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The Contemporary Globalization of Political Antisemitism: Three Political Spaces and the Global Mainstreaming of the “Jewish Question” in the Twenty-First Century

Lars Rensmann

Abstract

This article examines the current globalization of political antisemitism and its effects on the resurgent normalization of anti-Jewish discourse and politics in a global context. The focus is on three political spaces in which the “Jewish question” has been repoliticized and become a salient feature of political ideology, communication, and mobilization: the global radical right, global Islamism, and the global radical left. Different contexts and justificatory discourses notwithstanding, the comparative empirical analysis shows that three interrelated elements of globalized antisemitism feature most prominently across these different political spaces: anti-Jewish conspiracy myths; Holocaust denial or relativization; and hatred of Israel. It is argued that the current process of the globalization of political antisemitism has significantly contributed to antisemitism’s presence in all kinds of public spaces as well as the convergence of antisemitic ideology among a variety of different actors. Moreover, the globalization of political antisemitism has helped accelerate the dissemination and social acceptance of anti-Jewish tropes that currently take shape in broader publics, that is: the globalized mainstreaming of antisemitism. The article concludes by discussing some factors favorable to the globalization and normalization of antisemitism, and the resurgence of antisemitic politics in the current age.

Keywords conspiracy myths, globalization, Holocaust denial, Israel hatred, political antisemitism

INTRODUCTION: THE RESURGENCE OF POLITICAL ANTISEMITISM IN THE GLOBALIZED AGE

While some scholars have suggested that antisemitism is a phenomenon of the past that has been replaced by resentments against other minorities or even rendered irrelevant, we witness a forceful presence of hatred towards Jews around the globe today.¹ Rather than having disappeared in the decades after the unspeakable crimes of the Holocaust, antisemitism lingered on less openly in some contexts while remaining salient in others. Especially in recent years antisemitism is aggressively resurfacing—verbally and often violently—in autocratic

regimes and liberal democracies alike, as well as global society at large. The public and political force of antisemitism takes multiple forms today, and, though not unchallenged, it is manifest in a variety of contexts and trajectories in the contemporary world: from antisemitic marches overtly calling for the death of Jews to Islamist and radical rightist acts of terrorism against Jews and synagogues, to coded cultural stereotypes or innuendo among parts of the intelligentsia; from viral “grassroots” antisemitism spreading on global social media, reinforcing anti-Jewish attitudes, to institutional antisemitism, including government-sponsored Holocaust denial and eliminationist threats against Jews and the Jewish

state; from proliferating antisemitic conspiracy myths “explaining” the global age to antizionist antisemitism demonizing the Jewish state as the most evil “threat to humankind.”

First, antisemitism can hereby be conceived as a certain perception “which may be expressed as hatred toward Jews” and which is “directed toward Jewish or non-Jewish individuals and/or their property, toward Jewish community institutions and religious facilities.”² Second, these generalizable dimensions, which are analogous to other racisms (such as exclusionary practices based on collective discrimination, othering, prejudicial generalization), are complemented by features that are *specific* to antisemitism. They point to the particular history of anti-Jewish inventions. They go beyond false generalizations or group discriminations we know from other racisms. In particular, antisemitism represents a form of myth or paranoia that serves as a container in which all of one’s fears, projections, problems, and unacknowledged desires can be placed. In so doing, antisemitism provides a comprehensive, delusional explanation of the world by appeal to a fantasy of a global Jewish conspiracy in which Jews personify all that is perceived as evil. They include the collective identification of Jews with—and the reified personification of—globalization, cosmopolitanism, abstract intellectualism, money, global capitalism, modernity, “warmongering,” all of which reduce the complexities and contradictions of the modern world to “Jewish machinations.” Contemporary antisemitism, like its modern predecessors, especially functions as an ideological matrix onto which all kinds of perceived or actual personal, societal, political and cultural problems can be “unloaded” and attributed to “the Jews.”³ In light of these specific functions, anti-Jewish myths are also more likely than other resentments to turn into a self-immunized and possibly eliminationist view. “[R]ather than [being] just a set of attitudes about Jewish people,”⁴ antisemitism comprehensively explains the world as an evil plot by “cold-blooded Jews,” the “enemies of humankind.” Seeing all

problems, harm, and conflicts in (global) society through the lens of the “Jewish question” implies that only by solving the “Jewish question”—in the last instance, eliminating all Jews—all other “outstanding issues of contemporary society can be solved.”⁵ In their view of Jews as global and “globalist” actors “decomposing” societies around the world, all forms modern and contemporary antisemitism are inherently global in orientation.⁶

This contribution examines the current globalization of political antisemitism and its effects on the general resurgence, salience and normalization of anti-Jewish discourse and politics in global society. *Political antisemitism* is defined here as anti-Jewish resentment that takes the form of a political movement (in the modern period, it did so in the second half of the nineteenth century)⁷ or becomes an issue that is deliberately politicized by political actors such as parties or political organizations. Political antisemitism thus transforms social resentments against Jews into a subject of political mobilization, campaigning, or other forms of political action. The *globalization of political antisemitism*, then, can be understood as political antisemitism that transcends local or national geographical, societal and public boundaries or demarcations. The “globalization of political antisemitism” refers to the processes in which political antisemitism takes transnational and ultimately global forms, content, and scope.

It is argued that while absorbing all kinds of tropes from the arsenal of (modern) antisemitism, the current globalization of political antisemitism takes the myth of global Jews as the main force behind “globalism” and globalization, and other tropes about Jews, to a new level. This globalization of political antisemitism facilitates new trans-national anti-Jewish common ground and new bonds between otherwise diverse political groups, and it helps advance the normalization of anti-Jewish ideas in otherwise diverse societies, from democracies to autocracies.

The particular focus is on the forceful reemergence, repoliticization, and globalization

of the “Jewish question” in and through three contemporary and globally relevant political spaces (that is, transnational political and discursive contexts in which antisemitism plays an important ideological role and is frequently communicated and mobilized today): the global radical right, global Islamism, and the global radical left. Different contexts and partly varying justificatory discourses notwithstanding, antisemitism finds ideological adherents, similar expressions, and significant support in these spaces (in addition to other political groups or movements, which can also appear as “centrist,” including recently parts of the *gilets jaunes* in France).⁸ The appeal of contemporary antisemitism tends to cut across heterogeneous politico-cultural contexts and increasingly supersedes conventional political distinctions, yet differently from the ways, and more expansively than, “new antisemitism” scholars have so far suggested (who tend to equate antisemitic “antizionism” with “new” antisemitism, although the former is neither new, nor the only way modernized antisemitism is expressed today).

Through those particular spaces and lenses generating anti-Jewish public communication and modes of justification that address the “Jewish question” and “make sense” of a globalized world within different political communities and movements, a general globalization of antisemitism is currently fostered. It reaches beyond the political realm proper, as these political spaces help intensify and accelerate the exchange of antisemitic ideas, tropes, myths, and codes across various territorial borders, groups, publics, societies, and political boundaries. It is also argued here that the process of the globalization of political antisemitism has (i) increased the overall presence and dissemination of antisemitism, (ii) facilitated the convergence or “synchronization” of antisemitic ideology shared by a variety of groups and actors, and (iii) helped accelerate the normalization and social acceptance of anti-Jewish tropes in broader publics, that is: the globalized mainstreaming of antisemitism.⁹

Three elements of globalized antisemitism feature most prominently across the aforementioned political spaces: anti-Jewish conspiracy myths; Holocaust denial or relativization; and hatred of Israel. Reflective of such an overlap and interrelatedness which complicate any neat ideological separation, the remainder of this contribution examines antisemitism expressed on the right, on the left, and in Islamist judeophobia as examples or instantiations (rather than fringe exceptions) before discussing the current mainstreaming or normalization of antisemitism—and some of the societal and political causes for the reemergence of the “Jewish question” in the twenty-first century.

