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The collective Jew: Israel and the new antisemitism[1]

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ABSTRACT For Theodor Herzl, Zionism, in the sense of a political movement to establish a sovereign Jewish state, offered the only workable solution to the problem of antisemitism. Some commentators today speak of a 'new antisemitism'. They claim, first, that there is a new *wave* or *outbreak* of hostility towards Jews that began with the start of the second Palestinian intifada in September 2000 and is continuing at the present time. Second, and more fundamentally, the 'new antisemitism' is said to involve a new *form* or *type* of hostility towards Jews: hostility towards Israel. This is the claim under discussion in Klug's paper. The claim implies an equivalence between (a) the individual Jew in the old or classical version of antisemitism and (b) the state of Israel in the new or modern variety. Klug argues that this concept is confused and that the use to which it is put gives a distorted picture of the facts. He begins by recalling classical antisemitism, the kind that led to the persecution of European Jewry to which Herzl's Zionism was a reaction. On this basis, he briefly reformulates the question of whether and when hostility towards Israel is antisemitic. He then discusses the so-called new form of antisemitism, especially the equation of anti-Zionism with antisemitism. He concludes by revisiting Herzl's vision in light of the situation today.

KEYWORDS antisemitism, anti-Zionism, Israeli-Palestinian conflict, new antisemitism, Zionism

In the Preface to his pamphlet *The Jewish State* (1896), one of the founding documents of political Zionism, Theodor Herzl declared: 'The world resounds with outcries against the Jews…'[2] Chapter 2, 'The Jewish Question', opens with this description:

> No one can deny the gravity of the situation of the Jews. Wherever they live in perceptible numbers, they are more or less persecuted. Their equality before the law, granted by statute, has become practically a dead letter. They are debarred from filling even moderately high positions, either in the army, or in any public or private capacity. And attempts are made to thrust them out of business also: 'Don't buy of Jews!'[3]

In short: 'The nations in whose midst Jews live are all, either covertly or openly, Anti-Semitic.'[4]

For Herzl, Zionism, in the sense of a political movement to establish a sovereign Jewish state, offered the solution – the only workable solution – to the problem of antisemitism. He recognized that 'the Jews will always have sufficient enemies, much as every other nation has'.[5] But he thought that, if they had a state of their own, their

[1] This paper reflects conversations over a long period with friends, relatives and colleagues. I have benefited especially from reading an unfinished manuscript on this subject by Francesca Klug and from comments by Reva Klein on a draft of this paper. I am grateful to Tony Kushner for his help with certain references.

[2] Theodor Herzl, *The Jewish State: An Attempt at a Modern Solution of the Jewish Question* [1896], trans. from the original German by Sylvie D'Avigdor (London: Henry Pordes 1993), 7.

[3] Ibid., 22.

[4] Ibid., 23.

[5] Ibid., 76.

situation would be fundamentally changed for the better in two ways. First, 'once fixed in their own land, it will no longer be possible for them to scatter all over the world. The diaspora cannot take place again, unless the civilization of the whole earth should collapse …'[6] Second, 'if we only begin to carry out the plan, anti-Semitism would stop at once and for ever'.[7] As Herzl saw it, the conditions of life for Jews would be normalized once their *status* was normalized. No longer perpetual 'strangers' in other people's countries,[8] they would be at home in their own land, possessing their own constitution, language, laws, army and flag, 'much as every other nation has'.[9] In short, a Jewish state would provide 'the solution of the Jewish Question after eighteen centuries of Jewish suffering'.[10]

A century later, fifty years or so after the creation of the state of Israel in 1948, there are those who see the rise of a 'new antisemitism' in the world, with the Jewish state itself as the focus of hostility towards Jews. According to proponents of this view, contemporary antisemitism is new in two respects. First, on their account, a new *wave* or *outbreak* of hostility towards Jews began with the start of the second Palestinian *intifada* in September 2000 and is continuing at the present time. They see this expressed in an increase in attacks against Jews and Jewish institutions.[11] They perceive a change in the public climate of Western European societies whereby anti-Jewish sentiment has become more socially acceptable among 'the chattering classes' and on the activist left.[12] And they cite the growth of an antisemitic discourse in Muslim circles.[13] Some commentators, such as Avi Becker, Secretary General of the World Jewish Congress, believe the current wave of antisemitism 'is unprecedented since the end of World War II'.[14]

Second, and more fundamentally, the 'new antisemitism' is said to involve a new *form* or *type* of hostility towards Jews: hostility towards Israel. 'New' here does not necessarily mean within the last few years; it could be as old as the state itself or even older. However, those who hold this view tend to think that the new form of antisemitism has intensified with the recent *intifada*. They point to a persistent anti-Israel bias in

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[6] Ibid.

[7] Ibid., 78, see also 18, 20.

[8] Ibid., 15.

[9] Separate sections of chapter five of Herzl's pamphlet deal with the constitution, the language, the laws, the army, the flag and other aspects of the proposed Jewish state.

[10] Ibid., p. 30.

[11] See, for example, the report produced by the Washington-based Lawyers Committee for Human Rights, *Fire and Broken Glass: The Rise of Antisemitism in Europe* (New York and Washington, DC: Lawyers Committee for Human Rights 2002). The Foreword states: 'As this report makes clear, there is an alarming rise in antisemitic violence in Europe: but it is on the rise in other parts of the world as well.'

[12] See, for example, David Landau, 'Jewish angst in Albion', *Ha'aretz*, 18 January 2002, available at www.haaretzdaily.co.il/hasen/objects/pages/PrintArticleEn.jhtml?itemNo=119116 (viewed 18 February 2003).

[13] See, for example, Robert Wistrich, *Muslim Anti-Semitism: A Clear and Present Danger* (New York: American Jewish Committee May 2002), available at www.ajc.org/InTheMedia/PublicationsPrint.asp?did=503 (viewed 20 March 2003).

[14] Avi Becker, 'Anti-Semitism in the guise of intellectualism', *Ha'aretz*, 7 October 2002, available at www.haaretzdaily.com/hasen/pages/ShArt.jhtml?itemNo=216763&contrassID=2&subContrassID=1&sbSubContrassID=0 (viewed 20 March 2003). For a critique of this kind of claim, see Antony Lerman, 'Sense on Antisemitism', *Prospect*, August 2002.

western media, especially on the part of journalists of a 'liberal-left' persuasion.[15] They refer to the animus with which certain prominent non-Jewish intellectuals have attacked Israel.[16] They accuse the United Nations (UN) of being unfair to Israel, singling out the Jewish state for criticism and applying double standards when judging its behaviour. They quote the vitriolic language in which Israel is sometimes condemned, citing in this connection the UN World Conference against Racism held in Durban, South Africa, in September 2001.[17] Noting that the polemic against Israel at this conference originated at the Asian regional meeting in Tehran, they tend to see Arab and Muslim anti-Israel propaganda as the *locus classicus* of the new form of antisemitism.

Proponents of this view see an equivalence between (a) the individual Jew in the old or classical version of antisemitism and (b) the state of Israel in the new or modern variety. Jonathan Sacks, Chief Rabbi of Britain and the Commonwealth explains: 'At times it [antisemitism] has been directed against Jews as individuals. Today it is directed against Jews as a sovereign people.'[18] In classical antisemitism, the Jew was frequently associated with the Antichrist and the Devil.[19] Likewise, according to Rabbi Michael Melchior, former Deputy Foreign Minister of Israel, the Jewish state today is portrayed as 'the new anti-Christ of the international community, or the devil of the international community'.[20] Per Ahlmark, speaking at a conference in Jerusalem, put the equivalence this way: 'We certainly could say that in the past the most dangerous antisemites were those who wanted to make the world *Judenrein*, free of Jews. Today the most dangerous antisemites might be those who want to make the world *Judenstaatsrein*, free of a Jewish state.'[21] Irwin Cotler sums it up when he says, in a striking phrase, that Israel has emerged as 'the collective Jew among the nations'.[22] Hence the title – and the focus – of this essay.

