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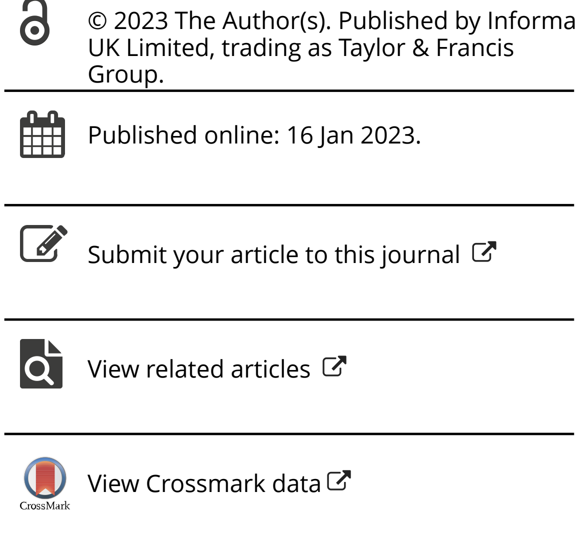

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The social psychology of contemporary antisemitism

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ABSTRACT
This article focuses upon the social psychological aspects of antisemitism. Empirical research into three forms of antisemitism is reviewed through the lens of social psychological theories of social representation, intergroup relations and identity processes. Across research, perceived threat from Jews and Israel is a recurrent theme. The proposed integrative model suggests that negative social representations of Jews and Israel that accentuate intergroup threat can in turn have implications for identity processes at an individual level, mainly by curtailing feels of self-esteem, self-efficacy, continuity and distinctiveness. Identity threat can lead the individual to react defensively by engaging in antisemitism.

KEYWORDS Antisemitism; anti-Zionism; Israel; social representations; threat; identity

Antisemitism is an age-old form of prejudice. It has existed for millennia. It persists in the present day. Antisemitism has been manifested in many different ways over the centuries that it has existed. Its manifestations have ranged from belief in the blood libel, that is, the perception that Jews consume the blood of Christian boys in the performance of religious ritual, to the perception of Jewish world domination, most recently argued in relation to the creation of the State of Israel. Extreme consequences have ensued – such antisemitic beliefs were mobilised to carry out the systematic mass murder of 6 million Jews in Nazi-occupied Europe. A unifying thread across all of the tropes that have characterised antisemitic belief, talk and action is the perception of threat from Jews. The Jewish people and the symbols associated with Judaism, including the State of Israel, are generally perceived by antisemites as posing a threat to one's ingroup and by extension to oneself. The perception of threat in turn generates psychological, emotional and behavioural responses that can be referred to as antisemitism. The changing face of contemporary antisemitism and, in particular, the subtle ways in which it is contemporaneously manifested can make it difficult to detect. This can also reduce the credibility of claims of antisemitism with

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some denying its existence and the plight of those who experience it. However, it is no less virulent or damaging to society. In this article, three key manifestations of contemporary antisemitism are outlined: general antisemitism, left wing antisemitism, and antisemitism in Iran. Empirical research into these forms of antisemitism is reviewed through the lenses of major social psychological theories of social representation, intergroup relations and identity processes. An integrative model for explaining antisemitism is briefly outlined.

What is antisemitism?

Antisemitism has been defined as 'a persisting latent structure of hostile beliefs toward Jews as a collective manifested in individuals as attitudes, and in culture as myth, ideology, folklore and imagery, and in actions – social or legal discrimination, political mobilization against the Jews, and collective or state violence – which results in and/or is designed to distance, displace, or destroy Jews as Jews'.[1] This definition captures the cognitive (beliefs), affective (attitudes) and behavioural (actions) elements of antisemitism. It suggests that antisemitism, which may be manifested in thinking, talk or cultural representation, possesses an action orientation – to harm Jews. It acknowledges the (reciprocal) relationship between the micro (the individual), meso (social groups) and macro (culture and institutions) levels of this form of prejudice.[2] They interact in producing antisemitism – after all, the social context influences individual cognition but influential individuals similarly have the capacity to influence the social context as well as the social representations that comprise it.

Anti-Zionism means different things to different people. It depends on how Zionism is actually defined. Zionism refers to the ideology that recognises Jewish nationhood and advocates for a nation-state in the Land of Israel.[3] Some Zionists believe that the State of Israel should be limited to the pre-1967 borders. Others would like to see territories acquired in 1967 annexed and incorporated in the State of Israel. In short, there is much variation in the beliefs of Zionists. This is possibly one of the reasons that anti-Zionism is often defended and legitimised and successfully differentiated from antisemitism by those who espouse such views. In general terms, anti-Zionism can be defined as the delegitimization of the State of Israel, ranging from disproportionate criticism of Israel vis-à-vis other countries to calling for its destruction. Many commentators have argued that anti-Zionism amounts to antisemitism.[4] For many anti-Zionists, it is the Jewish character of Israel that makes its statehood unacceptable – Jews may be tolerated as individuals or a religious community but not as a nation with its own state. Analyses of anti-Zionist rhetoric often reveal clear antisemitic tropes, such as references to world domination and Holocaust revisionism.[5]

It should be clarified that criticism of the policies of the State of Israel do not necessarily constitute antisemitism but that singling Israel out unjustly, let alone denying the Jews' right to national self-determination, does tend to reflect an underlying antisemitic agenda. Examples of anti-Zionism with an underlying antisemitic agenda are therefore included as part of the discussion.

