above all violently fought conflict over land, resources and life opportunities. Such conflicts typically have direct and indirect consequences. These include brutalisation, radicalisation, friend/enemy communications with stereotype formation, ethnisation, taking sides, biased reporting, etc. Statements on Israel and Israeli policy that are unreasonable, wrong, or considered illegitimate in the value framework of certain sectors of society can have many causes. The *a priori* assumption that their origin or even just their common denominator lies in anti-Semitism alone reduces the breadth of the spectrum of possible explanations in an unproductive manner. Misunderstanding this objection, as some of the critics do, as a claim that anti-Zionism and criticism of Israel are *per se* free of anti-Semitism is simply a logical error. This error can, however, be explained by the fact that the political-moral discourses on anti-Semitism are heavily superimposed on the field of anti-Semitism research.

4 Unification of anti-Semitic phenomena and underestimation of the symbolic dimension

The study indicated *inter alia* that a problematic unification often occurs in the discourse on anti-Semitic phenomena: In disregard of the individual concrete phenomena, they are described and assessed as a supposedly homogeneous entity called “anti-Semitism”. The schoolyard insult is thereby implicitly accorded the same moral weight as a physical attack; expressions of opinions, some of which are only produced in response to surveys, are lumped together with terrorist attacks, and diffuse everyday aversions are assigned the same rank as programmatic anti-Semitic declarations. The study shows how widespread such unification is and also to what extent it can have problematic consequences. That our analysis is a realistic observation is confirmed – most likely unintentionally – by the reasoning of the critics of our study. Some of the actors studied are strongly influenced by the essentialist notion that the current anti-Semitic phenomena can only be understood as outwardly different forms of expression of an anti-Semitic essence, which is problematic from the perspective of the social sciences.

The study sorts the observed positions on the assessment of current anti-Semitic phenomena along a spectrum between “pessimistic” and “balancing positions” (Kohlstruck/Ullrich 2015: 45-47). The former see a continuous, comprehensive and steadily growing threat from anti-Semitism. The latter restrict their threat perception to specific areas and also speak about decreases or oscillations as well as complex circumstances due to intersectional connections. Thus, we counted among the “balancing” positions those that explain and assess anti-Semitic utterances by contextualising them. The balancing positions interpret aversive utterances whose content is directed against Jews as Jews (e.g. slurs like “you Jew”) not *necessarily* as an expression of a *comprehensive* anti-Semitic worldview, but *necessarily* as an anti-Semitic phenomenon. According to the study, other possible explanations include that the anti-Semitic utterance is used to formulate “a strategic dissociation from the rituals of the political culture of the majority society” or that this utterance results from “conflict dynamics of real conflicts and not generalised hostility towards Jews” (Kohlstruck/Ullrich 2015: 46).

The fact that the critics of our study are committed to a conception of anti-Semitism that is unifying and at the same time steadily expanding in scope (Kohlstruck/Ullrich 2015: 56; cf. Engel 2009) makes it difficult for them to make any distinction at all between an expressive level and a causal level and to recognise, besides “anti-Semitism as a system of thought” (Beyer 2015: 575), i.e. anti-Semitism as an ideological worldview or as a political programme, also other dynamics that may lead to anti-Semitic attitudes, utterances or behaviour or influence these in their form, content or probability of occurrence.

These influences also include – we emphasise this because taking it into account is far from obvious – the discourse *on anti-Semitism* in its interpenetration with other discourses. This can be illustrated based on the study’s observations on reactance phenomena in dealing with the subject of anti-Semitism. Such mental resistance against dealing with the subject are widespread in the pedagogical processing of anti-Semitism (Scherr

²³ The concept of double standards is not a scientific one. It was developed by a politician for political purposes and is meant to help unmask (supposedly) hidden anti-Semitism in a simple way (Sharansky 2004).

²⁴ Methodologically, this occurs by means of the EUMC working definition as well as the popular 3D rule (demonisation, double standards, delegitimation) and in *ad hoc* definitions provided by the actors studied (in detail see Kohlstruck/Ullrich 2015: Chap. 5).