One way to flesh out this concept is to take Herzl's words quoted above and to substitute 'Israel' or 'the Jewish state' for 'Jews'. The result, *mutatis mutandis*, should give us a description of Israel as 'the collective Jew'. It goes something like this. 'The world resounds with outcries against the Jewish state.' Like Jews in Herzl's time, Israel today is 'more or less persecuted' in the world. Just as 'equality before the law' was

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[15] Typically, in Britain, the *Guardian*, *Observer*, *Independent*, *New Statesman* and the BBC are accused of bias. This is a complex issue and I shall not try to assess the evidence for or against. My quarrel in this paper is less with the question of whether the allegation is true and more with the claim that such bias, if it exists, can only be explained as antisemitism.

[16] For example, the poet Tom Paulin, the writer A. N. Wilson, and the Nobel Prize-winning author José Saramago.

[17] See, for example, 'Briefing to the foreign press', by Rabbi Michael Melchior, Deputy Foreign Minister of Israel, 9 August 2001, available on the website of the Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs at www.mfa.gov.il/mfa/go.asp?MFAH0kaz0 (viewed 3 February 2003).

[18] Jonathan Sacks, 'The hatred that won't die', *Guardian*, 28 February 2002.

[19] See Joshua Trachtenberg, *The Devil and the Jews: The Medieval Conception of the Jew and Its Relation to Modern Anti-Semitism* [1943], 2nd edn (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1983).

[20] Melchior, 'Briefing to the foreign press'.

[21] Per Ahlmark, 'Combatting old/new antisemitisim', 11 April 2002, speech given at the international conference, 'The legacy of Holocaust survivors', Yad Vashem, Jerusalem, April 2002, available at www.yad-vashem.org.il/about_yad/what_new/data_whats_new/whats_new_international_conference_ahlmark.html (viewed 3 February 2003). Ahlmark is the former Deputy Prime Minister of Sweden.

[22] Irwin Cotler, *New Anti-Jewishness* (Jerusalem: The Jewish People Policy Planning Institute November 2002), 5. The Institute was established in February 2002 by the Jewish Agency for Israel. I am grateful to Antony Lerman for drawing my attention to this paper.

'practically a dead letter' for individual Jews, so it is for the Jewish state in international forums: it does not get a fair hearing. At one time, Jews were 'debarred' from public office; now Israel is 'debarred' from permanent membership of a regional group in the UN.[23] 'Don't buy of Jews!' has become 'Don't buy of Israel!'[24] And so on. Ultimately, just as individual Jews in the past were denied the most basic right of all, the right to live, so the very existence of the state of Israel is being questioned today. In short, adapting Herzl again: 'The community of nations in whose midst Israel exists is, either covertly or openly, antisemitic.' Such, more or less, is the view I am examining in this paper.

Although the state of Israel, on this account, is the *object* of a 'new antisemitism', the *effects* are felt by Jews and Jewish communities everywhere. Ahlmark explains how this works: 'It [contemporary antisemitism] attacks primarily the collective Jew, the State of Israel. And then such attacks start a chain reaction of assaults on individual Jews and Jewish institutions.'[25] In other words, on this account, the new *wave* of antisemitism is due, at least in part, to the new *form* that antisemitism takes today: antagonism towards the state of Israel.

The concept of Israel as 'the collective Jew' is thus both a thesis in its own right and a hypothesis for explaining hostility towards Jews around the world. I believe that the concept is confused and that the use to which it is put gives a distorted picture of the facts it purports to explain. This is not to deny that the facts give cause for concern. On the contrary, there are good reasons for the insecurity and discomfort that many Jews say they feel. It appears, for one thing, that there has been a sharp rise in attacks, physical and verbal, directed at Jews in several parts of the world since the second *intifada* began.[26] Moreover, given the political situation in the Middle East, there is reason to think that this trend will continue – unless Israel is integrated into the region and its conflict with the Palestinians is peacefully resolved. There is, furthermore, an unmistakable vein of antisemitism in public discourse on Israel, whether in the salon, on 'the street', in the mosque, in the UN or in the media.[27] It is in the air and, as Greville Janner has put it, you can smell it.[28] But, in the first place, you cannot always trust your sense of smell. And, in the second place, I see nothing radically 'new' about contemporary antisemitism.

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[23] Allison Kaplan Sommer, 'The UN's outcast: why is Israel treated differently than all other nations?', *Reform Judaism*, winter 2002, available at http://uahc.org/rjmag/02winter/outcast.shtml (viewed 4 January 2003).

[24] The Arab League has maintained an economic boycott of Israel since the state was created. The boycott was relaxed in the 1990s in the context of the Middle East peace process. In July 2001 the Central Office for the Boycott of Israel called for it to be revived (see 'The Jewish Virtual Library', www.us-israel.org/jsource/History/Arab_boycott.html (viewed 13 March 2003)). Currently, numerous groups around the world are calling for various kinds of boycott – economic, academic and cultural – of Israel.

[25] Ahlmark. Cf. Michael Melchior's statement, 'The wave of anti-Semitism doesn't end with the borders of Israel. It reaches Europe, Canada, and Australia – even campuses in the United States': 'A conversation with Rabbi Melchior', available on the website of the National Council for Jewish Women at www.ncjw.org/advocacy/israel-melchior.htm (viewed 6 January 2003).

[26] See note 11.

[27] The Muslim columnist Yasmin Alibhai-Brown has candidly written about 'the anti-Semitism that we all know is freely traded in mosques and other places': 'The Middle East is destroying my friendships', *Independent*, 24 February 2003, available at http://argument.independent.co.uk/low_res/story.jsp?story=381039&host=6&dir=173 (viewed 25 February 2003).

[28] Quoted in Landau. Greville Janner attributed this remark to his father, Barnett Janner.

Exaggerating its extent, or confusing it with other forms of hostility towards Jews, only exacerbates the situation.

I shall neither attempt to make the whole of the argument for these beliefs nor to explore all their ramifications. My focus is on the concept of Israel as 'the collective Jew'. I begin by recalling classical antisemitism: the familiar, common-or-garden, old-fashioned variety, the kind that led to the persecution of European Jewry to which Herzl's Zionism was a reaction. On this basis, I briefly reformulate the question of whether and when hostility towards Israel is antisemitic, and then discuss the so-called new form of antisemitism, especially the equation of anti-Zionism with antisemitism. I shall first take a historical approach and then consider some objections to my argument. I conclude by revisiting Herzl's optimistic vision, and consider how he might react if he heard there was a 'new antisemitism' in the world.

The old antisemitism

A good, simple working definition of antisemitism, according to a broad consensus of scholars, is this: hostility towards Jews *as* Jews.[29] This definition has the virtue of ruling out such cases as the London bus conductor (let us call her Mary) who, in a hypothetical scenario, angrily throws Rabbi Cohen off the 73 bus for smoking.[30] Even if smoking is something Rabbi Cohen does religiously; even if he is wearing a *kipah* (skullcap) at the time and consequently is identifiably Jewish; even so, his situation is no different from that of Jane Smith or Ahmed Khan or Bhupinda Singh or any of the other smoking passengers that Mary evicts that morning from her bus. His crime is that he is a smoker, not that he is a Jew. It is a little more complicated if Mary's hostility to Rabbi Cohen is based on the fact that he is singing *zemiros* (hymns) on the upper deck at the top of his voice. But is it because he is singing *zemiros* or is it because he is singing, full stop? Suppose he would have been singing 'Oh I do like to be beside the seaside': would Mary have taken the same action? In other words, which is he guilty of being: loutish or Jewish? Let us give Mary the benefit of the doubt: she is a liberal, tolerant, broad-minded woman, but rules are rules and she throws him off the bus because he is creating a nuisance. The fact that he is Jewish is neither here nor there – for Mary. But for Rabbi Cohen it matters. I mean specifically that it is the reason why he is singing *zemiros*. Rabbi Cohen is not merely a person who happens to be Jewish and happens to be singing. He is singing *as* a Jew. But she evicts him *as* a lout. Mrs Goldstein, who is watching this scene from the back of the bus, smells antisemitism. She is wrong.