The psychology of prejudice

Theories from social psychology can help understand the antecedents of antisemitism. In this section, theories of categorisation and social identification, as well as those focusing upon perceived threat from outgroups, are outlined. It is argued that a synthesis of tenets from these theories can enable us to explain antisemitism.

Categorisation and social identity theory

Social categorisation refers to the process of perceiving an individual primarily in terms of their group membership and mirrors how individuals categorise physical objects into particular types. This is essentially a heuristic, sense-making exercise. The process of social categorisation reduces one's focus on the individual's personal characteristics in favour of their group membership(s). The characteristics and stereotypes deemed to be associated with the category (e.g. Jew, Israeli) come to dominate one's perception of the individual. In the eyes of the perceiver, the target ceases to be an individual and is perceived primarily as a member of the category to which they are assigned. One makes assumptions about what the person thinks, feels and will do on the basis of the way in which they have been categorised. On the basis of an early experiment,[6] it was concluded that human beings have a tendency to exaggerate differences between people from distinct groups while viewing members of outgroups as being more similar to each other than members of the ingroup. In other words, the diversity of one's ingroup is more likely to be acknowledged than that of an outgroup, enabling the individual to generalise about outgroup members using stereotypes. This helps us to understand why antisemites often come to see Jews as a homogeneous group.

Social categorisation is the first key step to the formation of group identities. According to social identity theory, social identity refers to 'those aspects of an individual's self-image that derive from the social categories to which he perceived himself belonging'.[7] In other words, we categorise ourselves primarily in terms of a particular group membership. However, we also do the same with others. People vary in the extent to which they identify with social groups. For instance, some people have a stronger

national identity than others and those that have a stronger national identity may be more sensitive to threats to it.[8] A key tenet of social identity theory is that we are motivated to perceive our own group memberships as superior to those of others, which in turns provides feelings of both positive distinctiveness and self-esteem. We become convinced of the superiority of our own group vis-à-vis outgroups and anything that challenges this perception can be deemed to be harmful for our sense of identity. A key cause for intergroup discrimination is the perception of threat from outgroups. Particular types of threat are described below. However, it is worth noting briefly what can actually cause people to believe that their (social) identity is threatened. People may come to believe that their social identity is not valued by others or that it is being positioned less favourably than an outgroup's social identity. They may believe that the value, integrity or even survival of their group are imperilled by the outgroup. They may perceive the authenticity of their membership of a particular group as being called into question. Such threats can precipitate reactive responses, such as stigmatisation of outgroups and discrimination against them. Perceived threat is central to antisemitism.

Intergroup threat theory

Intergroup threat theory[9] posits that people experience intergroup threat when they perceive that outgroups are in a position to cause harm. The outgroup thus comes to be perceived as a hazard. In its original formulation, the theory differentiates between two distinct types of threat. *Realistic threats* refer to concerns about physical harm from the outgroup or loss of resources, power and welfare as a result of the outgroup's actions. *Symbolic threats* refer to concerns about the integrity and validity of the ingroup's meaning system, including its norms, values and worldview as a result of the outgroup's actions. Both types of threat are psychological since they rely upon perception but this is especially true of symbolic threats which can result in a loss of self-esteem and continuity. It has been noted that some outgroups are perceived as posing *hybridised threats* which combine both realistic and symbolic elements and are, thus, construed as hyper-threatening to the ingroup.[10] Perceived threats are 'real', in that they have real psychological consequences for individuals and the groups to which they belong – they are thus meaningful to the individuals and groups involved, even if they have no basis in objective reality. Threats are constructed, represented and thus realised in the minds of individuals.

There are many antecedents to the threats described in intergroup threat theory. First, the nature and quality of intergroup relations are key factors. Relative power is a case in point. Groups that perceive other groups to be more powerful (however this is defined) may also come to perceive them as

a threat. This has been described as ingroup power.[11] Similarly, the notion of subjective group vitality[12] refers to the perception that one's group will survive and thrive in the long term, which is dependent upon beliefs regarding group size, its distribution across a territory, and its level of esteem in society. Perceptions of low subjective group vitality may increase the perception of outgroup threat. Second, culture is important. Individuals from collectivistic cultures generally append more importance to their ingroups than those from individualistic cultures.[13] They may therefore be more prone to perceiving threats from outgroups. Third, situational factors, such as influence from the press, politicians and key figures from one's ingroup, have the power to influence the level of threat perceived and experienced. Fourth, there are clearly individual difference variables that play a role in determining threat. Many studies[14] have found that authoritarian personality traits, personal values such as conservation, paranoia, death anxiety and low self-esteem are associated with perceived threat from outgroups and thus greater proclivity to discriminate against them. Perceived threats arise from representational processes – often originating in political spaces, the media and in everyday talk – which is the focus of social representations theory.