DEMONIZING JEWS AS “ENEMIES OF THE NATION”: ANTISEMITISM AS A CORE ELEMENT OF THE RADICAL RIGHT TODAY

The global radical right provides a significant political space in which antisemitism is mobilized and articulated, continuously since World War II, and today again increasingly so.¹⁰ Largely discredited and politically marginalized in much of the Western world after the Holocaust against the Jews of Europe and the military defeat of Nazism and fascism—the modern radical right’s most extreme, powerful and murderous expressions in history—various radical right movements and parties have had a forceful comeback in recent decades.¹¹ Since the 1980s and 1990s, several new radical right parties emerged, while others rebranded or reinvented themselves in search of a broadened popular appeal and of regaining public legitimacy. And they succeeded in doing so.¹² By now, radical right actors have reentered the broader public sphere, celebrated many electoral successes, and gained seats in democratic parliaments the world over; in some democracies, such as Hungary and Brazil, radical right populist parties even govern today.¹³

Following a “populist turn” and ideological modernizations, some of these actors distanced themselves from classic fascist, racially antisemitic symbols, rhetoric, and tropes.¹⁴ Yet certain

key ideational features and undercurrents have remained the same over time, and they are shared by all types of radical right actors—from radical right populist parties to extremist, openly anti-system fascist groups and white supremacist or neo-Nazi terrorists. These intertwined features are ethnic nationalism as a “master concept,”¹⁵ overt or coded racism and anti-immigrant views, authoritarianism,¹⁶ as well as overt or coded antisemitism.¹⁷

The latter is, and has always been, a constitutive ideological trait of the radical and extreme right.¹⁸ Some of the historical and contemporary radical right parties, movements and groups are first and foremost antisemitic. Moreover, exclusionary ethnic nationalism—a core ideological element of the radical right—is closely linked to antisemitism, whereby Jews appear as the ethnic nation’s alleged “existential other.” The nationalist construction of an existential opposition between a glorified ethnic nation or “white race,” on the one hand, and collectivized others who allegedly do not belong or who are viewed as subversive “enemies of the nation,” on the other hand, is at the heart of all contemporary radical right ideologies. This construction also has a long and distinct antisemitic socio-political trajectory. Hatred against Jews has often been a foundational element in ethnicized constructions of the nation and its alleged superiority, even if it appears coded at times: images of cosmopolitan, “wandering” and “homeless” Jews constituting a powerful “global cabal” and *the* quintessential antithesis to an ethnic nation are part and parcel of nationalist and radical right ideology, past and present. Especially today, this link between white ethnic nationalism, with its “anti-globalist” worldview, and antisemitism is (back) in full force and on display.¹⁹

Likewise, radical right propaganda, from the radical populist to the extreme right, is shaped by conspiracy thinking, which is intimately linked to and almost inevitably leads to antisemitism—the historical “fake news” conspiracy myth *sui generis* since ancient times. In radical right propaganda, there are always secret, cosmopolitan

string-pullers and hidden elites seeking to undermine or threaten the ethno-national community, often explicitly identified as Jews and personified in images of Jews. Both the nostalgic glorification of one’s nation or national identity and the conspiratorial personification of all perceived evils of the modern world in “globalist” Jews are historically interlinked and mirror each other like megalomania and paranoia. Such conspiracy myths constitute a core element of radical right ideology and its mobilization—and is a striking, preeminent feature of globalized contemporary antisemitism.

Despite antisemitism’s central significance among the old and new radical right and among radical right actors across the globe—and particularly the prominent role of anti-Jewish conspiracy fantasies—there has been surprisingly little research focusing on contemporary radical right antisemitism.²⁰ However, the antisemitic conspiracy myth that Jews control the media, political institutions, the government, international organizations, and the global economy—and indeed “steer” processes of societal globalization against (ethno-)national interests—is salient among the radical right and their supporters. In the United States, it is prominently on display in speeches by the far right conspiracy ideologue Alex Jones. In his radio shows, he sees Jewish billionaire George Soros as “the head of the Jewish mafia” trying to derail the Trump presidency.²¹ The fantasy of Jewish world control is also mobilized by the transnational radical right “identitarian movement,” by various radical right populist parties, and present among the neo-Nazi fringes and right-wing terrorist groups assaulting synagogues. An especially significant example of such antisemitic conspiracy thinking on the radical right is the, by now, globalized myth that “globalist” Jews orchestrate global mass migration waves into ethnically predominantly white nation states. Originating in radical pre-World War II antisemitism and later in neo-Nazi and white supremacist fringes, this nationalist rightist conspiracy fantasy advances the myth that Jews

would deliberately and secretly seek a “great replacement” or “white genocide.”²² At times, the “Great Replacement” fantasy does not directly point to a “global Jewish plot,” but to imagined conspiracies by ‘corrupt international elites’ or “globalists” (in the jargon of the French author Renand Camus who helped popularize the “Great Replacement”). However, these terms often also work as stand-in codes for Jews, and American far rightists and neo-Nazis have collectively yelled “Jews will not replace us” at a torch march in Charlottesville in 2017. More frequently, the Jewish philanthropist George Soros is identified and fantasized as the string-puller behind the alleged “replacement” through global migration. This trope has long migrated into more mainstream authoritarian-nationalist populist vocabulary, from the Lega Nord in Italy to the Austrian Freedom Party, Victor Orbán’s FIDESZ (the ruling party in Hungary), the tweets by US President Donald Trump, or Brexit Party leader Nigel Farage. Attached to a racist and antisemitic emergency mode and a readiness to commit violence, this trope has recently motivated right-wing terrorist acts from the US to Norway and New Zealand.

Another key feature of contemporary globalized antisemitism, Holocaust relativization, also features prominently on the radical right. Denying or downplaying any form of colonial as well as Holocaust-related national guilt is especially relevant for the ethno-nationalist radical right, as the history of national guilt, complicity or collaboration in these atrocities could taint the image of an allegedly “glorious nation.” Often then, such historical memory is viewed and rejected as a (Jewish) conspiracy against the national interest (so-called “secondary antisemitism”), allegedly promoted by a “powerful Jewish lobby” using the memory of the Holocaust to advance its interests. Radical right Holocaust “revisionism” reaches from outright denial of the Shoah, as in the “Leuchter report” that was widely circulated in neo-Nazi circles for decades, to various relativization strategies, frequently accusing Jews for keeping this memory alive. While such relativization

and secondary antisemitism are most strikingly mobilized by the radical right in Austria and Germany—where Björn Höcke, one of the leading agitators of the radical right-wing populist *Alternative for Germany*, has called for a “180-degree turnaround” in the way Germany seeks to atone for Nazi crimes²³—the phenomenon is far from being limited to these Nazi perpetrator countries’ radical rightists. The radical right Brazilian president Jair Bolsonaro, for instance, relativizes the Holocaust and spreads conspiracy myths and hatred against minorities while holding the country’s highest public office.²⁴

Radical antizionism—as a third salient element of contemporary globalized antisemitism—has its historical roots and today a widespread presence in the global radical right as well.²⁵ Historically, the major Nazi propagandist Alfred Rosenberg wrote an entire book against “Zionism.” And in his most programmatic speeches, Hitler launched attacks against Zionism and the very idea of a Jewish state, which he saw as part of a global Jewish conspiracy: “The Zionists’ state in its entirety should not become anything less but the last complete highest school of all their international dirty business, and everything should be directed from there.”²⁶ Today, most actors on the radical right continue to mobilize hatred against Israel and antisemitic antizionism as a means to dehumanize Jews. For instance, the American ethno-nationalist and white supremacist former KKK Grand Wizard David Duke—who supported Trump’s election, paved the way for the so-called “alt-right” in the United States, and established himself in the global radical right—has a long record of radical antisemitism and antizionism. He also attended an Iranian Holocaust denial conference in 2006, stating: “The Holocaust is the device used as the pillar of Zionist imperialism, Zionist aggression, Zionist terror and Zionist murder.”²⁷ Representative of many others, the German neo-Nazi party “The Right,” declares: “Stop Zionism: Israel is our misfortune.”²⁸ The party also supports the transnational anti-Israel movement BDS.²⁹

To be sure, some new radical right populist parties have tried to reach out to Jewish voters,³⁰ or praise Israel for its “fight against Islamism.” This adds complexity to the global radical right’s traditional hatred of the Jewish State. The tension is epitomized in the Dutch branch of the international neo-Nazi group *Racial Volunteer Force* (RVF), which marches against the “dark side of the Zionist lobby” in the Netherlands and calls the radical right-wing populist Gert Wilders (*Party for Freedom*) a “Zionist pig” for his declared support of Israel.³¹ However, considering the underlying antisemitism shaping most radical right populist parties, actors, and their voters—including prominently the French *Rassemblement National* or the German *AfD*—such support as there is for Jews on the radical right appears thin-layered and temporary.³²

Notwithstanding ideological overlap and organizational ties, three distinct forms and types of radical right antisemitism can be identified. First, there are the radical edges of an antisemitic radical right that find expression in a proliferating, long underestimated, and increasingly globalized right-wing extremist terrorism. It is inspired by white supremacist ideology as well as anti-Jewish conspiracy thinking. The origins of this contemporary terrorist right can be partly traced back to post-fascist terror groups in Europe and in the US, exemplified by the 1958 Atlanta temple bombing,³³ followed by other terrorist acts, some of which were inspired by the racist and antisemitic “Turner Diaries” from 1978. A new wave of extreme right terror against Jews and other minorities has begun over the last decade; mostly committed by small cells or single terrorists who feel both encouraged and emboldened by a changing political climate and alleged ‘national emergencies’ declared on social media. These groups include the *National Socialist Underground* (NSU) cell in Germany, which committed 43 murder attacks, mostly killing immigrants, from 2000 to 2007. Most recently, the new global antisemitic terror wave has also hit the United States, where terrorists often make Jews responsible for migration—via

the framing of the aforementioned, increasingly popularized “great replacement” conspiracy myth and “white genocide” fear. In Pittsburgh, a right-wing terrorist murdered eleven worshippers at the Tree of Life synagogue in the fall of 2018. The culprit said he “just want[ed] to kill Jews” because they committed “genocide to [his] people.”³⁴ In 2019, a terrorist attacked a synagogue in San Diego, killing one victim, in the name of an antisemitic “self-defense” fantasy. Taking inspiration from a rightist terrorist attack against Muslims in Christchurch, New Zealand, the shooter said he was “trying to defend [his] people from the Jewish people.”³⁵