But now let us *not* give Mary the benefit of the doubt. Let us assume the worst and suppose she is a bigot. But about what or whom exactly? What does she know from 'Jewish'? Rabbi Cohen is singing in Hebrew. Does *she* know it is Hebrew? It could be any foreign language. She looks at Rabbi Cohen, with his foreign appearance and foreign ways, and what she sees is just that: a foreigner, in other words an asylum seeker. And

[29] Tony Kushner points out some of the difficulties with this definition but regards it as 'a useful tool': see his *The Persistence of Prejudice: Antisemitism in British Society During the Second World War* (Manchester: Manchester University Press 1989), 2-8.

[30] Why the 73 bus? It so happens that the 73 goes to Stamford Hill, a district in London with a substantial Hasidic community, but it is not crucial for the argument.

under the guise of enforcing the rules against creating a nuisance, she deports him from her bus. You might call this 'xenophobia', hatred of strangers or of anyone 'different'; but it is not antisemitism. However, perhaps Mary's prejudice is more specific. She is not an ignorant woman. One look at Rabbi Cohen's black garb and long flowing beard and Mary knows precisely what he is: one of them mullahs. 'Clear off, Abdul' she shouts in his ear as she shoves him on to the pavement. As Rabbi Cohen picks himself up off Stoke Newington High Street, he reflects philosophically that he is the victim of Islamophobia. But Mrs Goldstein is convinced that all London bus conductors hate Israel.

But suppose now that Mrs Goldstein is right, not about London bus conductors in general but about Mary being an antisemite. Suppose, in other words, that Mary knows Rabbi Cohen is Jewish and that this is why she ejects him from her bus. She knows he is Jewish and she feels contempt for him or hatred or some such emotion *because* he is Jewish. What does this mean? Knowing he is Jewish, what exactly does Mary think she knows? She is antisemitic: she despises him because he is a Jew. And what, pray, is a Jew?

In his essay, 'The freedom of self-definition', Imre Kertész, the Hungarian-Jewish winner of the 2002 Nobel Prize for Literature, reflects on Jewish identity in light of his experience during the Nazi Holocaust as a concentration camp inmate. He writes: 'In 1944, they put a yellow star on me, which in a symbolic sense is still there; to this day I have not been able to remove it.' He goes on to say that the name or label 'Jew' is 'an unambiguous designation only in the eyes of anti-Semites'.[31] I understand Kertész to be saying that the yellow star was not just a form of identification but a whole identity. Pinning the star to his breast, they were pinning down the word 'Jew', determining what it meant. Kertész observes that 'no one whose Jewish identity is based primarily, perhaps exclusively, on Auschwitz, can really be called a Jew'. What he means is that they cannot call *themselves* a Jew – they cannot define themselves as Jewish – because the word is not theirs to use: it is someone else's brand stamped on them and they are stuck with it: 'Jew'. This is, poignantly, how Kertész sees his own condition: 'to this day I have not been able to remove it.' But Rabbi Cohen, singing *zemiros* at the top of his voice on the upper deck of the 73 bus, is Jewish on his own terms: he 'can really be called a Jew'. So, Mary knows Rabbi Cohen is Jewish. Rabbi Cohen knows Rabbi Cohen is Jewish. But he is not the 'Jew' – the figment – that Mary perceives and despises.

This suggests that our working definition of antisemitism, hostility towards Jews as Jews, is flawed. It should be amended to read: hostility towards Jews as 'Jews'. This might seem a minor, almost pedantic, difference but it totally alters the sense of the definition. That is to say, our working definition is not merely imprecise, it is positively misleading. It would be more accurate (if cumbersome) to define the word along these lines: a form of hostility towards Jews as Jews, in which Jews are perceived as something other than what they are. Or more succinctly: hostility towards Jews as *not* Jews. For the 'Jew' towards whom the antisemite feels hostile is not a *real* Jew at all. Thinking that Jews are really 'Jews' is precisely the core of antisemitism.

Antisemitism is best defined not by an attitude to Jews but by a definition of 'Jew'. Defining the word in terms of the attitude – hostility – rather than the object – Jew – puts the cart before the horse. Indeed, hostility is not the only 'cart' that the horse can

[31] Imre Kertész, 'The language of exile', *Guardian*, 19 October 2002, available at http://books.guardian.co.uk/review/story/0,12084,814056,00.html (viewed 19 February 2003).

'pull' behind it. Envy and admiration can also go along with an antisemitic discourse. Wilhelm Marr, who founded the Antisemiten-Liga (League of Antisemites) in Germany in 1879, described Jews as 'flexible, tenacious, intelligent'.[32] These are not terms of contempt. However, their antisemitic bent is evident when they are read in context: 'We have among us a flexible, tenacious, intelligent, foreign tribe that knows how to bring abstract reality into play in many different ways. Not individual Jews, but the Jewish spirit and Jewish consciousness have overpowered the world.' This 'Jewish spirit' and 'Jewish consciousness' – that Marr called *Semitism* – lies at the heart of the word he coined: *anti*semitism.[33]

Who, then, are the 'Jews' that the antisemite hates – or fears or despises or envies or admires? What is the 'unambiguous designation' of the yellow star that Kertész 'to this day' is unable to remove? When they pinned the badge on him and he became a 'Jew', what did he become? He ceased to be a mere mortal and became, in a way, timeless: a cipher of the eternal Jew, an expression of 'Jewish spirit' and 'Jewish consciousness'. He became powerful, wealthy, cunning; rootless and cosmopolitan, merciless and vengeful, depraved and demonic; arrogant yet obsequious, secretive yet flamboyant, legalistic yet corrupt. He became a member – and agent – of a people apart, a state within a state, a cohesive community that holds itself aloof. At the same time, this powerful, wealthy, cunning group infiltrates society, pursuing its own selfish ends. Across the globe its hidden hand controls the banks, commerce and media, manipulating governments and promoting wars among nations. Wherever there is money to be made or power to be seized, he, Kertész, the 'Jew', can be found, even if only in disguise. Fundamentally, the yellow star designated the Jewish peril: a parasite that preys on humanity and seeks to dominate the world. This is what Kertész became when, stripped of everything except this badge, he was made a 'Jew' in Auschwitz.[34]

In short, antisemitism is the process of turning Jews into 'Jews'.

Antisemitism and anti-Zionism

If this is what 'old' antisemitism is, then the decisive question concerning hostility towards Israel is (something like) this: Does it ever turn the Jewish state into a 'Jewish' state? Does it, as it were, pin a yellow star on to the state of Israel? Does it project on to the state, explicitly or otherwise, those traits that make up the classical stereotype of the 'Jew'? If and when it does, then it is a form of antisemitism. If not, it is not.

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[32] English translation by Paul Mendes-Flohr and Jehuda.Reinharz of Wilhelm Marr, *Der Sieg des Judenthums ueber das Germanenthum vom nicht confessionellen Standpunkt ausbetrachtet*, (Bern: Rudolph Costenoble, 1879), 30-35, excerpted in Paul Mendes-Flohr and Jehuda Reinharz (eds), *The Jew in the Modern World: A Documentary History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 332.

[33] Ibid.