Social representations and identity processes

Social representations theory[15] focuses upon how abstract ideas are transformed into common sense realities in people's mind, enabling them to think and talk about them. A social representation is thus a social construction of reality. According to the theory, a social representation is formed through two principal processes: anchoring and objectification.

Anchoring refers to the association or comparison of something novel and abstract to something that is already known about. Some people have little or no first-hand experience of Jews or Judaism but come to harbour antisemitic beliefs by anchoring Jews to malevolent and highly stigmatised groups. For instance, some people link the actions of the Israeli government (as well as the Jewish population of Israel purported to support these actions) to those of the Nazi regime, arguing that Jews and possess the same characteristics as Nazis.[16] Not only does this type of anchoring delegitimise Jews and Israel, but it also provides an implicit rationale or justification for the atrocities committed against the Jewish people during the Holocaust. It suggests that in essence the Jews are the same as the Nazis. This example illustrates the power of anchoring – it can rapidly metamorphose into more elaborate social representations enabling people to think about the object in novel ways.

Objectification is the process whereby unfamiliar and abstract objects are transformed into concrete and 'objective', common-sense realities – for example through verbal and visual images, metaphor, or similes. There are

fundamentally three subprocesses of objectification. First, figuration turns ideas into verbal or visual images. Second, personification connects a concept or idea to a person. Third, ontologisation makes a concept real through the use of images and visualisation. For instance, Holocaust images, such as the striped uniform worn by Jewish concentration camp inmates, may be transposed onto Palestinians, accentuating their plight and attenuating that of Jewish Holocaust prisoners.[17]

Anchoring and objectification are social, linguistic and psychological processes and are found in many different contexts, such as the press, political discourse and everyday talk. Collectively, they contribute to creation of particular representations of Jews and Israel.

Social representations theory has been linked to identity processes to shed light on the content of identity, that is, how people come to perceive their own sense of self.[18] Identity process theory posits that the content dimension of identity consists of group membership (among other elements, such as personality traits).[19] People acquire an understanding of the group memberships that comprise their identity through exposure to and engagement with social representations. For instance, Jews will acquire a sense of what their Jewishness means through dominant images, ideas and values in their social context. Others will similarly hold social representations of Jews that inform the ways in which they think, talk and behave in relation to them. Identity process theory also postulates that individuals strive to construct an identity that is characterised by feelings of self-esteem, self-efficacy, continuity and distinctiveness. These are said to be the desirable end states of identity and thus motivate people to construct identities in particular ways, embracing some elements (i.e. group memberships) while eschewing others. When these principles of identity are, in any way, curtailed by changes in one's social context, identity is said to be threatened. It is easy to see how a symbolic threat from Jews might undermine a person's self-esteem and how both symbolic and realistic threats might undermine their sense of continuity, for instance. People react to identity threat in varied ways. They employ strategies for coping and for enhancing identity.

In this article, it is shown that some social representations of Jews and Israel can have a specific focus upon threat, as defined in intergroup threat theory, but that these constructed threats can in turn have implications for people's sense of self-esteem, self-efficacy, continuity and distinctiveness. Threats to any of these principles motivate people to engage in coping strategies – some adaptive, others less so. A known strategy for protecting one's own sense of identity is of course outgroup prejudice.[20] When a threat to identity is perceived to emanate from an outgroup, people may respond by simply denigrating the threatening outgroup, curtailing its ability to threaten them. Antisemitism and its close relation anti-Zionism may constitute one such strategy for protecting one's sense of identity. Yet, not everybody who

experiences identity threat will necessarily engage in outgroup prejudice. Identity resilience is a determinant of the extent of identity threat upon exposure to a hazard and the way one copes. The concept refers to the individual's overall perception that their identity is characterised by feelings of self-esteem, self-efficacy, continuity and positive distinctiveness.[21] This individual 'trait', is based upon many factors, including their past experiences, personality traits and group memberships. In previous research, the concept of identity resilience has been shown to reduce the level of identity threat experienced upon exposure to a hazard and to facilitate engagement in more adaptive coping strategies.[22] It may therefore be inversely associated with maladaptive coping, such as outgroup prejudice. In others words, the higher one's identity resilience, the less threatened they will feel when exposed to a potentially threatening social representation of Jews and thus the less likely they will be to exhibit antisemitism. Three specific forms of contemporary antisemitism are now considered through this theoretical lens.

Contemporary manifestations of antisemitism

General antisemitism

Despite the long-standing perennial issue of antisemitism, there is actually limited empirical psychological research into this form of prejudice. Kressel and Kressel conducted a study of research trends concerning antisemitism in major social sciences databases since the 1940s and a content analysis of abstracts of psychological studies of antisemitism since 1990.[23] They found that, while the Holocaust had received significant empirical attention, there was limited research into contemporary manifestations of antisemitism. Clearly, it is important to understand contemporary antisemitism. Furthermore, despite the growing significance of antisemitism, consensus about what actually constitutes antisemitism is lacking. It is easy to see how this might in turn lead to the delegitimisation of charges of antisemitism, especially when the focus is upon apparent hostility against Israel. This essentially facilitates antisemitism because, when it is called out, the accusations may simply be rejected, enabling the antisemite to continue to discriminate.