The second and closely related type can be categorized as openly racist and antisemitic right-wing extremist groups and parties. They include white supremacist, fascist and neo-Nazi movement-parties and groups (examples are *Casa Pound* in Italy, the *National Democratic Party* in Germany or the *American Freedom Party*), as well as new network-style organizations, such as increasingly trans-nationally organized global “alt-right” and “identitarian” groups and networks like “Generation Identity” and the “Identity Europe/American Identity Movement.” Despite partial attempts to modernize their appeal and appear youthful, fresh and rebellious, these radical anti-system groups and parties often do not shy away from displaying support for Hitler or openly articulating paranoid anti-Jewish conspiracy myths and annihilation fantasies. In some cases, there are close affinities to the terrorist wing of the radical right. Most of these actors believe in the great replacement-white genocide conspiracy fantasy. As an example representative of many others, the white nationalist extreme right editor Greg Johnson views “the organized Jewish community” as the “principal enemy . . . of every attempt to halt and reverse white extinction,” stating “[t]herefore, White nationalism is inescapably antisemitic.”³⁶

Third, there are radical right-wing populist parties, which have largely distanced themselves from the extremist and terrorist types of the far

right and, by modernizing their rhetoric and appeal, have achieved broad popular successes as part of a politico-cultural nationalist, “anti-globalist” counter-revolution across the globe.³⁷ Yet these parties share central ideological tenets—including white ethnic nationalism and some variation of the “great replacement” conspiracy myth—and at times also show open sympathy for the more extreme racist and antisemitic types, or “retweet” their slogans. For instance, despite his declared opposition to antisemitism and his support of Israel, in 2017 the right-wing populist US President Donald Trump suggested that the aforementioned white supremacist marchers in Charlottesville, who yelled “Jews will not replace us,” included “some very fine people.”³⁸ The French radical right-wing populist leader Marine Le Pen, who claims to be the protector of French Jews as a moral cover for the party’s vilification of Muslim immigrants, wants to deprive French Jews of Israeli citizenship and alludes to antisemitic stereotypes (“globalized money”) on the campaign trail.³⁹ It is through these parties and actors with broad public appeal that conventional radical right ideologemes, including ethno-nationalist friend-enemy thinking and antisemitic conspiracy myths directed against “globalist” Jews as the white nation’s alleged existential other, have re-entered the center of public debates even in democratic countries.

ATTACKING JEWS AS ‘ENEMIES OF ISLAM’: CONTEMPORARY ISLAMISM AND ISLAMIZED ANTISEMITISM

With the rise of radical political Islamism over the last three decades, antisemitism has found another aggressive, increasingly globalized platform, or a second transnational political space, in the contemporary world. Radical Islamism shares with ethnic nationalism, and the nationalist radical right, the glorification of an illiberal authoritarian order; the nostalgic idea of a purified collective identity finding salvation by way of violent elimination of those declared the in-group’s enemies; and antisemitism as a

constitutive ideological feature.⁴⁰ Yet while Islamism puts antisemitism at center stage, it also provides an ideological alternative to ethnic nationalism and it has proven its truly trans-national appeal far beyond the Middle East. All variations of radical Islamism, distinctions and violent internal conflicts notwithstanding, aim at some sort of religious-based global domination in a world that is “liberated” from modern Western “decadence,” infidels—and especially from Jews and “Zionists.”

The origins of Islamism can be traced back to the beginnings of the twentieth century. Ideologues like Sayyid Qutb and Hasan Al-Banna, the founding fathers of the Egyptian “Muslim Brotherhood,” advanced a movement and worldview influenced by both modern totalitarian and backward-looking religious elements that were molded into a comprehensive yet eclectic ideology that is rigorously anti-Jewish.⁴¹ In such Islamist ideology, anti-Jewish parts of the Quran gain prominence. Though Islamism’s full force has arguably begun to unfold in the second half of the twentieth century and at the turn of the twenty-first century, in the 1930s, as Jeffrey Herf has demonstrated, there was already a first totalitarian, antisemitic “alliance borne of shared enemies and shared ideology . . . between the radical Islamist, the Grand Mufti of Jerusalem, and the Nazi regime.”⁴² Islamism’s distinct elements as a “counter-cosmopolitan”⁴³—that is: a global, non-ethnic but rigorously identitarian—exclusionist and violent ideology that calls for Islam and Sharia as the foundations of government, find expression in a variety of often competing movements, states, and non-state actors. Yet they consistently share Jew-hatred alongside homophobia, misogyny, authoritarianism and the goal of radically transforming—first and foremost Muslim—societies in a pan-Islamic rule system. Islamist political propaganda time and again entails a “jihadist” support for religious violence and terror to advance Islamism’s cause, whereby Jews (and Israel) are often explicitly viewed as the existential “enemy of Islam”

that needs to be killed.⁴⁴ Islamist propaganda, actors, and movements are thus key players in antisemitism's current globalization wave.

The three most striking features of contemporary modern(ized) and globalized antisemitism are also part of Islamist propaganda directed against Jews: First and foremost, Islamism promotes the conspiracy myth of Jews (or, interchangeably, "evil Zionists") as the dark force manipulating, orchestrating, and dominating the modern world. Jews allegedly work to destroy Islam, while the persecution of Jews is construed as "self-defense." There is also an obsession with the downplaying and denial of the Holocaust, which is predominantly viewed as a propaganda tool with which 'the Jews' have conspiratorially brain-washed the world. Lastly, there is, even more prominently, an outspoken hatred of Israel and "Zionists" as a core feature of Islamized antisemitism.

Such antisemitic antizionism incorporates postcolonial resentments against Western modernity and the memory of Western colonial oppression, turning Israel and "Zionists" into the key force behind Westernization, colonialism, and crises of the Muslim world. This conspiracy narrative has resonated in Muslim immigrant minority communities, and especially among disillusioned Muslim youth living in Western democracies.⁴⁵

Three types of Islamist political formations which promote antisemitism and violence against Jews are especially salient today: globally operating radical Islamist groups like ISIS and Al Qaeda; regional Islamist terrorist groups like Hamas and Hezbollah; and Islamist governments, some of which also sponsor trans-national Islamist groups and non-state terrorist actors.

First, there are the truly trans-national Islamist non-state terror groups. The events of 9/11 put Al-Qaeda, and with it global Islamist terrorism, on the horizon of global politics and society. For the first time since 1945, Jeffrey Herf notes, the idea of a Jewish world conspiracy has been animating a significant, indeed global political movement targeting Jews around the globe.⁴⁶ Hatred of Jews was a central motive

for Osama bin Laden and his organization. He claimed to fight against the "coalition of Jews and crusaders."⁴⁷ It is through the prism of a paranoid antisemitic conspiracy theory, according to which "the power of international Jewry was a dominant force in world politics," that the Islamists "have understood the Allied victory in World War II, the founding of the State of Israel and its victories in Arab-Israeli wars, the American and Western victory in the Cold War, and the wars with Iraq."⁴⁸ This apocalyptic terrorism and antisemitism, which turns Jews into a special enemy to be targeted and annihilated,⁴⁹ sacrifices its own agents in a cycle of destruction and self-destruction. It is largely carried out through a network of decentralized, often loosely or only digitally connected "martyrs." The "Islamic State," or ISIS, has replicated Al Qaeda's model and ideology, combining war for territory in the Middle East with "ultraviolence" and intensified terror attacks in Europe.⁵⁰ Here, too, annihilationist antisemitism is central, crystallized in the belief that Jews have launched a war against Islam. An ISIS fighter killed four people at the Jewish Museum of Belgium in Brussels⁵¹; a suicide bomber in the 2016 Brussels attack specifically targeted Orthodox Jews at the airport; and at the center of the Paris attack was the Bataclan (where ninety people were killed), known among Islamists for its (former) Jewish owner.

Second, there are primarily regional antisemitic groups such as Hezbollah and Hamas. While Hezbollah also operates (and targets Jews) beyond the Middle East, Hamas focuses on violence against Jews in Israel by means of rockets and terror acts. The Hamas Charter remains aggressively antisemitic and contains references to the notorious, century-old Russian anti-Jewish conspiracy myth forgery of "The Protocols of the Elders of Zion"; later to be used as Nazi propaganda. The charter accuses Jews "of relying on secret societies to foment global economic and political disasters" and calls on Hamas followers to "prepare for 'the next round with the Jews, the merchants of war'."⁵²

Third, radical Islamist antisemitism is nurtured by Islamist governments who over the last decades have seized power in various countries and reshaped national political cultures accordingly, including Chechnya, Iran, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and Indonesia, among others. Antisemitism and antisemitic antizionism are hereby official policy, and part and parcel of the political doctrine by which these regimes govern. The Iranian “Islamic Republic” serves as a particular case study. Even though it is somewhat less apocalyptic than many other Islamist non-state actors, revolutionary antizionism is a key pillar of Iran’s radical Islamist ideology. The regime represents the most radical antisemitic antizionism in the Muslim Middle East, depicting the Jewish state “as ‘Little Satan,’ as a ‘cancerous tumor’ that has to be removed” and promoting “the official slogan that ‘Israel has to be wiped out’.”⁵³ Like other Islamists, Iran’s revolutionary Shia Islamism combines its radical (Khomeinist) political theology with elements of modern nationalist and “anti-imperialist” Third-Worldism and a profound hostility to Western liberalism’s “decadency.” Meir Litvak points out that “international Zionism” is hereby viewed as “the culmination of a Judeo-Western political and cultural onslaught on the Muslim world.”⁵⁴ Replicating a classic antisemitic worldview, the government sees itself threatened by a powerful Zionist conspiracy with global reach, which has allegedly penetrated—or already controls—Western legal systems, cultures, democracies, and the media.⁵⁵