[34] I have peppered this paragraph with several antisemitic clichés and I have drawn on most of the main themes, as it seems to me, of antisemitic discourse. There are, of course, innumerable variations. These themes appear in religious, racial and ethnic forms of antisemitism and underlie the classic antisemitic canards, such as the blood libel and the mediaeval accusation of well- poisoning. *Der ewige Jude* (The Eternal Jew) was the title of a famous Nazi propaganda film made in 1940, based on a book with the same name published in Germany in 1937. *The Hidden Hand* was a periodical published in England by The Britons, a group on the far right, in the 1920s. *The Jewish Peril* was the title under which *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion* appeared in London in 1920.

Those who hold the view I am examining see the question differently. They draw the line in a different place. They start out, however, from the same point: it is legitimate in principle to oppose and criticize Israel. Jonathan Sacks observes, '[W]e can too easily dismiss all criticism of the state or government of Israel as anti-semitism. It is not. No democratic state is entitled to consider itself beyond reproach, and Israel is a democratic state.'[35] Abraham Foxman, National Director of the Anti-Defamation League, agrees: 'We are always careful to say that not every criticism against the State of Israel is anti-Semitic. Yes, Israel is a state, a member of the community of nations, and it is subject to criticism as any other state. Therefore, if you criticize Israel, that doesn't make you an anti-Semite.'[36] Then what does? Where do they draw the line between legitimate and illegitimate opinion? Foxman speaks for virtually all proponents of the view under discussion in this paper when he says, 'First, let me say anti-Zionism is anti-Semitism, period.…It is pure, simple, unadulterated anti-Semitism.'[37] Hillel Harkin, writing in *The Wall Street Journal*, elaborates:

> [O]ne cannot be against Israel or Zionism, as opposed to this or that Israeli policy or Zionist position, without being anti-Semitic. Israel is the state of the Jews. Zionism is the belief that the Jews should have a state. To defame Israel is to defame the Jews. To wish it never existed, or would cease to exist, is to wish to destroy the Jews.'[38]

All the proponents of the view I am examining tend to draw the line in the same place. Like Harkin, they all tend to rule out, on the grounds that it is antisemitic, any criticism of Israel that 'defames' the state. Precisely what this permits and what it excludes is left somewhat open. Some commentators, for example, think it is antisemitic to describe the administration of the Occupied Territories as a form of apartheid. Others object even to describing them as 'occupied' (and not 'disputed'). Be that as it may, on one point there is a virtual consensus: anti-Zionism as such is beyond the pale.

There is an irony about this view. Antisemitism in civil service and government circles in Britain played a vital role during the early days of the Zionist movement. David Fromkin, in *A Peace to End All Peace*, tells the story in the context of the collapse of the Ottoman Empire at the end of the First World War, when the map of the modern Middle East was drawn. He says: '[T]he notion of committing Britain to Zionism was inspired by Gerald FitzMaurice and Mark Sykes.'[39] Both Fitzmaurice and Sykes believed in 'the

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[35] Sacks.

[36] Abraham Foxman, 'New excuses, old hatred: worldwide anti-Semitism in wake of 9/11', speech delivered to the Anti-Defamation League's National Exectuive Committee, 8 February 2002, available at www.adl.org/anti%5Fsemitism/speech.asp (viewed 4 March 2003).

[37] Ibid.

[38] Hillel Harkin, 'The return of anti-Semitism', *Wall Street Journal*, 5 February 2002, available at www.opinionjournal.com/forms/printThis.html?id=95001818 (viewed 20 March 2003).

[39] David Fromkin, *A Peace to End All Peace: The Fall of the Ottoman Empire and the Creation of the Modern Middle East* (New York: Avon Books 1989), 291. See also Mark Levene, 'The Balfour Declaration: a case of mistaken identity', *English Historical Review*, January 1992, 54-77: 'By extension of my argument, the origins of the Balfour Declaration are to be located less in the wartime policies and strategies of Britain in the Middle East and more in the murky waters of modern anti-Semitism. At the bottom of the pool was the fear that a collective, potentially conspiratorial Jewry knew something which the rest of the world did not know, and could manipulate it accordingly for its own ends' (76).

existence of a cohesive world Jewish community that moved in hidden ways to control the world'.[40] FitzMaurice, based in the British embassy in Constantinople, maintained that Jews had taken control of the Ottoman Empire.[41] Sykes, whose name is immortalized in the secret Sykes-Picot Agreement between Britain, France and Russia (1916), in which the parties agreed to divide up the Middle East into spheres of influence, 'harbored an abiding and almost obsessive fear of Jews, whose web of dangerous international intrigue he discerned in many an obscure corner'.[42] He was convinced that 'Jews were a power in a great many places and might sabotage the Allied cause'.[43] Fromkin continues:

> But unlike the Russians, Sykes believed in attempting to win them over. He reported to the Foreign Office that he had told Picot that, while Britain had no interest in taking possession of Palestine, it was what the Zionists wanted, and that they ought to be propitiated if the Allies were to have a chance of winning the war.[44]

This was in 1916, a year prior to the momentous declaration by Arthur Balfour, British Foreign Secretary, that stated that 'His Majesty's Government view with favour the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people'.[45] Balfour himself shared Sykes's view of Jews. A contemporary, summing up a conversation with the Foreign Secretary, wrote that Balfour 'is inclined to believe that nearly all Bolshevism and disorder of that sort is directly traceable to Jews'.[46] 'Always in the background', writes the Israeli historian Tom Segev, 'was his evaluation of Jewish power'.[47] As Prime Minister, Balfour had introduced the Aliens Bill (which became law in 1905), aimed specifically at limiting the admission of East European Jews who sought refuge in Britain, warning Parliament that the Jews 'remained a people apart'.[48] This view of Jews – a people suspiciously apart – recalls the phrase used by the German idealist philosopher Johann Fichte who in 1793 described the Jews as 'a state within a state'.[49] Fichte was against granting Jews civil rights, 'except perhaps, if one night we chop off all of their heads and replace them with new ones, in which there would not be one single Jewish idea'. He continued: 'And then, I see no other way to protect ourselves from the Jews, except if we conquer their promised land for them and send all of them there.' Thus he

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[40] Fromkin, 198.
[41] Ibid., 41-2.
[42] Ibid., 181.
[43] Ibid., 197.
[44] Ibid.
[45] Ibid., 297.
[46] Diary entry by Colonel Edward M. House, Chief Aide to Woodrow Wilson, quoted in Tom Segev, *One Palestine, Complete: Jews and Arabs Under the British Mandate* (London: Abacus, 2001), 119.
[47] Ibid., 45.
[48] Bernard Gainer, *The Alien Invasion: The Origins of the Aliens Act of 1905* (London: Heinemann Educational Books 1972), 116. Gainer describes Balfour's attitude towards Jews as 'ambivalent' (117, 119).
[49] English translation by M. Gerber of the passage in Johann Gottlieb Fichte, 'Beitrag zur Berichtung der Urteils des Publicums ueber die Franzoesische Revolution' (1793), quoted in Mendes-Flohr and Reinharz (eds.), 309.

anticipated by more than a century the antisemitic pro-Zionist British policy pursued by the likes of FitzMaurice, Sykes and Balfour.[50]