Some research has focused upon manifestations of antisemitism in distinct cultures. Kressel and Kressel have noted that antisemitism is a significant concern in Muslim majority countries.[24] This is often presented in the form of anti-Zionism, though closer analyses demonstrate the anti-Jewish underpinnings of such prejudice.[25] In their analysis of nationwide data from Poland, Bilewicz et al identified three factors of antisemitic beliefs focusing upon (1) conspiracy theories about Jews; (2) traditional religious anti-Jewish beliefs; and (3) secondary antisemitism consisting largely of

Holocaust commemoration. They showed these beliefs to be associated with authoritarian personality characteristics, having a social identity based upon victimhood and relative deprivation. Of the three factors, belief in conspiracy theories was the strongest predictor of antisemitic behavioural intentions.[26]

Salzborn et al identify four principal manifestations of antisemitism in Germany: (1) anti-Judaism relating to Christianity; (2) pseudo-biological theories of racial inferiority; (3) secondary antisemitism, such as the relativisation, minimisation or even denial of Nazi atrocities against Jews; and (4) antisemitism in the form of anti-Zionism. Latent antisemitism was described as 'an unconscious, permanent ambivalent attitude towards Judaism', which may therefore be difficult to capture using traditional measures of antisemitism.[27] On the basis of their qualitative interview research, they claim that latent antisemitism in Germany is much more prevalent than traditional quantitative surveys have estimated antisemitism to be (i.e. 15–20%). This research clearly shows the importance of social representations – conspiracy theories, for instance, are social representations that have been elaborated to explain intergroup threat and thus to attempt to protect oneself.

Research has also focused on the possible causal factors underpinning antisemitism. Using tenets of terror management theory, Cohen et al conducted three experimental studies of antisemitism in a US sample. They found that mortality salience (that is, thinking about one's own mortality) led to higher levels of antisemitism and lower support for Israel, as well as higher punitiveness towards human rights violations perpetrated by Israel than towards Russia or India under the same conditions.[28] The fact that antisemitism was manifested only in a bogus pipeline condition indicates that social desirability concerns can mask this form of prejudice. These results suggest that Jews constitute a specific target of prejudice when people experience mortality salience and that there is a clear association between anti-Israel hostility and that directed against Jews. Crucially, the research also suggests that death anxiety, which is threatening for one's sense of continuity in particular, may be prompting people to discriminate. In other research, Kofta et al. found that perceived lack of control (or low self-efficacy) predicted belief in conspiracy theories regarding Jews which in turn was associated with more negative attitudes towards Jews. Using both longitudinal and experimental research designs, they also found that political uncontrollability (i.e. the perception that one has no control over the political situation) was associated with increased endorsement of conspiracy theories regarding Jews. This research shows the significance of perceived control and competence, that is, self-efficacy, in explaining antisemitism.[29]

Golec de Zavala and Cichocka examined the relationship between collective narcissism – the unrealistic emotionally held conviction of the greatness of one's ingroup – and antisemitism in Poland. They found that the

relationship was mediated by Polish siege beliefs, that is, the perception that the ingroup is consistently threatened by hostile outgroups. The relationship was also mediated by the specific construal of Jews as a threatening outgroup that seeks to dominate the world.[30] Their results suggest that perceived insecurity about the ingroup may increase the specific threat thought to be posed by Jews, thus resulting in antisemitism. This is the case when one holds strong narcissistic views about the ingroup. Furthermore, as narcissism has been linked to self-esteem,[31] it may be that antisemitism reflects a strategy for protecting one's sense of self-esteem in the face of perceived threats from Jews.

Left-wing antisemitism

Left-wing antisemitism (often manifested in terms of extreme hostility towards Israel including its delegitimisation) tends to be presented in terms of discourses of progressivism which in turn enables antisemitism to become mainstream.[32] Hirsch notes that antisemitism may fail to be acknowledged and may thus be tolerated in apparently democratic spaces associated with the left, such as trade unions, political gatherings and the seminars and journals of left-wing thinkers.[33] Much of this antisemitism begins with criticism of the State of Israel – often connected to opposition to imperialism, neo-liberalism and capitalism – but has clear antisemitic tropes and features. Those who attempt to raise the issue of left-wing antisemitism may be accused of doing so in bad faith, that is, of politicising the issue of antisemitism for (right-wing) political self-gain. Thus, it seems that antisemitism may be used as a mechanism for safeguarding the 'progressive', identity of left-wing activism. This may simply come to be perceived as 'being progressive'.