The link between antizionist and antisemitic ideology is thereby evident in many areas, including Iran’s “advocacy and sponsorship of Holocaust denial and its alliance with notorious Holocaust deniers in the West.”⁵⁶ Matthias Küntzel has pointed out that since the days of Ahmadinejad’s presidency, Holocaust denial is no longer just a marginal part of the regime’s arsenal of antisemitism, but has been construed as a “liberation struggle”: the alleged struggle for “freely” studying the “Holocaust myth” is linked to ideological conceptions

of Shia Islam as the religion of the politically dispossessed.⁵⁷ The Iranian government and its political elite went further than any other country in hosting and officially endorsing Western Holocaust deniers. This includes the infamous Roger Garaudy, a former Marxist who converted to Islam and who is the author of the antisemitic book *The Founding Myths of Israeli Politics*. His work is praised in Iranian media and Friday sermons for exposing the “big lie” of the Holocaust.⁵⁸ Iran also sponsors so-called “Holocaust International Cartoon contests” in order to ridicule the mass atrocities against the Jews of Europe.⁵⁹ The hardline pro-government English language newspaper *Iran Daily* claims that the “genocidal war launched by the Jews against the Palestinian people” prompted many to draw an analogy between “the German holocaust against the Jews and the Jewish holocaust against Palestinians.”⁶⁰ Hence, the Iranian regime has spared “no effort to establish the ‘exposure’ of the ‘Holocaust Myth’ as a new historiographical paradigm.”⁶¹ Such Holocaust denial does not just serve as a means of delegitimizing Israel, but also merges with a full-fledged antisemitic worldview attributing all international conflicts, discrimination against Muslims, and economic hardship to a global Jewish conspiracy. This ideology also translates into violent revolutionary action, as Iran is on a global mission and sponsors antisemitic Islamist groups in Europe and the Middle East, including most prominently the Hezbollah. In so doing, Iran is a significant actor in the globalization of antisemitism.

Radical Islamism’s rise and its contemporary anti-Jewish propaganda have partly benefited from Western responses. In addition to failed and incoherent Middle East policies, often involuntarily bolstering Islamism, governments and societies have tended to also misconceive the problem domestically. In response to long existing discrimination against, and exclusion of, Muslim immigrants based on exclusionary ethnic policies in European societies, for instance, radical Islamism and antisemitism among Muslims have often been downplayed out

of fear of feeding into “islamophobia.” Likewise Islamist organizations have been elevated into institutional partners allegedly representative of Muslim immigrants. This, however, in effect reproduces the collective conflation of Muslim immigrants with Islamism, and it helps immunize Islamized antisemitism from criticism, even within Muslim communities. For example, the Iran-sponsored Islamic Centre Hamburg (IZH) is a partner of the city of Hamburg and is equipped with a state contract, despite its regular participation in antisemitic Al-Quds demonstrations calling for the destruction of the Jewish state and promoting Hezbollah.⁶² In 2014, ISIS supporters who demonstrated in the Dutch city The Hague demanded the killing of “dirty Jews from the sewers.” This constitutes a hate crime in the Netherlands (and in most other European countries), yet the protestors were not arrested or prosecuted by Dutch authorities.⁶³ On 9 December 2017—a day after an antisemitic march through the city of Gothenburg (Sweden) that called for Jews to be killed—Muslim perpetrators threw firebombs at a synagogue with 40 youth inside. While these culprits were later convicted of an antisemitic hate crime by a Swedish court, a German court ruled that an arson attack on the Jewish synagogue in Wuppertal in 2016 was “criminal arson, but not antisemitic.”⁶⁴ Denying the antisemitic nature of the crime against a Jewish religious institution, according to the court the defendants simply wanted to “call attention to the Gaza conflict” and express “criticism of Israel.”⁶⁵ These events and subsequent criminal prosecutions, or the lack thereof, indicate that police authorities and courts in Europe—and society as a whole—often still struggle to recognize antisemitic hate crimes committed by Muslims or Islamists.

THE RADICAL OTHERING OF ISRAEL: ANTI-ZIONIST AND POST-COLONIAL ANTISEMITISM ON THE LEFT

A third political space in which contemporary antisemitism is frequently tolerated, articulated, or even mobilized is the radical left. There is

no inherent link between the global radical left and antisemitism. Nevertheless, it is equally misguided, as Robert Fine and Philip Spencer point out, to think antisemitism and the left are intrinsically at odds with each other, and thus that there could be no such thing as ‘left antisemitism.’⁶⁶

In contrast to right-wing extremism and radical Islamism or modern Islamic fundamentalism, left-wing ideology, in both its historical and contemporary configurations, has not been antisemitic in its constitutive core. However, three ideological trajectories have nurtured antisemitic ideas on the left: first, there are still virulent, centuries-old traditions of a reified “anti-capitalism” identifying Jews with capitalism, which has recurrently resonated in left-wing movements.⁶⁷ Second, there is a leftist tradition of a Manichean or binary “anti-imperialist” worldview. Based on nationalistic and anti-pluralistic conceptions of societies, it divides the world into mean-spirited oppressing groups or nations (representing Western liberal capitalist democracies) and whole nations designated as essentially good but oppressed.⁶⁸ Jews were not viewed as part of the latter within the anti-imperialist or authoritarian-Communist tradition, and among the regimes which it represented (even the Shoah was largely excluded in Communist memory politics). Third, and closely related to this worldview, there is the evolution and normalization of a radical antizionism as part of the twentieth and twenty-first century cultural left. Its often times unconditional support for antizionism, still also featuring prominently among radical rightists and Islamists, can likewise be traced back to Stalinist origins. Since the late 1960s, however, such antizionism has also been backed by less orthodox variants of an “anti-imperialist” New Left and mutated into an element of radical left-wing identity politics. Being categorically against Israel, originally only a marker of Nazism, the radical right, and Islamism, has thus often turned into a feature or marker of radical left self-understandings as well.⁶⁹

Since slogans such as “kick Zionists out [of Germany]” or “smash Zionism” surfaced on left-wing student demonstrations almost fifty years ago, antizionism has taken root within the left and partly turned into a worldview. This has often encouraged discrimination against Israelis and Jews. Uncompromising antisemitic antizionism, which is as shown by no means limited to left-wing groups, attributes secret global political and media power to “Zionists”. It also entails demonizing any and all of Israel, its actions, and its citizens, while denying the Jewish state—and only the Jewish state—the very legitimacy to exist. The world’s only Jewish state is hereby ideologically denigrated as an “artificial state,” an “apartheid state,” or even a “genocidal project.”⁷⁰ Consequently, this subjects the Jewish state, its institutions, citizens, and any Jew viewed, portrayed or labeled as a “Zionist,” or any supporter of Israel (that is, the vast majority of Jews), to double standards, boycotts, defamations as “racist settler-colonialists,” and physical exclusions up to celebrating terror against Israeli citizens as “armed resistance”—while largely ignoring racism and antisemitism among groups such as Hamas or Hezbollah and “peoples” designated as “the victims of Zionism.” This leftist antizionism projects classic binary anti-colonial and anti-imperialist rhetoric onto Israel: Leftist antizionism is embedded in an uncritical, binary, ideological narrative in which Israel epitomizes all the evils of colonialism, Western modernity, and liberal democracy, whereas the deeply conservative Palestinian society is in its entirety glorified and portrayed as void of all responsibility for violence—in spite of wide-spread support for religious extremism, terrorism, homophobia, and authoritarianism. This binary worldview points to an *inverse orientalism* that dehumanizes groups by means of both collective idealization and denigration.⁷¹ Anti-Zionist narratives hereby often do not stop short of employing classic antisemitic imagery about a shrewd, ruthless, malevolent, string-pulling, war-mongering and conspiratorial cabal of Jews as “enemies of humanity”—or tolerates such

imagery as “understandable” reactions to Israel.⁷² Particularly the legacy of leftist antizionism and the history of radical left justifications of terrorist violence against Jews around the world—from Tel Aviv to Buenos Aires and Munich⁷³—as self-defense are mirrored in current manifestations of antisemitism on the left.