The irony of antisemitic support for Zionism deepens when we look at the other side of the argument, so to speak. Balfour's letter, containing his benevolent Declaration, might have been sent to Lord Rothschild earlier than 2 November 1917 had it not run into opposition. The opposition was not led by antisemites of a different stripe. It 'came from leading figures in the British Jewish community', notably Edwin Montagu, a member of the Cabinet.[51] Montagu rejected the basic premise of Zionism: that Jews constitute a separate nation.[52] In his memorandum 'The Anti-Semitism of the Present Government' (23 August 1917), he wrote: 'I wish to place on record my view that the policy of His Majesty's Government is anti-Semitic in result and will prove a rallying ground for Anti-Semites in every country in the world.'[53] Fromkin notes wryly that Montagu was worried about his own position and the position of his family in British society. Be that as it may, 'The evidence suggested that in his non-Zionism, Montagu was speaking for a majority of Jews'.[54] Certainly, his views were shared by the Conjoint Foreign Committee of the Board of Deputies of British Jews and the Anglo-Jewish Association. In a letter to the *Times* published on 24 May 1917, the Conjoint Committee wrote what was, in effect, a critique of Zionist ideology. The letter registers objections to two 'points' or planks in the Zionist programme, the first being the 'claim that the Jewish settlement in Palestine shall be recognized as possessing a national character in a political sense'. Here is part of what they say about this claim:

> It is part and parcel of a wider Zionist theory, which regards all the Jewish communities of the world as constituting one homeless nationality, incapable of complete social and political identification, with the nations among whom they dwelt, and it is argued that for this homeless nationality, a political center and an always available homeland in Palestine are necessary. Against this theory the Conjoint Committee strongly and earnestly protests.[55]

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[50] Herzl wrote in his diary, 'The antisemites will become our most loyal friends, the antisemitic nations will become our allies', quoted in Segev, 47n. Segev writes: '[T]he movement that was supposed to be a center of world influence in fact occupied four small, dark rooms in Piccadilly Circus in London; its entire archives were kept in a single box in a small hotel room, under the bed of Nachum Sokolow, a leader of the World Zionist Organization. Most Jews did not support Zionism; the movement was highly fragmented, with activists working independently in different European capitals. Weizmann had absolutely no way of affecting the outcome of the war. But Britain's belief in the mystical power of "the Jews" overrode reality, and it was on the basis of such spurious considerations that Britain took two momentous decisions: the establishment of a Jewish legion and the Balfour Declaration' (43).

[51] Fromkin, 294.

[52] Segev, 47.

[53] Public Record Office, London: Cab. 24/24 (British Cabinet Papers). See also Richard Webster, '"Sadam, Arafat and the Saudis hate the Jews and want to see them destroyed"', *New Statesman*, 2 December 2002. Stuart Cohen describes this memorandum as 'the most stinging' of a series of 'rebarbative memoranda' from Montagu: see *English Zionists and British Jews: The Communal Politics of Anglo-Jewry, 1895-1920* (Princeton: Princeton University Press 1982), 278.

[54] Fromkin, 294. He continues, 'As of 1913, the last date for which there were figures, only about one per cent of the world's Jews had signified their adherence to Zionism. British Intelligence reports indicated a surge of Zionist feeling during the war in the Pale of Russia, but there were no figures either to substantiate or to quantify it.'

[55] Reprinted in Mendes-Flohr and Reinharz (eds.), 580. The letter states, however, that, given 'the reorganization of the country under a new sovereign power', they 'would have no objections to urge against

The letter goes on to warn that 'the establishment of a Jewish nationality in Palestine, founded on this theory of Jewish homelessness, must have the effect throughout the world of stamping the Jews as strangers in their native lands, and of undermining their hard-won position as citizens and nationals of those lands'. In effect, the thrust of the argument made by the Conjoint Committee in 1917 was that Zionism, in theory and in practice, tends to endorse the classical antisemitic view of Jews as essentially alien, a people apart and a state within a state. This argument might or might not be valid. But is it plausible to describe it, in Foxman's words, as 'pure, simple, unadulterated anti-Semitism'?

According to the view under discussion in this paper, anti-Zionism is inherently or invariably antisemitic. But as this historical excursus has shown, anti-Zionism and antisemitism are in fact independent variables: one can exist without the other. Certainly, antisemitism can, and sometimes does, take the form of anti-Zionism; but as we have seen, it can also take the opposite form.

Objections and replies

Someone might object: 'This argument is all very well but it is too theoretical. It ignores two facts. First, history has overtaken the question. Israel exists, and for millions of Jews Israel is their home. They have nowhere else to go. To oppose Zionism at this point in time means nothing less than wanting to deprive them of their homeland and perhaps their very lives. Only an antisemite could want such a thing. Second, anti-Zionists single out the Jewish state unfairly. They accept the principle of self-determination for everyone else – but not for Jews. Why not? They accept the right of every other state to exist – but not Israel. Why? Clearly, anti-Zionism is just a form of antisemitism.'[56]

The first thing to say about these objections is that 'anti-Zionism' refers to several different positions concerning the existence of Israel as a Jewish state. These include the view that the state of Israel has no right to exist; that it should not have been created in the first place; that it ought not to continue to exist at all; or that it should not survive as a specifically Jewish polity. The objection lumps these positions together whereas each should be taken separately. Some people today, precisely because of the difference that history has made, reject the anti-Zionist stance that Israel should cease to exist, but still maintain the anti-Zionist view that it ought never to have been created. They might also harbour the anti-Zionist (or post-Zionist) hope that Israel one day will repeal the Law of Return and evolve into a society that ceases to define itself in ethnic terms or to see itself, in Harkin's phrase, as 'the state of the Jews'.[57]

Furthermore, there is nothing inherently or inevitably antisemitic about any of these anti-Zionist positions. To some extent, Zionism raises issues that are unique; to that

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a local Jewish nationality establishing itself' in Palestine. At the same time, the second 'point' in the Zionist programme to which they object is 'the proposal to invest the Jewish settlers in Palestine with certain special rights in excess of those enjoyed by the rest of the population…' (581). They caution: 'Any such action would prove a veritable calamity for the whole Jewish people.'

[56] This objection is hypothetical but it is based on actual remarks I have come across.

[57] According to Israel's Law of Return (1950), every Jew, anywhere in the world, has the right to come to Israel as an *oleh* (a Jewish immigrant) and to become an Israeli citizen.

extent it is legitimate to 'single out' the Jewish state. For one thing, the question of whether Jews constitute a nation in the relevant, modern sense is no less a burning issue today – not least for Jews themselves – than it was in 1917. For another, Israel is not a Jewish state in a vacuum. The special circumstances of its creation in the Middle East, where Jewish aspirations have clashed with Arab, Palestinian and Muslim aspirations, make it a special case. But to a great extent, Zionism is controversial in much the same way as other forms of nationalism are controversial. For the Zionist idea is modelled on the nineteenth-century idea of the nation-state. It is not antisemitic to reject this model. Jews, as much as anyone, have suffered from nationalism in the lands where they have lived. It is by no means obvious that the solution to their suffering – or the solution to the conflict with the Palestinians – is to continue to accept Herzl's nineteenth-century idea and embrace the very ideology that has oppressed them in the past.

No doubt, there are those who single out the Jewish state unfairly. But the notion that everyone who opposes the cause of Jewish nationalism supports every other national cause on the planet is implausible. Even among people who tend to support national liberation movements in general, their attitude in a given case can depend on the cause in question and on the circumstances. Conceivably, someone who sympathizes with the Chechens in their conflict with the Russians, or the Kurds in their conflict with various states, might believe that 'the principle of self-determination' does not apply to, say, the Basques. (And if so, this does not make them bigoted anti-Basque racists, though this might be how they appear in Bilbao.) It is equally implausible to maintain that Israel is the only state whose legitimacy has been questioned or denied in the modern world. Perhaps one of the distinguishing marks of the last century is the extent to which people questioned the legitimacy of existing states. The former Soviet Union and the former Yugoslavia are two examples that come to mind, both of which, in terms of scale and complexity, dwarf the case of Israel.