The Labour Party in Britain was a long-standing supporter of Zionism but has gradually shifted its stance on Israel especially with the appointment of Jeremy Corbyn as its leader in 2015. Corbyn subsequently stepped down as leader in 2019 but concerns about antisemitism in left-wing politics remained. For some, Corbyn became the personification of anti-Zionism in the Labour Party which for decades had been developing a political culture 'that fails to relate to Jews, antisemitism, Zionism, or Israel as they actually are but instead to abstract, ideological constructs of those things'.[34] This has led some to conclude that Labour is institutionally antisemitic and the results of an investigation published in 2020 confirmed the presence of antisemitic elements in the party.[35] An account of antisemitism in the Labour Party clearly demonstrates the significance and utility of social representations theory. It has been argued that antisemitism constitutes 'one specific form of racism and as a reservoir of myths and images that circulate in our broader political culture'.[36]

Empirical research in international contexts has shown a close association between left-wing politics and antisemitism. For instance, In a survey of attitudes towards Jews and Israel in Britain, Staetsky found that levels of antisemitism were highest among far-left respondents when compared to other subgroups in the sample and that levels of anti-Israel sentiment were heightened across individuals with left-wing attitudes more generally.[37] Across the board, it was observed that the higher the level of anti-Israel sentiment, the higher the level of antisemitism.

In other research, Guhl analysed public Facebook pages supportive of the British Labour Party in between 2015 and 2019 and found that 56% of all comments sections contained at least one antisemitic comment and that in 59% of these cases the comments were not challenged by others.[38]

Allington conducted a thematic discourse analysis of three Facebook pages associated with the British Left that revealed three recurrent discursive repertoires – all designed to resist accusations of antisemitism. First, accusations of antisemitism were constructed as a political ploy to silence critique of Israel and to undermine the Left. Second, polls and surveys indicating the presence of antisemitism were dismissed on the basis of flawed methodology. Third, it was claimed that, because criticisms were levelled at the 'Zionist elite' rather than at Jews in general, this was not a case of antisemitism.[39] Overall, these repertoires can facilitate overt anti-Zionism that is often manifested in terms of antisemitic tropes.

Schröder conducted a survey of 6715 ninth-graders in Germany. Although right-wing political orientation was the strongest predictor of antisemitic attitudes, he also found that a correlation between left-wing political orientation and Islamist attitudes and antisemitism. The highest levels of antisemitism were observable in the Muslim subgroup in the sample.[40] Indeed, it has been stated that, under the guise of anti-Zionism, anti-imperialism and anti-capitalism, the radical left and fundamental Islam have converged in their antisemitism on a global scale.[41]

Antisemitism in Iran

Global surveys have found that antisemitism is especially prevalent in Muslim societies.[42] Opposition to the State of Israel tends to underpin antisemitism in these societies and categories such as 'Israel', and 'Jew', are often used interchangeably in social representations of the Arab-Israeli conflict. There has been some qualitative and quantitative empirical research into antisemitism in the Muslim world, most of which has found a conflation of anti-Israel and anti-Jewish social representations.[43] Some of this work focuses upon the strong antisemitic sentiment observable in young Muslims residing in Western countries and suggests that some feel disillusioned by social, political and media institutions in the West and aggrieved by

perceived injustices in the Middle East.[44] As one of the most overtly antisemitic nations in the world, the Islamic Republic of Iran is the focus of this section.

Anti-Zionism is a key ideological building block of the Islamic Republic. The anti-Zionist rhetoric of Iranian politicians frequently draws upon overt antisemitic imagery. In seeking to explain antisemitism observable in Iran, Jaspal noted that (1) both anti-Zionism and antisemitism enable the isolated Shiite Muslim regime to restore feelings of belonging in the primarily Sunni Muslim world and beyond; (2) their self-appointed leadership role in global anti-Zionism enhances feelings of self-efficacy; (3) antisemitism and anti-Zionism provide continuity to the Shiite ideology (and Ayatollah Khomeini's legacy) upon which the Islamic Republic was founded; and (4) Jews and Israel are personified in terms of a key threat to this sense of continuity.[45]

In a series of analyses of coverage of Israel and Jews in the Iranian state media, it was found that newspapers resisted social representations of Israeli statehood, instead constructing it as a malevolent regime.[46] This in turn served to substantiate and crystallise the social representation of the 'Zionist regime' as a terrorist threat. Coverage was consistent in its construction of anti-Zionism as a religious duty for all Muslims. Even in coverage of the so-called 'Arab Spring', anti-government protests that took place in several Arab countries in the early 2010s, there was a strong focus on Israel's demise as part of what was consistently described as the 'Islamic Awakening'.[47] To this extent, the 'Arab Spring' was 'instrumentalised' to forward the Islamic Republic's own anti-Zionist agenda. It has been noted that, as a 'mouthpiece' of the Islamic Republic, the English-language state media seeks to export its ideology, including anti-Zionism, to the outside world, especially to Muslims who may not identify with mainstream media in their own countries.

One of the most notorious examples of antisemitism in the Islamic Republic was undoubtedly the Iranian-sponsored International Holocaust Cartoon Contest that was published in the government-aligned newspaper *Hamshahri* in 2006. Jaspal conducted a visual thematic analysis of the entries submitted to the competition.[48] Jews were constructed as evil and the State of Israel as brutal. The international community was represented as subservient to the 'Nazi-Zionist' ideology. A recurrent theme across all cartoons was denial of the Holocaust and affirmation of Palestinian suffering. Threat imagery was pervasive across the entire corpus – the main objective of the cartoons was to trigger fear, hatred and action against Jews and Israel.