The three aforementioned components that are especially characteristic for current judeophobia are also present in parts of the left. We find (i) anti-Jewish conspiracy myths (about an allegedly world-wide, extremely powerful “Israel lobby” or “Jewish lobby” controlling governments and the media); (ii) Holocaust trivialization (for instance by equating Israel with Nazism, or Palestinians with the victims of the Shoah); and (iii) hatred of the Jewish state and its citizens, portrayed as the sole source of all conflicts and violence in the Middle East, or as an exceptionally brutal and ruthless collective in opposition to “humanity.”⁷⁴ A fourth, and maybe particularly striking element of leftist antisemitism today, is antisemitism denial. When directed against the (radical) left, charges or criticisms of judeophobia tend to be indignantly, defensively, if not fiercely rejected, given the left’s anti-racist self-identification. Moreover, such charges are often viewed as being made by powerful Jews with hostile intentions. Yet it is exactly this self-immunization and self-exculpation mechanism—tabooing discussions about antisemitism, refusing any willingness to investigate one’s prejudices, and blaming the (Jewish) messenger—that enables leftist antisemitism to flourish. Due to their anti-racist credentials, as presumed opponents of discrimination against minorities, leftist actors have been crucial in broadening the legitimacy of anti-Jewish tropes—often primarily directed against Israelis and the Jewish state—and in rendering the dissemination of such tropes socially and publicly acceptable.

In recent years, antisemitism has flourished, for the most part internally unchallenged, within both the more traditional and the postmodern cultural left around the world. This includes a

variety of LGBTQ, feminist, and post-colonial activists from Latin America to the US, South Africa, and Europe. The hegemonic “anti-Zionist” cultural climate among activists of postmodern left politics has, for example, allowed for largely uncontested expulsions of three lesbian Jewish women from a Dyke march in Chicago in 2017. They were expelled for carrying a rainbow flag with a star of David—the generally recognized symbol, not just of Israel, but also of Judaism and Jewish identity—which made some protesters allegedly “feel unsafe.”⁷⁵

Such anti-Jewish practices, targeting even the most liberal Jews, and symbols of Jewish life, and conflating Jews and Israel (which are merged into one oppressive entity/identity), are partly engendered by a profound, identitarian hostility against the Jewish state and anybody remotely supportive of it. They are embedded in a specific type of identity politics and ideological campism, or a “politics of position,” in which Israel and Israelis are categorically viewed as extraordinary human rights violators or enemies of humanity.⁷⁶ Such practices are also supported by what David Hirsh has called the “Livingstone formulation”—named after the former mayor of London, Ken Livingstone, and his defense against accusations of antisemitism: it suggests that if anyone raises the issue of antisemitism on the left or problematizes the demonization of Israelis and Israel, he or she does so inevitably in bad faith, purposely conspires in a secret plan to silence criticism of the Jewish state, and automatically belongs to the camp of the right wing or the oppressors.⁷⁷ Moreover, this presupposes that the ‘real’ problems are always unjustified antisemitism charges by Jews, rather than expressions of antisemitism against them; it categorically takes side with those who are allegedly “unjustly accused of antisemitism,”⁷⁸ rather than with the victims of antisemitism. This common reaction pattern does not just fail to recognize antisemitism, but is in itself entrenched in antisemitic tropes, as it is implicitly based on the assumption that Jews who address antisemitism are dishonest, slanderous, conspiratorial, manipulative, and use their (alleged) discrimination for their own

political or material purposes. It also a priori presupposes that “criticism of Israel cannot be construed as antisemitic,”⁷⁹ insinuating that as long as “Zionists” and Israel are the target, rather than Jews “as Jews”, it can by definition never be a case of antisemitism. Such antisemitism denial is, in fact, part of a “racializing discourse” on the left that enables all kinds of anti-Jewish stereotyping.⁸⁰

One of the most significant examples of radical antizionism merging into postmodern antisemitism that has emanated from the cultural discourses of the left is the global Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) movement.⁸¹ The BDS movement boycotts Israel, including the country’s citizens and academic and cultural institutions, as well as Jewish institutions and individuals not willing to pass a loyalty test and distance themselves from Israel or their Israeli-Jewish identity—which is, as Cary Nelson points out, reminiscent of the Christian antisemitic choice for Jews to either convert or remain “demons” to be persecuted.⁸² Not every BDS supporter is necessarily an antisemite or harbors antisemitic motivations, of course. But BDS is far from just articulating “criticism of Israel” or Israeli policies. It displays a prejudiced, illiberal and anti-pluralistic image of “the Israelis” and Israeli society that justifies active discrimination against Jewish Israelis based on their ethnicity and identity. The campaign also builds alliances with overt, militant Jew haters, including terrorist groups like Hamas and PFLP which actively promote BDS.⁸³ Its leaders call for the de facto elimination or “euthanasia” of the Jewish state, in the words of BDS activist Omar Barghouti.⁸⁴ BDS creates a narrative of the Israeli-Arab conflict that is exclusively focused on Jewish Israelis as perpetrators. This means that the antisemitic agency, authoritarianism, and brutality of Hamas or Fatah are never criticized. These actors seemingly play no role in the conflict. BDS also displays no solidarity with the Palestinian victims of Hamas’s terror, including gays and dissidents, or thousands of Palestinians murdered by the Assad regime.⁸⁵

Moreover, the campaign provides a culture in which verbal antisemitism is hardly ever negatively sanctioned—to the contrary, leading BDS activists have repeatedly made antisemitic statements without negative sanctions by the campaign and movement.

Originally an invention by British left-wing antizionist activists in the early 2000s,⁸⁶ BDS has gained global traction by now and is supported by antisemites across the political spectrum, including a wide range of radical rightists, ethnic nationalists, neo-Nazis, Islamists and pan-Arab nationalists alike. While not a leftist campaign, BDS has built coalitions with Palestinians and broadened its appeal especially among several left-wing, LGBTQ, intersectional feminist and post-colonial academics as well as artists, including musicians Brian Eno and Roger Waters. Waters, a main proponent of the BDS movement, compares the Israeli treatment of Palestinians to the atrocities of Nazi Germany and thinks that the “Jewish lobby” is “extraordinarily powerful.”⁸⁷ Prominent academic BDS advocates include Judith Butler, who claims that Israelis are “thrilled” when Palestinians are killed “because they think their safety and well-being and happiness are being purchased, are being achieved through this destruction.”⁸⁸ At the same time, Butler locates the authoritarian and antisemitic terror organizations Hamas and Hezbollah in her camp, the “global left”⁸⁹ (she also displays ‘critical solidarity’ with their main goals, even if not necessarily their violent tactics). Prominent BDS academic Steven Salaita indiscriminately dehumanizes Israelis as unscrupulous, greedy murderers: “I think of all the pain Israelis have caused, their smugness, their greed, their violence, and yet I smile, because it’s all only temporary.” At minimum antisemitic in effect, he suggests that the “Zionists” have transformed “‘antisemitism’ from something horrible into something honorable since 1948.”⁹⁰ Without being criticized by his BDS colleagues for such claims, Salaita also fantasized about Netanyahu possibly appearing on television “with a necklace made from the teeth of Palestinian children.”⁹¹

In addition to denying Jews political self-determination (and any right to a Jewish state in whatever shape), its lack of distancing towards brutal authoritarian groups like Hamas, as well as the broadly accepted uninhibited antisemitism of many of its advocates and supporters, the BDS movement actively discriminates against individuals with a Jewish-Israeli background by virtue of their ethnicity. For instance, in 2015 the Oslo human rights film festival rejected a documentary simply because it was produced by an Israeli. Unless the Israeli makes films about the “illegal occupation,” his films would “not be shown.”⁹² In so doing, BDS is a relevant force nurturing a culture of antizionist antisemitism, resonating in considerable parts of the left today. BDS has normalized, and granted legitimacy to, resentments demonizing Jews individually and as an organized collectivity allegedly standing in the way of humanity. The movement has thereby helped to make antisemitic tropes acceptable in mainstream public discourse. It has arguably done so to an extent that the radical right, despite its role in mobilizing and empowering extremist cultures and instigating terrorist violence against Jews and synagogues the world over, could not.

THE POLITICAL MAINSTREAMING OF ANTISEMITISM IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY: GLOBAL SOCIETY AND TRANSNATIONALIZED POLITICS OF UNREASON

Political antisemitism has forcefully resurged over the last two decades, and particularly proliferated in the global public sphere over the last five years. This article has so far analyzed the contemporary process of political antisemitism’s globalization in three political spaces through which anti-Jewish myths have been repoliticized, globally publicly disseminated and engendered, and ideologically ‘synchronized.’

But, it is argued here, antisemitism’s repoliticization has also contributed to its growing social acceptability in the global public sphere as well as the broader cultural realm. This includes both classic and “modernized” forms of antisemitism

that employ new or transformed anti-Jewish codes.⁹³ Furthermore, we suggest that political antisemitism's globalization has contributed to the process of normalization of anti-Jewish hostility.

While antisemitism plays an increasingly important role again in a broad variety of radical movements around the world, today public manifestations of anti-Jewish resentments are neither limited to political extremists nor strictly speaking to the political sphere. The resurgence of political antisemitism has itself been engendered by antisemitism's socio-cultural appeal far beyond the political margins. Antisemitism never went away after 1945 and the Nazi atrocities. However, global political antisemitism has in recent years helped reactivate, repoliticize and legitimize such lingering anti-Jewish societal undercurrents and worldviews. Antisemitism's aggressive repoliticization and mobilization, serving as an important social glue among otherwise diverse political organizations and movements, has thereby in turn increasingly spilled over into, and increased its presence and 'respectability' in, the non-political sphere—with implications for (global) society as a whole.