But even when Israel is singled out unfairly, even when it is 'defamed' by its detractors, it by no means follows that the hostility towards the state is antisemitic. This goes to the heart of the quarrel I have with the view under discussion in this paper. I shall make my case via a document notorious for its hostile tone towards Israel and for its defamatory content: the resolution adopted by the UN General Assembly in 1975 that concluded 'Zionism is a form of racism and racial discrimination'.[58]

I remember it well. I recall the feeling of alienation that many other Jews at the time must have felt, regardless of their political views about Israel and its policies: the primordial sense that 'the world is against us', the hollow feeling in the pit of the stomach that it was happening again. For the UN is the world body. When it speaks, it is as if the world were speaking in unison. And the world seemed to take no cognizance whatsoever of the Jewish experience of oppression and the active struggle against it. For historically, Zionism, however misbegotten and whatever its faults, came into existence as a reaction to antisemitism. Antisemitism is a form of racism. Yet 'the world' was saying that Zionism was itself a form of the evil it fought against. No ifs and buts. No qualifications

[58] United Nations General Assembly Resolution 3379, 10 November 1975. The text is posted on the website of the Jewish Virtual Library at www.us-israel.org/jsource/UN/unga3379.html (viewed 4 April 2003). In a sense this proposition – Zionism is a form of racism – is the mirror image of the claim that anti-Zionism is a form of antisemitism. Both distort reality and do so in the same way: by equating ideas that are independent variables.

or caveats. No acknowledgment of the Jewish story. The preamble to the resolution, 'recalling' and 'taking note' of one evil and injustice after another, neither recalled nor took note of antisemitism at all. It did not so much as mention the word. It was as if there never had been the persecution of which Herzl spoke, let alone the Nazi genocide, the wholesale destruction of Jewish communities in Europe, and the massive displacement of Jewish people that gave such impetus to the Zionist movement, bringing so many Jews round to a cause they might otherwise have spurned. Worse, the preamble did not merely ignore the Jewish story; it folded it into the larger narrative of European colonialism. It described the 'racist regime' in Israel as having 'a common imperialist origin, forming a whole and having the same racist structure and being organically linked' with the white supremacist regimes in South Africa and Rhodesia. But in fact the origins of Zionism did not lie in the imperialism of European states, even if, like other national movements, Zionism played the game and sought to benefit from imperial politics. Nor was Zionism based on an ideology of European or white supremacy. On the contrary, Jews had been marginalized by white European civilization. Zionism was a national movement aimed at liberating Jews from the chronic circumstances of their rejection and persecution. This entire history was obliterated by the UN resolution. It was this total blotting out of Jewish experience in the preamble, as much as the conclusion itself, that cut like a knife. The silence was deadening. In this accounting of history, Jews as Jews had no place. The feeling of rejection was chillingly familiar. You didn't have to be a Zionist to have this reaction; being Jewish was enough.

I have written this as powerfully as I can in order to make it as hard as possible to argue, as I now shall, that the animus towards Israel that informed the UN resolution was not antisemitic, and that it completely misses the point to see it this way. Ironically, the clue to the true nature of the hostility to Israel in this resolution lies in the very features of the text to which I have drawn attention: namely, on the one hand, the failure to acknowledge a Jewish point of view and, on the other hand, the dominance of an anti-European or anti-western perspective. For the resolution reflected the politics and the history of the developing nations that predominate in the General Assembly, nations that share a common history as former European colonies. And, as Avi Becker has observed: 'Palestinians are a symbol of third-world struggle for self-determination.'[59] Israel, on the other hand, tends to be seen in light of its European provenance. Zionism, after all, was largely a movement of European Jews that set out explicitly to 'colonize' Palestine.[60] From this point of view, Israeli Jews are just another wave of the European invasion of the non-European parts of the globe. So it is no wonder their story has been folded into the larger narrative. This does not *justify* the text nor does it make it any more palatable; but it does *explain* it. Or rather, it points to the fact that the resolution should be placed in a political context. That is to say, the text reflects territorial, economic and political interests along with general principles of justice and human rights; not antisemitic prejudice.[61]

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[59] Quoted in Sommer.

[60] This was explicit from the outset: see Herzl's address to the First Zionist Congress, Basle, 1897, reprinted in Arthur Hertzberg, *The Zionist Idea: A Historical Analysis and Reader* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1997), 226-30.

[61] The political context includes, of course, the *Realpolitik* of UN machinations, which in 1975 included the Cold War alignments of member nations behind the rival superpowers of the United States and the Soviet Union.

If this hypothesis is true, if the underlying causes are political, we would expect hostility towards Israel to fluctuate relative to the politics of the Middle East. And it does. As the Jewish Agency for Israel points out: 'Anti-Israel resolutions at the United Nations coincide with events in the Middle East.'[62] Thus, when the peace process got underway in 1991 with the convening of the Madrid Conference, Israel's star began to rise. Within weeks, the UN General Assembly revoked its 1975 resolution equating Zionism with racism.[63] Israel's standing in the UN continued to improve when, in 1993, the Israelis and Palestinians signed the Oslo Accords.[64] Moreover, bilateral relations with other states improved concomitantly. In 1994 Israel and Jordan signed a peace treaty. David Harris, Executive Director of the American Jewish Committee, has provided a helpful shortlist of other favourable developments in the 1990s. 'Several other Arab countries,' he notes, 'including Oman, Qatar, Morocco, and Tunisia, established formal sub-ambassadorial links with Israel, while Mauritania went the extra mile and announced full diplomatic ties with Israel'.[65] Nor was this confined to Arab countries: other nations sought out the Jewish state. 'It reached the point', says Harris, 'where, like a busy New York bakery on a Sunday morning, they had to take a number and wait on line for visits to an Israel that loomed large in the public imagination, but that was too small to handle all the interest and attention at once'.[66]

Then in 2000, says Harris, 'we got mugged'. By 'we' he means both Israel and Jewry. By 'mugged' he is referring to two things: first, the 'worldwide campaign being waged to isolate, condemn, and weaken Israel'; second, 'the wave of documented anti-Semitic incidents' in Western Europe.[67] But there was no mugging. What happened was that peace talks broke down at Camp David in July, Ariel Sharon marched to the Temple Mount in September, the second *intifada* broke out, and the Israel Defence Forces made increasing incursions into the West Bank and Gaza Strip. In other words, the political conflict flared up. Again, the Jewish Agency states the matter plainly: 'Since the escalation of violence in the Middle East, there has been renewed movement at the UN with Israel again the target of one sided condemnations, and unfair criticism.'[68]

In short, the empirical evidence overwhelmingly supports the view that hostility towards Israel, at bottom, is not a new form of antisemitism; it is a function of a deep and bitter political conflict. The depth and bitterness of this conflict is sufficient to explain,

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[62] 'The myth of Zionism = racism after Durban', available on the website of the Jewish Agency, Department for Jewish Zionist Education, The Pedagogic Center at www.jajz-ed.org.il/actual/zr/3.html (viewed 3 February 2003).

[63] United Nations General Assembly Resolution 46/86, 16 December 1991. The text is available on the website of the Jewish Virtual Library at www.us-israel.org/jsource/UN/unga46_86.html (viewed 4 April 2003).

[64] 'The myth of Zionism = racism after Durban'.

[65] David A. Harris, 'Letter from one Jew to another', 29 October 2002, available on the website of the American Jewish Committee at www.ajc.org/InTheMedia/RelatedArticlesPrint.asp?did=679 (viewed 4 January 2003).

[66] The Association Agreement between Israel and the European Union signed in November 1995, which entered into force on 1 June 2000, is another example of Israel coming in from the cold during the 'thaw' of the peace process. See the website of the European Union at http://europe.eu.int/comm/external_relations/news/05_00/ip_00_557.htm (viewed 19 March 2003).

[67] Harris. See the reply by Rabbi John D. Rayner, 'Open letter to David A. Harris, Executive Director, American Jewish Committee': www.eto.home.att.net/antisem8.html (viewed 4 January 2003).