In addition to this work on social representations of Jews and Israel, there has been some empirical research into attitudes at an individual level. In a survey study of antisemitism and anti-Zionism in Iran, a strong positive association between antisemitism and anti-Zionism was found.[49] No significant differences by gender or educational attainment in levels of

antisemitism or anti-Zionism were found, suggesting that both forms of prejudice are pervasive regardless. Political conservatives and moderates both exhibited high levels of antisemitism and anti-Zionism, though political conservatives scored higher on both variables. The study used different scales to measure antisemitism and anti-Zionism. There was a significant interaction effect of political trust and Iranian national identity on anti-Zionism, suggesting those with a stronger national identity and higher political trust were more accepting of anti-Zionist social representations. There was also an interaction effect of political trust and Muslim religious identity upon antisemitism. Thus, social context is key – the more convincing that political institutions are, the more readily individuals will accept their threat representations. This also suggests that social representations disseminated by a trusted source (in this case, politicians) will be more impactful. Multiple regression analyses showed that identity threat was a significant predictor of both antisemitism and anti-Zionism, demonstrating the significance of how one reacts psychologically to intergroup threat representations.

A model for explaining antisemitism

On the basis of the social psychological theories outlined and the empirical research reviewed in this article, a model for explaining antisemitism is proposed (see Figure 1). The model outlines some of the key elements likely to be influential in stimulating antisemitism but will need to be elaborated as more empirical research is conducted.

It is proposed that negative social representations of Jews that are present and developed in media coverage, political discourse and everyday talk and experience are a key main determinant of antisemitism. These can be accentuated in the mind of the individual depending upon (1) their individual

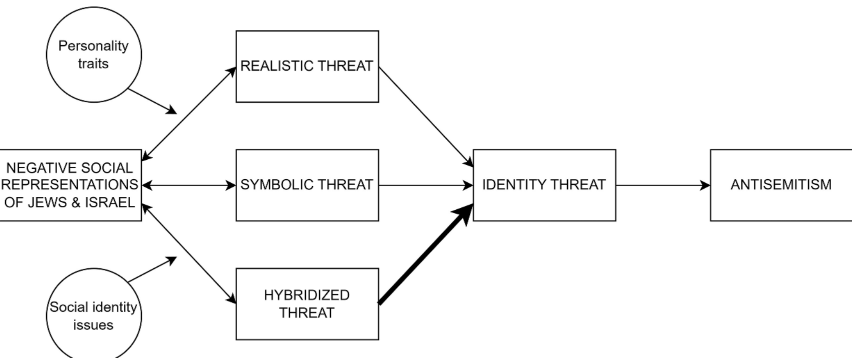

Figure 1. An integrative model of social representation, intergroup threat and identity for explaining antisemitism.

personality traits, such as authoritarianism, paranoia and identity resilience; and (2) social identity issues, such as the extent of their identification with particular social groups.

When the individual is exposed to negative social representations of Jews that construe them as posing a threat to their resources or wellbeing, they will likely internalise the belief that Jews pose a realistic threat. Those representations that construct Jews as attempting to change, challenge or do away with one's cultural values and norms will result in perceptions of symbolic threats. In some societies, however, Jews are clearly positioned as challenging both one's physical and cultural wellbeing in which case individuals will position Jews as posing a hybridised threat and thus as being hyper-threatening to the ingroup. It is important to note that, according to this model, social representations are the key determinant of perceived threat. Threat perceptions do not just arise automatically – they must be grounded in some form of representation. These representations may emerge in a number of contexts, as well as on the basis of personal experience. They may emerge for many different reasons. Yet, the relationship between exposure to negative social representations of Jews and the perception of threat is likely to be mediated by individual personality traits and social identity issues.

Some personality traits make one more susceptible to perceiving threat even in relatively innocuous situations. Many studies have shown that authoritarianism – a personality trait – correlates positively with negative attitudes towards Jews.[50] The content of the negative social representations of Jews to which the individual with high levels of authoritarianism is exposed is key – it could be hypothesised that, if representations construe Jews as a threat, they will readily be accepted by the individual with higher levels of authoritarianism. This is consistent with the individual's general proclivity to treat with respect authority figures and to accept uncritically the social representations that they disseminate.[51] In a study of personal values, Feather and McKee found that the personal values of power and security were positively related to prejudice while those of universalism and benevolence were negatively correlated with prejudice.[52] This too suggests that certain values may predispose an individual to perceiving threat from outgroups and thus exhibit prejudice as a self-protective strategy. In an experiment on the antecedents of Islamophobic prejudice,[53] it was shown that, over and above exposure to terrorism news (a threatening social representation), trait paranoia was the sole predictor of Islamophobia, which was operationalised in terms of negative attitudes towards a Muslim competing player in an online game. In short, personality is likely to shape how one reacts to threatening social representations of Jews and Israel.

Similarly, the extent of social identification is an important mediator of the relationship between exposure to a social representation and the perception of intergroup threat. Put simply, an individual who has a stronger

attachment to their ingroup will be more sensitive to threatening stimuli in relation to that group.[54] Moreover, since the group is an important element of their identity, they will take more seriously the threatening information and respond with defensive tactics.[55] In short, they will feel more threatened by representations that concern a valued group membership and seek to defend it.