As in the past, the now globally resurgent political (and publicly mobilized) antisemitism is also once again particularly explosive and incendiary. In its shadow, the number of documented violent attacks against Jews has been sharply rising in many places around the world, including Europe. In 2018, they increased by 74% in France and over 60% in Germany.⁹⁴ Moreover, public opinion surveys—long-term diachronic and recent ones—show that the appeal of antisemitic tropes and (world-)views has partly grown, though antisemitism had never gone away as an undercurrent in societies around the globe. One out of three European citizens believe the anti-Jewish trope that Jews, about 0.2% of the world's population, are “too influential in political affairs around the world,” with similar opinion figures on “too much influence” in business, finance, wars, and conflicts.⁹⁵ According to global ADL surveys in 2014

and 2015, over a billion people harbor antisemitic views today.⁹⁶ Yet the measured growth in antisemitic attitudes is modest compared to the more significant dramatic rise in public anti-Jewish hate speech, and the equally significant trend towards the mainstreaming and normalization of antisemitism on social media and the global public sphere.⁹⁷ Publicly articulated anti-Jewish tropes are increasingly uncontested or deemed legitimate contributions to public debate. The expanding boundaries of what is viewed as acceptable discourse about “the Jews” helps legitimize outright discrimination and violence against Jews that threatens Jewish life and security.

The multi-faceted resurgence of anti-Jewish rage and the mainstreaming of antisemitism are due to several actors and factors within the context of a transformed environment of politics and media at the beginning of the twenty-first century. Anti-Jewish conspiracy myths have historically served as a way to handily explain actual or perceived crises in (modern) societies by personalizing all sorts of problems and projecting them on the image of a secret, malevolent Jewish cabal pulling the strings. Today, growing social anxieties vis-à-vis socio-cultural, political, military, and economic conflicts and crises in the globalized age are frequently projected onto allegedly “globalist” Jews and Israel pursuing a particularistic agenda. The global age is also marked by other developments intertwined with rising anti-Jewish hatred such as: trends toward political autocratization—that is, the rise of authoritarian-populist movements and regimes and the partial regress of democratic ones; a wave of global terrorism largely driven by antisemitic Islamist and extreme right actors; and profoundly transformed, digitalized public spheres in which hate speech, fake news, and conspiracy myths are now mobilized and freely flourish, creating favorable conditions for contemporary antisemitism.

There are evident signs of a forceful, new transnationalization and globalization of antisemitic publics. This means that alongside the rise of antisemitism in conventional national

publics and the emboldened official judeophobia openly promoted by the governments of Iran, Indonesia, Saudi-Arabia, Malaysia, Turkey, Qatar or Pakistan (and many others, especially in the Muslim world),⁹⁸ there are now also many antisemitic groups that are not attached to national territory, and we can observe an intensified dissemination of antisemitic propaganda across national boundaries and globally.⁹⁹ Moreover, Heiko Beyer empirically observes a transnational rise of anti-Jewish attitudes, which he calls the “globalization of antisemitic resentment.”¹⁰⁰ Antisemitism has thus also become increasingly deterritorialized: Its dissemination is no longer limited to states and their publics. Since 9/11, the antisemitic forgery of the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion* has become even more globally popular, while this pamphlet has arguably been read more than any other work in the Western world except the bible.¹⁰¹ Samuel Salzborn thereby detects an emerging global “antisemitic revolution” since 9/11.¹⁰² Antisemitic terror organizations like Al Qaeda or ISIS operate as truly transnational organizations with global outreach and appeal. Trade union and ANC activists in South Africa who claim “Zionism is racism” connect with antisemites from Europe and Asia,¹⁰³ Latin American or Australian Jew haters take inspiration and adopt ideas and strategies from North American agitators. For a longer period, several UN committees, like the UN Human Rights Committee, have displayed openly anti-Jewish hostility, while the UN also sponsors INGOs that are a hotbed of antizionist and antisemitic propaganda.¹⁰⁴ Antisemitism has even taken root in globalized popular culture such as football, where attacking Jews and ‘Jewish clubs’ has become a means to assert exclusive identities.¹⁰⁵

In particular, the globalization of antisemitism benefits significantly from a “new age of global authoritarianism.”¹⁰⁶ Cultural environments susceptible to conspiratorial myths and hostility towards Jews go hand in hand with, or have been reinforced by, a “third wave towards autocratization,”¹⁰⁷ that is: a trend to

re-establish illiberal regimes and autocracies. Part of this trend is the *rise of authoritarian populist actors and parties* within democracies, especially on (but far from limited to) the right, which have had considerable electoral success in recent years, from governments in India to Brazil, from Europe to Russia and the US. Frequently, their campaigns employ antisemitic innuendo. Representing a global anti-liberal, anti-pluralist backlash and ethnic identity politics at odds with constitutional democracy and putting minorities and their civil rights under pressure, the rise of illiberal, authoritarian populism particularly affects Jews and their individual rights. Moreover, authoritarian populists divide society into two homogeneous groups, “the good people” and “the corrupt elite,” a move that opens the door to overt anti-Jewish conspiracy myths. For instance, the authoritarian populist US president Donald Trump, who has labeled American mainstream media the “enemy of the people”¹⁰⁸—a claim reminiscent of antisemitic attacks on free media and an allegedly Jewish “lying press,” or *Lügenpresse*, in Nazi Germany and of Stalinist propaganda and other totalitarian movements of the twentieth century, often directed against Jews—also used antisemitic overtones in his final campaign video in the 2016 presidential election, “Trump’s Argument for America.” Showing exclusively Jews from the financial world, including Jewish billionaire George Soros, Trump laments “the establishment,” “those who control the levers of power in Washington” and “global special interests” as people “who don’t have your good in mind.”¹⁰⁹ Both Trump and Viktor Orbán, the prime minister of Hungary, have legitimized the attacks against “the globalists,” a term which can in certain contexts serve as an antisemitic code for “the Jews.”¹¹⁰ Alongside Nigel Farage, leader of the British “Brexit Party,” which received 31.6% of the vote in the 2019 European elections, they also both propagate the radical right conspiracy myth that Soros, whom Farage calls “the biggest danger to the

entire western world,” is partly responsible for orchestrating global mass migration.¹¹¹ Even extreme cases of Holocaust relativization (and dehumanization of Jews) have entered high ranks of democratic governments, and have thus become mainstreamed. William Happer, who serves on the National Security Council in the Trump administration as the president’s deputy assistant for emerging technologies, claims: “The demonization of carbon dioxide is just like the demonization of the poor Jews under Hitler.”¹¹² Such a statement is antisemitic in more ways than one: Belittling and objectifying the “poor Jews,” it equates the victims of the Shoah with carbon dioxide emissions. Happer relativizes the crimes of the Shoah and the persecution of the Jews of Europe by comparing them to environmental standards, and instrumentalizes Jewish victims for policy rhetoric in an entirely unrelated area.

Such mainstreaming of antisemitism within, among others, the oldest and new constitutional democracies is by no means restricted to the illiberal, nationalist-populist right. On the left, it is represented by the post-material Dutch democratic mainstream party *GroenLinks*, which since 2018 supports BDS’s complete, exclusive boycott of the Jewish state. Most prominently, however, it has recently been represented by the British Labour Party, founded in 1900 and *the* center-left party in the UK, under the leadership of left-wing populist Jeremy Corbyn. Until March 2020, Corbyn has a long track record of “speak[ing] out against Zionism” and “standing up against the Zionist lobby.”¹¹³ This case is especially relevant because it signifies the first (and one of the oldest and largest) European center-left party’s normalization of institutional antisemitism, that is, the licensing and toleration of antisemitism by an institution and its leadership, producing an institutional climate with exclusionary effects on Jews. As a Labour MP, Corbyn over the years defended antisemites and Holocaust deniers like Paul Eissen or Steven Sizer; invited antisemitic conspiracy theorists to the British parliament; worked for Iran’s Press TV, a

propaganda outlet of the antisemitic and terror-sponsoring dictatorship analyzed above; supported an antisemitic mural; honored Palestinian suicide terrorists who had killed eleven Jews at the 1972 Munich Olympics; called members of Hamas and Hezbollah his “friends,” and joked that British-born “Zionists . . . do not understand English irony.”¹¹⁴ Since Corbyn was elected as party leader and took office, many cases of open antisemitism emerged in the Labour Party.¹¹⁵ Corbyn has allowed if not encouraged the vilification and demonization of Israel, spilling over into many cases of overt antisemitism, to spread largely uninhibited in the party.¹¹⁶ After being exposed to a constant flow of anti-Jewish slurs and threats without being defended by the party leadership (and then being blamed within the party for addressing the problem in “bad faith” to harm Labour and to shield Israel from criticism), Labour MP Luciana Berger and several other Jewish and non-Jewish members and MPs eventually left Labour. Here, antizionism has partly turned into institutionalized antisemitic politics of exclusion which, like other forms of antisemitism, re-position “Jewish wrongdoing at the center of all that is problematic in the world” and portray Jews “as having universal importance for humankind.”¹¹⁷ It is yet to be seen in how far Corbyn’s defeat in the 2019 general parliamentary election and his resignation in 2020 will put an end to flourishing antisemitic resentments in the Labour Party.