1999). Reactance can be guided by resentment but can also – as the study shows – be linked to the further symbolic charges of the subject of anti-Semitism and anti-anti-Semitism. These charges include party politics, conflicts over the history of the left and the GDR, connections to the Arab-Israeli conflict and the German “*raison d'état*” postulated by the government. According to the experiences of some of our interview partners, these additional charges contribute to a deep sense of insecurity among pedagogical staff and result in them preferring to avoid the subject instead of facing it head on. Accordingly, political work as well as educational work on anti-Semitism or for democracy and human rights should find strategies for actively dealing with this challenge. A first prerequisite for this is to differentiate among different contexts in which phenomena relevant to anti-Semitism are fostered and generated. Although this is dismissed in a simplifying and polemical manner by the criticism of our study, it does also imply critically analysing the “foundations of German post-war democracy, which include the culture of remembrance of the Holocaust or Germany’s special relationship with Israel” (AJC 2015: 10) as contextual conditions for the development of discourses that are anti-Semitic or relevant to anti-Semitism.

One argumentation strategy of the critics aims at reducing the discursive landscape of Berlin on the subject of anti-Semitism portrayed in the study, which is heterogeneous and broken in multiple respects, to the simple – and indeed utterly misleading – contraposition of a ‘Jewish’ perspective and a ‘non-Jewish’ view on anti-Semitism and to impute a disregard for the Jewish view to the study. This not only assumes a systematic ignorance towards those who are potentially personally affected by anti-Semitism; it is even claimed that the study’s representation could “contribute to a reinforcement of anti-Semitic stereotypes” (AJC 2015: 6).

Some of our critics claim that Jewish organisations are mostly assigned to the pessimistic debate position in the study.²⁵ As already mentioned, the study in fact distinguishes two different modes of speaking about anti-Semitism and finds a spectrum of opinions between “pessimistic” and “balancing” positions taken by the organisations studied. However, this applies to both Jewish and non-Jewish actors. And it is in the first instance a descriptive finding about divergences in problem analyses that is hardly surprising. The explanatory approaches provided by us do not refer to the ‘background’ or religious affiliation of the actors, but *inter alia* to the *discursive context* shared by all (Ullrich/Keller 2014), in which these positions are taken. A further pattern of the discursive field under consideration manifests in this shift in emphasis from a content-related distinction to an ethnic-religious attribution: The complex symbolic significance of anti-Semitism in the public discourse is disregarded and reduced to the level of the relationship of non-Jews to Jews. This ignores results of the study, which empirically identifies pessimistic assessments of anti-Semitism also among non-Jewish actors and in turn finds Jewish actors who explicitly disavow very pessimistic positions. Accordingly, we see possible explanations for pessimistic assessments besides (potential) affectedness in a multitude of factors such as the political predispositions of the persons and organisations involved, supra-individual frames of the discourse on anti-Semitism, a selective focus in social space, different degrees of freedom on definitional issues due to differences in organisational structure, and in the often precarious working conditions of projects, which must annually portray a high relevance of the funded field of work in funding proposals to their donors. The imputation of a linear association of certain assessments of anti-Semitism with ethnic-religious group membership ignores general, thematically neutral mechanisms such as the necessity for organisations to distinguish themselves thematically or the effects of funding guidelines in a sector that has grown immensely in the past roughly 10 to 20 years and has become more heterogeneous for that reason alone.

Such a narrowing of the *broader discursive field* ‘anti-Semitism/Jews/Israel/Arab-Israeli conflict/...’ to the level of the relationship of non-Jews to Jews or to the binary constellation of Jewish and non-Jewish perspectives is at the expense of the treatment of other dimensions of the complex, especially the symbolic dimension: In the political culture, practiced anti-anti-Semitism is widely regarded as a touchstone of successfully dealing with the past and as an exceptional symbol of legitimacy of post-Nazi democracy: “Opposing anti-Semitism has become *raison d'état*” (Bleeker-Dohmen/Strasser 2005: 808).²⁶ The fact that accusations of anti-Semitism can indeed be an instrument in the political struggle for power is also being disregarded. In evaluative terms, anti-Semitism seems to be regarded as the most reprehensible group aversion in the German public. With the binary structure of their reception scheme, some critics confirm the hypothesis of the study that asserts the existence of such simplifications. The study treats them as problematic because, in strongly clinging to the coordinates of an earlier phase of post-National Socialist German ‘dealing with the past’, they attach little importance to the current phenomena of symbolic charges and discursive superpositions and thus appear insufficiently complex. The experiences of the surveyed pedagogues that were systematised in the study and the fundamental considerations

²⁵ This may be due to the prominent use of a quote from a representative of a Jewish organisation in the corresponding section of the study (Kohlstruck/Ullrich 2015: 45f.).