All forms of perceived threat from outgroups can result in identity threat. In other words, feeling that an outgroup poses a threat to one's ingroup can lead people to experience decreased levels of self-esteem, continuity, distinctiveness and self-efficacy. Of course, some principles of identity are likely to be more or less susceptible to threat depending upon the specific type of intergroup threat that is represented and thus perceived. For instance, a symbolic threat from an outgroup might be especially challenging for the self-esteem principle of identity because in this case norms, values and representations that are central to the ingroup's identity content are being questioned and undermined by an outgroup. The continuity principle of identity, while vulnerable under both threat conditions, might plausibly be under greater strain when one perceives a realistic threat since this entails a perceived threat to the survival of the group itself.

It could be hypothesised that hybridised threats involving both realistic and symbolic elements that become intertwined and thus inseparable will be associated with higher levels of identity threat at an individual level. (This is represented in Figure 1 as a bold arrow from hybridised threat to identity threat.) This hypothesis emanates from the notion that realistic and symbolic elements of threat come to substantiate, sustain and reinforce one another and thus become objectified as a social representation. For instance, Jews are sometimes represented as a malevolent people seeking to challenge truth and to undermine the norms, values and traditions of Christians and Muslims, which reflects the symbolic threat perceived. The blood libel – a realistic threat – could be perceived as a natural extension of this. The representation of Israel is the objectification of realistic and symbolic threats from Jews, which pervades contemporary antisemitic representation.

There is a clearly a feedback loop between negative social representations of Jews and all three forms of threat – realistic, symbolic and hybridised. The negative social representations of Jews make it more likely that they will be perceived as a threat and the threat perceptions further sustain, develop and elaborate the negative social representations. When people feel personally threatened they will elaborate the social representations that are subsequently disseminated to others. Thus, the threats become elaborated and are reified in social representations that can last – as they have done – for centuries.

Identity process theory postulates that identity threat will lead people to engage in varied strategies for reducing or ideally eradicating the threat.

Coping strategies operate at intrapsychic, interpersonal and intergroup levels. Antisemitism is a case in point. The individual may come to hold negative beliefs, experience negative emotions and engage in hostile behaviours towards Jews. Scales for measuring antisemitism attempt to capture all three dimensions of such prejudice.[56] The specific target of one's negative attitudes may be Jews, Israel or indeed both. Research using social identity theory has shown that prejudice against outgroups can perform an alleviatory function for identity. For instance, downward comparison[57] can restore feelings of self-esteem since one identifies an underdog that enables one to feel that one's ingroup is in fact superior. Research using the terror management theory suggests that discrimination against outgroups can alleviate feelings of existential threat and thus enhance one's sense of continuity.[58] The denigration of a prime outgroup can similarly sustain the positive distinctiveness that is so central to social identity – after all, a social identity exists only when one believes one's ingroup to be distinctive from others and it is of course crucial that ingroup distinctiveness be founded upon a positive premise.

Conclusions

This article has shown that contemporary antisemitism is manifested in many different ways. Just three examples of antisemitism are examined but there are many more. Undoubtedly, antisemitism will continue to evolve and new manifestations will emerge. They must continue to be studied. Antisemitism appears to be unique because it is so long-standing and, despite the many attempts to eradicate it, has persisted. However, it is a form of prejudice like any other and thus theories of social representation, intergroup relations and identity can help to understand why and under which conditions it will emerge. The research presented in this article was conducted in several distinct societal contexts. Yet, a recurrent theme in all this work is that of threat. Jews and more recently Israel have consistently been represented as posing threats – symbolic, realistic and hybridised. Some people are more susceptible than others to these representations and accept them uncritically. These threats originate at a group level (as outlined in intergroup threat theory) but can have significant psychological implications at an individual level leading some people to experience identity threat. It is argued that antisemitism – manifested in many different ways – constitutes an easily accessible defensive response to identity threat associated with intergroup threat. This must be mitigated.

Some key recommendations for reducing the risk of antisemitism can be offered. First, it is important to recognise and call out negative social representations of Jews and Israel that may lead to intergroup threat. Clearly, this will be more challenging in societies, such as Iran, in which anti-

Zionism constitutes an element of the state ideology. However, pressure must be exerted on institutions to respect human rights. A careful analysis of social representations – especially in the press and in political discourse – can show the ways in which anchoring and objectification are used to create threatening social representations of Jews and Israel designed to incite hostility. Second, it must be acknowledged that higher levels of social identification, as well as some personality traits, heighten the likelihood of intergroup threat perception. A social identity – be it one based upon one's left-wing politics or one's religious or national identities – must never be based upon denigration of an outgroup. It may be possible to re-shape the content of dominant social representations regarding one's social identity and thus to distance it from antisemitism. Working with communities and especially community leaders will be key. Third, antisemitism should not be the most readily available coping strategy in contexts of threat. Alternative strategies, such as increased intergroup contact, would yield more fruitful outcomes for intergroup relations and potentially decrease the risk of antisemitism in those experiencing threat. In short, antisemitism remains a societal challenge. It must continue to be identified, called out and mitigated. The model presented in this article provides some scope for doing so.