Few would claim that criticism of Israel’s government is per se antisemitic—indeed, the claim that an allegedly powerful “Zionist lobby” would constantly conflate criticism of the Israeli government with antisemitism to discredit critics and would manipulate the public accordingly is part of the arsenal of contemporary judeophobia. Uncompromising binary anti-Israel rhetoric, however, today functions as a major vehicle for antisemitism, even if its protagonists deny any antisemitic intent. Leftist groups and movements play a key role in antisemitism’s legitimization, and in changing boundaries of the sayable, while often denying antisemitism’s

existence or relevance. As importantly, contemporary judeophobia is capable of building bridges across various ideologies.¹¹⁸ Different, otherwise seemingly antagonistic political actors around the world find common ground in antisemitism. For example, David Duke calls the Democratic Congresswoman and BDS supporter Ilhan Omar “[b]y defiance to Z.O.G. [Zionist Occupied Government] . . . NOW the most important member of US Congress,”¹¹⁹ while leftist politicians defend convicted antisemitic hate preachers like Raed Salah, who claims that Europeans are “slaves to global Zionism” and “Jerusalem will soon become the capital of the global caliphate,” or antisemites like “Nation of Islam” leader Lous Farrakhan. The authoritarian leftist George Galloway, who sympathizes with the antisemitic Islamists from Hamas, also endorses Steve Bannon’s views about world politics,¹²⁰ while German neo-Nazis support Hezbollah and BDS. Tagging or identifying Jews as the source of all “evil” in global society, certain antisemitic tropes thus provide an increasingly convergent, shared ideological ground for various red, brown, and Islamist actors, if not alliances between them—but also resonate in less ideologically rigid social protests, such as the Yellow Vest movement in France.¹²¹ Hence, while different political camps employ partly different rationalizations, justifications, and lexical features, there is also considerable uniformity and convergence today, when it comes to anti-Jewish tropes, stereotypes, and dominant elements.¹²²

A significant factor in the contemporary process of antisemitism’s transnationalization and mainstreaming in global society, including robust Western liberal democracies, are new and largely digitally transformed global publics. The current public rise and reinforcement of antisemitic views can partly be seen as a reflection of a globally intensified publicization of Jew hatred, spreading bottom up and top down. It features, in particular, contemporary antisemitism’s reinvigorated anti-Jewish global conspiracy myths, Holocaust trivialization, and hatred of the Jewish state. While we have not seen a consistent increase

in the number of those holding anti-Jewish attitudes, new digital media help dramatically disseminate, radicalize and normalize antisemitic conspiracy myths in the wider public.¹²³ Antisemitism is thereby especially articulated in everyday communication processes on various regular online platforms—and, notably, mostly by ordinary users rather than primarily on extremist websites.¹²⁴ This happens especially by means of publics restructured by digital means enabling unfiltered hate speech and avoiding physical encounters. Moreover, private corporate quasi-monopolies like Facebook and Google, guided by their profit-maximizing algorithms,¹²⁵ facilitate the consumption of post-factual, ideologically closed media bubbles, promote disinformation news websites like “Russia Today” or the “Western Journal,” and have generally popularized the breaking of taboos in civil discourse. Over years, they have emboldened unfiltered hate speech, to which they provide public platforms that favor such attention-drawing speech over nuanced reflection or factual journalism, and fostered fake news blurring all differences between facts and fantasies—and antisemitism is the historical prototype of fake news *sui generis* since antiquity. In doing so, these social media and search engine corporations have transformed the public cultural climate globally, massively accelerating a long unfolding process of “expanding the domain and boundaries of the sayable” in public discourse, also vis-à-vis antisemitism.¹²⁶ Other new corporate digital media platforms seem to be favorably catering to contemporary antisemitism as well. For instance, new research suggests that the quasi-monopolist corporate video platform YouTube’s “search and recommendation system appears to have systematically diverted users to far-right and conspiracy channels in Brazil.”¹²⁷ Channeling even seemingly apolitical young viewers into right-wing, antisemitic conspiracy bubbles to increase viewership and profits, YouTube has arguably played a key role in turning the radical rightist Jair Bolsonaro, until recently a marginal lawmaker in Brazilian politics, into a star politician and the country’s president.¹²⁸

In these times, conspiracy myths are generally on the rise and increasingly become part of quotidian global culture. Functioning as *the* quintessential historical matrix for conspiracy fantasies in the repertoire of the cultural imaginary that “explain” the complex modern, globalized world and its problems, antisemitism undoubtedly benefits from the currently widespread sense of crises of modernity, modern culture, and liberal democracy. Contemporary antisemitism comes in handy to seemingly “make sense” of a permanently transforming and contradictory globalized society as orchestrated by malevolent Jews, making “the Jew” into the “representative of the group thought to be at the center of the world’s evil.”¹²⁹ It serves as a pseudo-explanation for rapid social change and increasing socio-economic inequality by equating globalization, globalized capitalism and “imperialism” with Jews.¹³⁰ Antisemitism evolves in a more favorable environment in the current global age that is shaped by economic and socio-cultural globalization and related cleavages and crises. First and foremost, antisemitism serves today again to personify and objectify the social origins of civilizational social discontent. In doing so, it is a key element of contemporary politics of unreason in an increasingly illiberal, irrational and authoritarian age. Yet today, as David Seymour has pointed out, claims about contemporary antisemitism are often met, contrary to all evidence, with “intense denial.”¹³¹

The resurgent popularity of conspiracy fantasies in times of crises (including the coronacrisis today), from which it is a small step to full-fledged antisemitism, is boosted by the structural transformation and corporate digitalization of the public sphere but also benefits from long-term trends towards deep-seated socio-cultural polarization in societies around the globe. Such hardened, long-lingering polarization, primarily around issues of social values and cultural/collective identity constructs in an increasingly global-

ized world, has become aggressively politicized in recent years. The closely related mobilization of identity tribalism helps erode seemingly robust constitutional democracies and affects Jewish life within them. Alongside the open re-politicization of antisemitism as a way to ‘explain’ socio-cultural conflicts in the political world, the tribalistic, often antagonistic ideological camps that have emerged and their actors seem to find a common enemy in Jews. Jews seem to fall outside the ideological and religious camps of current dominant tribalisms: they are predominantly constructed as alien to the ethnic nation, or even viewed as the cosmopolitan “anti-nation,” by the contemporary populist right. Yet parts of the post-colonial left construct Jews collectively as belonging to white supremacists who oppress excluded minorities (*post-colonial antisemitism*), and for leftist antizionists ‘the Jew’ often functions as the “personification of the very principle of the national.” They depict “Israel as a uniquely illegitimate state or people.”¹³²

Charged with being too nationalistic and too cosmopolitan, being too culturally progressive and being too reactionary, with belonging to the green left and epitomizing “globalist” capitalist elites, Jews have become once again the projective target of all kinds of perceived or actual forms of social malaise in a globalized society, attacked from all kinds of political and religious groups for “orchestrating” the world’s troubles. In this light, contemporary political antisemitism can be viewed as both grounded in the long history of the “antisemitic imagination”¹³³ and as an anti-modern, deeply irrational ideological response to rapid cultural change, economic crises, and related societal conflicts in the twenty-first century. The globalization and the resurgence of political antisemitism, with its paranoid view of the world, should thereby also be understood as part of broader anti-democratic political regressions and transgressions of the current era.