²⁶ Cf. the resolution of the German parliament “Den Kampf gegen Antisemitismus verstärken, jüdisches Leben in Deutschland weiter fördern” [“Redoubling the fight against anti-Semitism, continuing to promote Jewish life in Germany”] of 04.11.2008 and the fact that the parliament has twice constituted a body of experts especially on the subject of anti-Semitism (cf. Bundestagsdrucksachen 16/10775(neu) and 16/10776 as well as the plenary minutes 16/185).

in this respect indicate that not taking into account discursive interferences impedes the educational work on the subject of anti-Semitism.

5 Outlook

The covered aspects of the reception of the study "Anti-Semitism as a Problem and a Symbol" have shown that the path of research in the sociology of knowledge that combines the observation of anti-Semitic phenomena with an analysis of the communication on anti-Semitism, hence with a second-order observation, leads to differentiated analyses and should thus definitely be pursued further. The very historically (diachronically) oriented research on anti-Semitism should thus be supplemented by more (primarily synchronically oriented) empirical work in the social sciences and complex conceptual work. In particular, the institutional basis of empirical research on anti-Semitism in the social sciences is by no means consolidated in Germany, despite the public prominence of the subject. This manifests *inter alia* in the fact that the long-term project in Bielefeld for surveying so-called "group-focused enmity" (research group around Wilhelm Heitmeyer and Andreas Zick) was discontinued and the "centre studies" ("*Mitte-Studien*") in Leipzig (research group around Oliver Decker, Elmar Brähler, Johannes Kiess) also do not have solid funding that would allow for more than just waves of slightly varying surveys. In this situation, the theoretical and methodological level of earlier work has no longer been reached in the field of attitude research (e.g. Bergmann/Erb 1991, 1991a; cf. Beyer/Liebe 2013). Existing qualitative studies on anti-Semitism sometimes yield deep insights into the type and origins of anti-Semitic phenomena; but by their nature they cannot claim quantitative representativity for the population, and they generate considerably less mass-media resonance than the survey studies (e.g. Scherr/Schäuble 2006; Ranc 2010; Seidenschnur 2013).

Any social science research dealing with the present, be it theoretical, qualitative-empirical or attitude survey, should integrate the thorough analysis of the multidimensionally conceived anti-Semitism complex. Such an expansion of perspectives carries implications for science and (educational) practice. It allows the real challenges that go along with different kinds of anti-Semitic phenomena to be taken just as seriously as the competitions, controversies and specific discursive dynamics in the interpretations, reinterpretations, negations or symbolic charges of discourses on anti-Semitism that act back on the object itself. The concepts of the quantity frame, of deconcretisation, of factual and social dichotomisation, of conceptual unification and of anti-Semitism as a symbol can serve as points of departure for a more comprehensive understanding of discourses that are anti-Semitic or relevant for anti-Semitism.²⁷ The sociology of knowledge analyses what seems self-evident to the societal actors. That this perspective has the potential to throw some light on the discursive field of anti-Semitism is obvious. Moreover, an analytical problematisation of political and pedagogical practices is inherent in this perspective. This problematisation is in turn unavoidable in view of the content-related goals that pedagogical practice sets itself, if it is genuinely interested in mastering the obvious problems and complex challenges (Schäuble 2012) in the field. An analysis of the transformations of anti-Semitic phenomena without an analysis of the controversial symbolic meanings of anti-Semitism necessarily remains incomplete.

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²⁷ Additionally, we would like to point to the concept of exceptionalism of the communication on anti-Semitism that was also used in the study (Kohlstruck/Ullrich 2015: 21 ff., 52 f.).

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