Notes

1. Fein, "Dimensions of Antisemitism," 3.
2. Jaspal et al., "Bridging Micro, Meso".
3. Engel, *Zionism.*
4. Jaspal, *Anti-Semitism and Anti-Zionism in Iran*; Rosenfeld, *Anti-Zionism and Antisemitism*; and Wistrich, "Anti-Zionism and Anti-Semitism".
5. Loeffler, "Anti-Zionism".
6. Tajfel and Wilkes, "Classification and Quantitative Judgment".
7. Tajfel and Turner, "The Social Identity Theory," 16.
8. Branscombe and Wann, *Collective Self-Esteem Consequences of Outgroup Derogation.*
9. Stephan et al., "Intergroup Threat Theory".
10. Jaspal and Cinnirella, "Media Representations of British Muslims".
11. Breakwell et al., "COVID-19 Preventive Behaviours".
12. Bourhis et al., "Notes on the Construction".
13. Triandis, *Individualism & Collectivism.*
14. Feather and McKee, "Values and Prejudice"; Hogg and Sunderland, "Self-Esteem and Intergroup Discrimination"; Lopes and Jaspal, "Paranoia".
15. Moscovici, "Notes Towards a Description".
16. Wistrich, "Anti-Zionism and Anti-Semitism".
17. Jaspal, *Delegitimizing Jews and Israel.*
18. Breakwell, "Identity and Social Representations".
19. Breakwell, *Coping with Threatened Identities*; and Jaspal and Breakwell, *Identity Process Theory.*

20. Branscombe & Wann, *Collective Self-Esteem Consequences of Outgroup Derogation*; Breakwell, *Coping with Threatened Identities*; and Jaspal, *Antisemitism and Anti-Zionism: Representation, Cognition and Everyday Talk.*
21. Breakwell et al., "The Identity Resilience Index".
22. Jaspal et al., *Coping Styles in Heterosexual and Non-Heterosexual Students in Lebanon.*
23. Kressel and Kressel, "Trends in the Psychological Study".
24. Ibid.
25. Jaspal, *Antisemitism and Anti-Zionism: Representation, Cognition and Everyday Talk*; and Kressel, *The Sons of Pigs and Apes.*
26. Bilewicz et al., *Harmful ideas.*
27. Salzborn et al., "Antisemitism Research using Methodological Triangulation," 1204.
28. Cohen et al., "Modern Anti-Semitism and anti-Israeli Attitudes".
29. Kofta et al., "What Breeds Conspiracy Antisemitism?".
30. Golec de Zavala and Cichocka, *Collective Narcissism and Anti-Semitism in Poland.*
31. Raskin et al., "Narcissism, Self-Esteem, and Defensive Self-Enhancement".
32. Hirsh, *Contemporary Left Antisemitism.*
33. Ibid.
34. Rich, "The Aetiology of Antisemitism," 359.
35. Equality and Human Rights Commission, "Investigation into Antisemitism".
36. Gidley et al., "Labour and Antisemitism".
37. Staetsky et al., *Antisemitism in Contemporary Great Britain.*
38. Guhl, "Everyone I know Isn't Antisemitic".
39. Allington, "*Hitler had a Valid Argument*".
40. Schröder, "Antisemitism among adolescents in Germany".
41. Taguieff, *Prêcheurs de haine.*
42. "ADL's Global 100 Survey"; and Pew Research Center, "*Chapter 3*".
43. Jaspal, *Antisemitism and Anti-Zionism: Representation, Cognition and Everyday Talk*; Jaspal, "Antisemitism and Anti-Zionism in Iran"; and Jikeli, *Perceptions of the Holocaust in Europe and Muslim communities.*
44. Jikeli, *European Muslim Antisemitism.*
45. Jaspal, "Anti-Semitism and Anti-Zionism in Iran".
46. Ibid.; Jaspal, "Representing the 'Zionist Regime'"; and Jaspal, *"Israel in the Iranian Media".*
47. Jaspal, "Representing the Arab Spring".
48. Ibid.; Jaspal, "Delegitimizing Jews".
49. Ibid.; Jaspal, "Antisemitism and anti-Zionism in Iran".
50. Bilewicz et al., "Harmful Ideas"; Frindte et al., "Old and New Anti-Semitic Attitudes"; and Todosijevic and Enyedi, "Anti-Jewish Prejudice in Contemporary Hungary".
51. Baars and Scheepers, "Theoretical and Methodological Foundations".
52. Feather and McKee, "Values and Prejudice".
53. Lopes and Jaspal, "Paranoia".
54. Branscombe and Wann, "Collective Self-Esteem Consequences"; and Golec de Zavala and Cichocka, "Collective Narcissism and Anti-Semitism in Poland".
55. Vignoles et al., "Beyond Self-Esteem".
56. Allington and Hirsch, "The AzAs (Antizionist Antisemitism) Scale"; and Cohen et al., "*Modern Anti-Semitism and Anti-Israeli Attitudes*".

57. Wills, "Downward Comparison Principles".
58. Greenberg et al., "How our Means for Feeling Transcendent".

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