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- 2 *International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance Working Definition of Antisemitism*, 2016, <https://www.holocaustremembrance.com/working-definition-antisemitism>; see also Dina Porat, “The Struggle over the International Working Definition of Antisemitism,” in *Antisemitism Today and Tomorrow: Global Perspectives on the Many Faces of Contemporary Antisemitism*, ed. Mikael Shaikman (Brookline, MA: Academic Studies Press, 2018).
- 3 See Lars Rensmann, *The Politics of Unreason: The Frankfurt School and the Origins of Modern Antisemitism* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press), 161.
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- 5 David Seymour, “Adorno and Horkheimer: Enlightenment and Antisemitism,” *Journal of Jewish Studies* 51, no. 2 (2000): 297–312, 312. Finding expressions in private interactions as well as popular culture, societal institutions, media and politics, the scope and intensity of contemporary antisemitism can vary—ranging from clichés about Jewish intellect to a fully blown antisemitic “world explanation.” And so do, as in previous periods, the socio-psychological motivations or causes involved: in some post-Holocaust contexts, “secondary” motives can play a role, that is, the urge to denigrate “the Jews” because they become identified with the troubling memory of national guilt and are blamed for remembering, by their very existence, the culpability and failures of one’s family or nation during the Shoah (see Rensmann, *The Politics of Unreason*, 360). A similar mechanism can be identified in *post-colonial* antisemitism—prominently featuring also among citizens from former colonizing or imperial powers, who may delegate historical national guilt onto Israel and the Jews, demonized as especially evil.
- 6 Just as the Nazis had global ambitions and wanted to rule the world, they viewed, like many of their antisemitic successors, Jews behind a global conspiracy—and it was no coincidence that they aimed at murdering all Jews around the globe.
- 7 See for definitions and original ground-breaking studies of “political antisemitism”, that is, antisemitism as a political movement: Paul W. Massing, *Rehearsal for Destruction. A Study of Political Anti-Semitism in Imperial Germany* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1949); Eva Reichmann, *Hostages of Civilisation. A Study of the Social Causes of Antisemitism* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1951); Peter Pulzer, *The Rise of Political Antisemitism in Germany and Austria* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988 [1964]); Shulamit Volkov, *Germans, Jews, and Antisemites. Trials in Emancipation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2006).
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- 12 See Cas Mudde, "Three Decades of Populist Radical Right Parties in Western Europe: So What?," *European Journal of Political Research* 52, no. 1 (2013): 1–19; Hans-Georg Betz, "The Radical Right and Populism," in *The Oxford Handbook of the Radical Right*, ed. Jens Rydgren (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 86–104; Piero Ignazi, *Extreme Right Parties in Western Europe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).
- 13 See Duncan McDonnell and Annika Werner, *International Populism: The Radical Right in the European Parliament* (Hurst: Oxford University Press, 2019); Daniele Albertazzi & Duncan McDonnell, *Populists in Power* (New York: Routledge, 2015).
- 14 See Ignazi, *Extreme Right Parties*.
- 15 See Bar-On, "The Radical Right and Nationalism."
- 16 See Cas Mudde, *The Ideology of the Extreme Right* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003), 169–175.
- 17 See Ruth Wodak, "The Radical Right and Antisemitism," in *The Oxford Handbook of the Radical Right*, ed. Jens Rydgren (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018).
- 18 See Rensmann, "Against 'Globalism';" Samuel Salzborn, *Globaler Antisemitismus* (Weinheim: Beltz Juventa, 2018).
- 19 It is important to note that the role of antisemitism in ethno-nationalist and white supremacist ideology has varied across time and space. There are few examples where white ethnic nationalism/racism is not also attached to antisemitism and racialized views of Jews as "enemies of the people." However, in several historical periods and cases of US history antisemitism was not the *primary* focal point rallying of ethnic nationalists, white supremacists, and the radical right—notwithstanding the virulent antisemitism enabling the lynching of Leo Frank in 1915; the temporary successes of Henry Ford's propaganda in the 1920s; the temporary successes of the decidedly anti-Jewish American Nazis of the German American Bund in the 1930s; and other antisemitic agitators attacking Jewish refugees in the 1940s, and since then. See Steve Oney, *And the Dead Shall Rise: The Murder of Mary Phegan and the Lynching of Leo Frank* (New York: Random House, 2003); Neil Baldwin, *Henry Ford and the Jews: The Mass Production of Hate* (New York: Public Affairs, 2001); Diamond Sander, *The Nazi Movement in the United States: 1924–1941* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1974).
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- 103 See Milton Shain, "Antisemitism and Anti-Zionism in the 'New' South Africa," in *Global Antisemitism: A Crisis of Modernity*, vol. 3, ed. Charles Asher Small (New York: Institute for the Study of Global Antisemitism and Policy, 2013), 21–27.
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- 105 See Jon Stratton, "Playing the Jew: Anti-Semitism and Football in the Twenty-First Century," *Jewish Culture and History* 16, no. 3 (2015): 293–311.
- 106 Rensmann, *The Politics of Unreason*, 405.
- 107 Anna Lührmann and Staffan I. Lindberg, "A Third Wave of Autocratization is Here: What is New about It?," *Democratization* 26, no. 7 (2019): 1095–1113.
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- 110 In similar innuendos, Trump has semantically "de-naturalized" American Jews by speaking of Netanyahu as "your prime minister" in front of American Jews, and he linked classic antisemitic "disloyalty" charges with American Jews—replicating the antisemitic "disloyalty" charges against American Jews previously iterated by Trump's BDS-supporting opponents, the antizionist Democratic congresswomen Rashida Tlaib and Ilhan Omar. See Julie Hirschfeld Davis, "Toxic Back Story to the Charge that Jews Have a Dual Loyalty," *The New York Times: International Edition*, August 23, 2019, 10; see also Barri Weiss, "Donald Trump and the 'Disloyal' Jews," *The New York Times*, August 21, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/08/21/opinion/trump-jews.html>.
- 111 Farage also says Soros seeks "to undermine democracy and to fundamentally change the makeup, demographically, of the whole European continent" (quoted in Peter Walker, "Farage Criticised for Using Antisemitic Themes to Criticise Soros," *The Guardian*, May 12, 2019, <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2019/may/12/farage-criticised-for-using-antisemitic-themes-to-criticise-soros>). On Trump see Bess Levin, "Trump: 'A Lot of People' Say Soros Is Financing the Migrant Caravan," *Vanity Fair*, October 31, 2018, <https://www.vanityfair.com/news/2018/10/donald-trump-george-soros-caravan>; on Orbán see William Echikson, "Viktor Orbán's Anti-Semitism Problem," *Politico.eu*, May 13, 2019, <https://www.politico.eu/article/viktor-orban-anti-semitism-problem-hungary-jews/>.
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- 115 For an in-depth analysis see Hirsh, *Contemporary Left Antisemitism*; Dave Rich, *The Left's Jewish Problem: Jeremy Corbyn, Israel and Anti-Semitism* (London: Biteback, 2018).
- 116 Representative of many other instances, a Labour candidate for parliament in 2019 liked antisemitic posts about Theresa May allegedly following a "Zionist Slave Masters agenda" (as quoted in capital letters). She welcomed the conspiracy myth that the Mossad would be behind ISIS; quoted in Board of Deputies of British Jews, "Joint Statement on Labour's Peterborough Election Candidate Lisa Forbes," *Board of Deputies of British Jews*, June 2, 2019, <https://www.bod.org.uk/joint-statement-on-labours-peterborough-election-candidate-lisa-forbes-2/>; see also Roger Cohen, "Jeremy Corbyn's Anti-Semitic Labor Party," *The New York Times*, February 28, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/02/28/opinion/corbyn-berger-anti-semitism.html>.
- 117 Hirsh, *Contemporary Left Antisemitism*, 4, 270. Many cases of left-wing antizionist antisemitism seem to resemble centuries-old Christian rather than modern racial antisemitism: in this lens, you may have a chance to "enter humanity" for the time being if you publicly disavow Israel and become an antizionist—which is what BDS requires from Israeli citizens if they do not want to be subjected to boycotts; see also Nelson, *Israel Denial*.
- 118 See Markovits and Beyer, "Jews and Americans as Supervillains."
- 119 Quoted in "Former KKK Leader David Duke calls Rep. Omar 'Most Important Member of Congress,'" *The Tower Magazine*, March 8, 2019, <http://www.thetower.org/7309-former-kkk-leader-david-duke-calls-rep-omar-most-important-member-of-congress/>.
- 120 See Tom Embury-Denis, "Steve Bannon and George Galloway 'hug' in Kazakhstan after Learning Theresa May Has Resigned," *The Independent*, May 24, 2019. <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/asia/theresa-may-resigns-steve-bannon-george-galloway-hug-brexite-a8928816.html>.
- 121 The concept "new antisemitism," often used to describe this convergence, can be misguided if it equates these new developments with "antizionism." Attacks on "Zionism" are a long-standing feature of antisemitic propaganda, predating the establishment of the state of Israel, and reaching back to the Nazi Party. Such attacks were already mobilized in that context almost a hundred years ago.
- 122 Schwarz-Friesel, *Judenhass im Internet*, 41.
- 123 See *ibid.*, 16.
- 124 See *ibid.*, 18, 45.
- 125 See José van Dijck, Thomas Poell, and Martijn de Waal, *The Platform Society: Public Values in a Connected World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019).
- 126 See Lars Rensmann, *Demokratie und Judenbild: Antisemitismus in der politischen Kultur der Bundesrepublik Deutschland* (Wiesbaden: VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften, 2004), 499.
- 127 Max Fisher and Amanda Taub, "How YouTube radicalized Brazil," *The New York Times International Edition*, August 14, 2019, 3.
- 128 See also Peter Suci, "YouTube as Political Influencer takes Spotlight," August 16, 2019, *TechNewsWorld*, <https://www.technewsworld.com/story/86188.html>; and on the role of WhatsApp as a medium to radicalize and mobilize the right see David Nemer, "WhatsApp is radicalizing the right in Bolsonaro's Brazil," August 16, 2019, https://www.huffpost.com/entry/brazil-jair-bolsonaro-whatsapp_n_5d542b0de4b05fa9df088ccc.
- 129 Marcus, *The Definition of Anti-Semitism*, 44.
- 130 Beyer, "The Globalization of Resentment"
- 131 David Seymour, "New Europe, Holocaust Memory, and Antisemitism," in *Global Antisemitism: A Crisis of Modernity*, vol. 1, ed. Charles Asher Small (New York: Institute for the Study of Global Antisemitism and Policy, 2013), 21–27, 27.
- 132 Karin Stögner and Johannes Höpolseder, "Nationalism and Antisemitism in the Postnational Constellation: Thoughts on Horkheimer, Adorno, and Habermas," *Global Antisemitism: A Crisis of Modernity*, vol. 1, ed. Charles Asher Small (New York: Institute for the Study of Global Antisemitism and Policy, 2013), 121–131, 130.
- 133 See Catherine D. Chatterley, "The Antisemitic Imagination," in *Global Antisemitism*, ed. Charles A. Small (Leiden: Brill, 2018), 77–82.