[68] 'The myth of Zionism = racism after Durban'.

for the most part, the strength and intensity of the polemic against the state, especially on the part of those who are directly impinged on by Israel's presence in the Middle East and by the expansion of Jewish settlements in the territories it has retained since the June 1967 war. They see the state through the lens of their own history and their own interests. And why shouldn't they? They see it as an integral part of a conflict in which the West has sought, since at least the end of the nineteenth century, to dominate the Middle East, to colonize it and control its affairs, either directly or through its clients, and continues to do so still. True, this perception of Israel is one-sided. Without doubt it distorts the story of how and why the state came into existence. But, if Palestinians and people who take their side are partisan, this does not mean they are being antisemitic; they are just not being Jewish. The mere fact that they are biased does not make them antisemitic, any more than those whose sympathies lie with Israel are *ipso facto* Islamophobic. It cuts both ways.

As an auxiliary argument, I would like to conduct a simple thought-experiment. Imagine if Israel were more or less the same in every essential respect as the real and existing state, including its oppressive presence in the Occupied Territories, except that it were not Jewish. Suppose, for the sake of argument, it were Catholic, like the Crusader states that Europeans created in the Middle East in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, and its name were, say, Christiania. Would Christiania be accepted into the bosom of the region more readily than Israel has been? I doubt it. Would the animosity felt towards Christiania be qualitatively different from, or significantly less than, the hostility actually directed at Israel? Again, I think not. Any differences would, I submit, be a matter of nuance. In fact, frequently, in the anti-Israel polemic found in Arab and Muslim circles, Israel is *called* a 'crusader state'. In a way, this says everything about the Israeli-Arab and Israeli-Palestinian conflicts. Crusader states, like the imaginary Christiania, were Christian; they were never Jewish. Israel is a Jewish state. But the underlying hostility towards it in the region is not hostility towards the state *as* Jewish but *as* European interloper or *as* American client or *as* non-Arab and non-Muslim – and, in addition, *as* oppressor. Whatever names we may legitimately give to these attitudes, 'antisemitism' is not one of them.

This is not to say that antisemitism cannot and does not enter into anti-Zionism in the Arab and Muslim world. Clearly it does. Moreover, the longer Israel is at loggerheads with the rest of the region, the more likely it is that antisemitism will take on a life of its own.[69] But equally clearly, this is, as it were, a secondary formation. Classical antisemitism 'did not exist in the traditional Islamic world'.[70] Primarily, anti-Zionism and anti-Israel sentiment in the Middle East is no more antisemitic than Mary's attitude to Rabbi Cohen in the first three of the four hypothetical scenarios I sketched above. In the first two cases, in which Rabbi Cohen is either smoking or singing at the top of his voice, Mary's hostility towards him is due to the fact that he is breaking the rules – that apply to everyone – or disturbing the peace of her bus. In the third, it is simply because he is 'different' or strange. So, she is hostile to him either (in the first two cases) *as* rule-breaker and *as* troublemaker or (in the third) *as* outsider; but not (in any of these cases) *as* Jewish. She is no antisemite: not even in the second case in which Rabbi Cohen is

[69] See notes 13 and 27.

[70] Bernard Lewis, 'The Arab world discovers anti-Semitism', in Sander L. Gilman and Steven T. Katz (eds), *Anti-Semitism in Times of Crisis* (New York: New York University Press, 1991), 346.

singing *zemiros*. For, although, from *his* point of view, he is merely expressing himself as a Jew, from *hers* he is being a lout. On the analysis I have given in this paper, Israel's situation in the Arab and Muslim Middle East is somewhat similar to Rabbi Cohen's in these three scenarios. Depending on how you view things, the parallel is closer to one of the first two cases – Israel's actions seen as violating international law or promoting conflict in the region – or to the third – Israel's presence seen as alien and its Jewish population as outsiders – or indeed it could be any permutation of the three.

There remains the fourth and final scenario: Mary, knowing Rabbi Cohen is Jewish, is hostile towards him on that account. This is not, *au fond*, because of anything he actually does but because she perceives him to be something he is not: a token of a type; the personification of the 'Jew' that haunts her febrile imagination. There are two possibilities here. Either she is open about it, subjecting him to an antisemitic diatribe. Or she conceals her real feelings, perhaps hiding behind company rules or pretending to be concerned for her other customers. 'Sorry, Sir,' she says disingenuously, 'but no one is permitted to make such a hullabaloo. Off you get!' In such a case, there is no sure way of diagnosing the animus that underlies her actions.

It is the same with Israel. There are times when Israel is attacked in explicitly antisemitic terms: the state is portrayed as 'the Jewish peril', all-powerful, capable of manipulating governments, responsible for all wars, seeking to dominate the world and so on. But at other times the antisemitism is disguised and there is no easy way of identifying it. In the absence of a discourse that, so to speak, pins a yellow star onto the state of Israel, we can only make a judgement based on the available evidence. Sometimes all we can say is that we 'smell' antisemitism. And sometimes when we do, we are right. But Mrs. Goldstein, who *always* sniffs it whenever anyone attacks Israel, is wrong.

Herzl's vision revisited

On the view I have been examining in this paper, there is an equivalence between (a) the individual Jew in the old or classical version of antisemitism and (b) the state of Israel in the new or modern variety. How would Herzl react to this way of seeing Israel's position in the world?

Herzl thought that, with the creation of a Jewish state, antisemitism would 'stop at once and for ever'. Zionism was meant to provide 'the solution of the Jewish Question after eighteen centuries of Jewish suffering'. Moreover, the solution was one that Jews themselves would implement. That is to say, Zionism called on Jews to take their destiny into their own hands.[71] Herzl's idea could be put this way: 'If we Jews are not wanted by the nations in whose midst we live, then we should take ourselves off and form a state of our own where we can live in peace.' If Herzl knew about the extent to which Israel would be embroiled in conflict and controversy, and if he thought that this was fundamentally due to antisemitism, he would be appalled. First, it would mean that his solution was itself encumbered with the very problem it was intended to solve. Second, if the predicament of the Jewish state today is equivalent to that of the individual Jew in the

[71] 'A people can be helped only by its own efforts, and if it cannot help itself it is beyond succor. But we Zionists want to rouse the people to self-help' (Herzl, quoted in Hertzberg, 228).

past, there is no equivalent solution. Israel cannot apply the same remedy: it cannot 'take itself off' to another corner of the globe. It has nowhere to go. Herzl's advice no longer avails.

What, in that case, can Israel do? If it is true that the community of nations is, either covertly or openly, antisemitic, what steps can it take to solve its own problem? Apparently none. If Israel is basically the victim of persecution in an antisemitic world, then it bears no responsibility for the position in which it finds itself: the object of widespread condemnation. For antisemitism is a phenomenon for which Jews, neither collectively nor individually, can be held responsible. It is an *a priori* prejudice that revolves around a fiction, a figment of what Jews are like. It is in the nature of such a prejudice that it will always find facts that seem to corroborate its fiction. Nothing that the Jewish state does or refrains from doing could produce it or prevent it. All Israel can do, if it really is 'the collective Jew among the nations', reprising the role of pariah, is fight for its survival, defying the world and keeping it at bay. In short, the view I have been examining in this paper carries political implications. It is oddly disempowering, casting the Israeli state in the old mould of Jewish victim. More precisely, it combines the old bogey of pre-Israeli Jewish helplessness with the new mentality of Israeli Jewish aggressiveness. This combination lends itself to a particular style of politics in Israel, one that is not confined to any single party but which is nicely exemplified by the policies of its present prime minister.

Looked at another way, the view I have been examining removes Israel from the realm of politics altogether and returns it to a mythic state of affairs in which 'the world' is to 'the Jews' what (in an antisemitic delusional fantasy) 'the Jews' are to 'the world': an eternal and implacable foe. If Herzl were alive today, I believe he would hold up his hands in horror at this perception. It would go completely against his grain, which was decidedly political and pragmatic.[72] If, however, he accepted that this was the reality, it would mean, in his eyes, that Zionism had failed. The goal of Zionism was to normalize the Jewish condition. The point of the Jewish state was to put the Jewish people on the same footing as other peoples. But if Israel is a lightning rod for worldwide antisemitism, then what Zionism has done is to reproduce, in the form of a state, the plight of the individual Jew down the centuries.

In short, I do not think that Herzl would care to hear that Israel has emerged as 'the collective Jew among the nations'.

Yet, in another inflection of this phrase, that is exactly the Zionist conception of Israel. This is why proponents of the view under discussion in this paper are virtually unanimous in maintaining that anti-Zionism equals antisemitism and that 'to defame Israel is to defame the Jews'. These equations presuppose that Israel and the Jews are, in a profound sense, one and the same. This is how Israel itself sees the case. Israel does not regard itself as just *a* Jewish state, a state that happens to have a Jewish identity (like the medieval kingdom of the Khazars). It defines itself as *the* Jewish state. Note the definite article. It does not merely signify singularity, as if Israel were the only state that, as it happens, is Jewish. It implies that Israel is, in Harkin's phrase, 'the state of the Jews', i.e. of the Jewish nation, where the nation comprises the whole of Jewry, whether all Jews

[72] 'I must, in the first place, guard my scheme from being treated as Utopian by superficial critics who might commit this error of judgment if I did not warn them.' 'I shall therefore clearly and emphatically state that I believe in the practical outcome of my scheme…' (Herzl, Preface, 7, 9).

see themselves as part of it or not and whether they accept that Israel is their state or not. The state of Israel sees itself as the 'centre' of the Jewish People.[73] This doctrine, which takes the biblical and religious themes of *Am Yisrael* and *Tzion* and transposes them into the key of an ethnic nation-state, lies at the heart of Zionism as an ideology. It is written into Israel's basic laws.[74] It is a message that the state, via its public institutions and political representatives, conveys to the outside world. It is the basis for how Israel views Jews in what is called 'the diaspora'. To what extent the view is reciprocated by Jews is hard to say. At the height of Operation Defensive Shield in the Occupied Territories in spring 2002, Jews, as Jews, gathered in large numbers in public rallies in numerous cities to affirm their solidarity with Israel.[75] Community leaders, religious and secular, have tended to reinforce this solidarity. Communal organizations, such as the current Board of Deputies of British Jews, regularly come to Israel's defence, as if defending Israel and defending the British Jewish community were one and the same. All in all, the average onlooker is liable to gain the impression that Israel is indeed 'the state of the Jews', the unique entity that represents all Jews collectively. It is as if Israel were, politically or even metaphysically, 'the collective Jew among the nations'.

In these circumstances, it is difficult to assess the extent to which the new wave of hostility towards Jews, radiating out from the Middle East, is antisemitic. If Jews as Jews align themselves with Israel, publicly and predominantly, then hostility towards Israel is liable to spill over into hostility towards Jews as such. Not that this is justifiable; it is never justifiable to lump all members of a religious or ethnic group together, dissolving the individual into the collective. The belief that all Jews are Zionists, or that all Jews identify with Israel, or that all Jews who identify with Israel support its every action, is false. But while this false belief can reflect an antisemitic canard about Jews forming a cohesive group that acts in unison, it can also be based on a rash generalization from the facts I have just rehearsed concerning the relationship between Jewry and Israel. A rash generalization, while reprehensible, is not antisemitic. The difference is between, on the one hand, a belief reached by jumping to a conclusion that exceeds the evidence and, on the other hand, an *a priori* prejudice. When the state of Israel claims Jews as its own, and

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[73] 'Our shared vision is to help strengthen Israel, secure the future of the Jewish people, and enhance Am Echad [one people]. We will bring the Jews of Israel and the Jews of the rest of the world together to form a closer and more meaningful partnership, with Israel at its center': Jewish Agency, 'Shared vision and mission statement': www.jafi.org.il/mission/mission.htm (viewed 5 February 2003).)

[74] Apart from the Law of Return, see also the Status Law (1952), which regularized the role of the Jewish Agency and the World Zionist Organization (WZO). This Law, which states that '[t]he state of Israel regards itself as the creation of the entire Jewish people', makes demands on Jews outside Israel, as if they were subject to Israel's laws: 'The mission of gathering in the exiles, which is the central task of the State of Israel and the Zionist Movement in our days, requires constant efforts by the Jewish people in the Diaspora; the State of Israel, therefore, expects the cooperation of all Jews, as individuals and groups, in building up the State and assisting the immigration to it of the masses of the people, and regards the unity of all sections of Jewry as necessary for this purpose': 'World Zionist Organization – Structure', Appendix no. 13 (Unofficial Translation), available on the website of the WZO at www.wzo.org.il/politics/Structure .html (viewed 5 February 2003).

[75] Well-attended solidarity rallies were held in many cities, including Washington, Paris and London. See my essay 'A time to speak out: rethinking Jewish identity and solidarity with Israel', *Jewish Quarterly*, winter 2002/3, 35-41.

when Jews *en masse* proclaim Israel to be theirs, it is not surprising if others fail to make the distinction between Jewish state and Jewish people.[76]

The question at issue in this paper has been one of interpretation. I have argued that, primarily and for the most part, hostility towards Israel is not based on the fact that the state is Jewish, let alone on a morbid and timeless fantasy about 'Jews'. It springs from Israel's situation in an Arab and Muslim Middle East and the direction taken by successive Israeli governments, especially in the Occupied Territories. Why does the question of interpretation matter? After all, hostility is hostility, whatever its causes or sources. Does it really make a difference whether we call it antisemitism or something else? It does. It matters because the question of how we act, and whether we are even capable of acting, is at stake. Antisemitism certainly enters the fray. But if we overstate its role, there is a price to pay. For one thing, we are liable to overlook other material factors, including ones that are under our control. For another, when we use the word too lightly and too loosely, it starts to lose its meaning. If it loses its meaning, we cannot speak out effectively against the real thing. Furthermore, the picture becomes confused. I see it this way: The longer Israel persists in its current policies towards the Palestinians, the more it will be excoriated, not only by antisemites but by people of goodwill. Almost no one will take Israel's part except mainstream Jews. To the latter this will seem all too familiar: on the one hand 'the world' and on the other hand 'the Jews'. So they will dig their heels in further and become even more defensive of Israel. In their exasperation, others will accuse them of being hardhearted and stubborn, which to Jews sounds like an old refrain. Thus, people will not know how to avoid seeming antisemitic and Jews will not know how to stop being victims.[77]

Be that as it may, and putting interpretation to one side, the fact remains that the world resounds with outcries against the Jewish state, the effects of which are felt by Jews who live in other countries. If Herzl knew, he would turn in his grave.

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[76] 'Jewish people' is ambiguous, being both the people (plural) who are Jewish (i.e. individuals) and the people (singular) that is Jewish (i.e. the collective). This is one of several ambiguities that complicate the subject of Israel and Jewish identity. For the present purpose, however, the ambiguity is benign.

[77] This paragraph contains several undeveloped remarks that touch on various complex issues. Apropos of the final sentence, people of goodwill who are conscientious can in fact go a long way to avoid seeming to be antisemitic. This remark is a starting-point for analyzing some of the media coverage that is hostile to Israel and that, without necessarily being antisemitic, nonetheless feeds into an antisemitic discourse. However, this topic, like the other complex issues that this paragraph touches on, lies outside the scope of this paper.