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A COMMON CAUSE

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A COMMON CAUSE

Reconnecting the study of racism and antisemitism

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ABSTRACT: This paper explores connections and disconnections in the study of racism and antisemitism within sociological inquiry. It begins with an exposition of how certain prominent theorists of racism and antisemitism (e.g., Du Bois, Fanon, Arendt) have in the past identified important connections between these fields of exclusion and persecution in the making of European modernity. While their analysis of connections between racism and antisemitism may have been uneven and provisional, the more recent tendency to replace such connectivity with separatist or even oppositional readings has been a step backward. This tendency toward what we call ‘methodological separatism’ impoverishes our sociological imagination for a number of reasons. First, it neglects the extent to which prejudice and persecution in relation to Muslims, Jews and Black people are connected phenomena in the formation of European modernity. Second, it encourages divisive and competitive analytical approaches which lock their protagonists in rival camps and reproduce aspects of the language of racism they oppose. While affirming the distinctive characteristics of anti-Black and anti-Jewish racisms, we argue that the development of a more integrated approach is required to enable our understanding of how modernity continues to operate.

Key words: racism; antisemitism; antiracism; Du Bois; Fanon; Badiou; sociology

1. Racism and antisemitism in the formation of European modernity

Racism is certainly a versatile phenomenon. It takes diverse forms and is aimed at diverse targets. One difficulty facing us as sociologists is to acknowledge the differences between racisms – be they anti-Jewish, anti-Black, anti-Muslim, anti-Irish, anti-Polish, anti-Chinese, etc. – but also to

explore the conceptual and historical linkages that bind them together. Racism may be directed against those seen as backward or primitive or alternatively against those seen as privileged and unduly clever at manipulating the world for their own interests (see Achinger: this volume). Different forms of racism co-exist. If we take one form as paradigmatic and privilege it into the *exclusive* form of racism, we shall not be able to see other forms, let alone trace their connections. Our conviction is that we lose something important if we isolate different racisms, or participate in a ‘competition of victims’, or worse, stumble into one kind of racism in our endeavour to resist another.

Racism and antisemitism have a connected history that is rooted in the formative period of European modernity (see Bhabra 2010a,b for further discussion of connected histories). They were linked on the one hand to the formation of homogenous Christian nations within Europe which was achieved through the ‘exclusion’ of Jews and Moors, and on the other to the colonial conquests of the non-European world through the objectifying treatment of indigenous peoples as inferior races (Fernandez-Armesto 2011: 87–114). The year 1492 illustrates the connections between these phenomena. It marked the victory of Christianity over the Moors, the expulsion and forced conversion of Jews within the Iberian Peninsula, and the establishment of Atlantic trade routes with the Americas. The opening passage of Christopher Columbus’ *Journal*, written for the eyes of the King of Spain, serves to exemplify this conjunction:

So after expelling the Jews from your dominions, your Highnesses, in the same month of January, ordered me to proceed with a sufficient armament to the said regions of India, and for that purpose granted me great favours and ennobled me that henceforth I might call myself Don and be High Admiral of the Sea . . . (cited in Stratton 2008: 10–11)

Ella Shohat comments that ‘European Christian demonology prefigured colonialist racism The *reconquista* policies of settling Christians in the newly conquered areas of Spain, as well as the gradual institutionalisation of expulsions, conversions and killings of Muslims and Jews in Christian territories, prepared the ground for similar *conquista* practices across the Atlantic’ (Shohat 1999: 136–7). First there came the development of the nation ‘at home’ through the expulsion and persecution of Muslims and Jews; then came slavery, disease and expropriation abroad with the subjugation of indigenous peoples. It was out of both forms of violence that the idea of ‘Europe’ was born. Both Jews and Muslims in Europe and colonised people outside of Europe had reason to cry: ‘Now Europe, O Europe, my hell on earth’ (cited in Stratton 2008: 18). The words are

from Samuel Usque, the Portuguese Marrano chronicler, writing one generation later.

If we make a leap from early modern Europe to the 'age of imperialism' and the scramble for colonies that took hold of Europe from the last quarter of the nineteenth century, the ties that bind antisemitism inside Europe to racism outside Europe were again in evidence. It is difficult to dismiss as sheer coincidence the chronological correspondence between the development of pseudo-'scientific' race theories, which were developed in relation to both non-European and European people, and the politicisation of antisemitism. Their connections need to be investigated but what is clear is that alongside one another 'scientific' racism and political antisemitism had a strong public presence in Western Europe, including in some labour movements, and became core elements of nationalist, pan-Aryan and pan-Slavic ideologies that proliferated in Central and Eastern Europe (Arendt 1979). The age of imperialism brought with it increasing vulnerability both for colonised peoples outside Europe and those considered aliens inside Europe. In the first two sections of her study of *The Origins of Totalitarianism* Hannah Arendt caught very well this connection when she presented 'antisemitism' and 'imperialism' as forerunners of the totalitarianism to come. Though seemingly independent of one another, these discussions were closely related to the new forms of nationalism that marked European society in this period (Hobsbawm 1992), as well as to the new ethos of a bourgeoisie tired of managing the tension between words and deeds and prepared to reveal a more naked brutality. At home and abroad forces were let loose that turned violence into the very aim of the body politic and proved incapable of rest until 'there was nothing left to violate' (Arendt 1979: 137).

When we approach our own era, some contemporary sociologists are still endeavouring to understand the connections between racism and antisemitism. Paul Gilroy (1993, 2001), for example, has done much to demonstrate that the 'terror of racism' for both Black and Jewish people are in 'some sort of mutual relation' and that a transnational history of Europe, Africa and the Americas that embraces these racisms might provide 'precious resources for understanding modernity'. He criticises any competition of victimhood between Blacks and Jews: 'The wrangle over which communities have experienced the most ineffable forms of degradation is both pointless and utterly immoral' (2001: 212). Against such competition of narratives, Gilroy argues in relation to the Holocaust that it is 'essential not to use that invocation of uniqueness to close down the possibility that a combined if not a comparative discussion of its horrors and its patterns of legitimation might be fruitful in making sense of modern racisms' (Gilroy 1993: 214). Gilroy looks back to an earlier and

more expansive tradition of critical thought, including the work of Frantz Fanon, to find the resources to make these current connections.

In the USA we find similar attempts to recover a time when connections between racism and antisemitism were acknowledged. For example, Cornell West has argued that the growth of antisemitism within the ranks of some Black activists (he was thinking especially of Louis Farrakhan) not only breeds an inconsistent antiracism but even compromises the prospects of effectively combating anti-Black racism: 'if we fall prey to antisemitism, then the principled attempt to combat racism forfeits much of its credibility' (2000: 110). He recalls that in 1964 two young Jewish civil rights activists were lynched by Ku Klux Klan members alongside their 21-year-old black comrade. Did this infamous episode testify to a natural solidarity between Jews and blacks as 'brothers in misery', to use Fanon's expression? Cornell West (2000: 104) responds cautiously. He acknowledges that 'there was no golden age in which blacks and Jews were free of tension and friction', and yet he continues: 'there was a *better* age when the common histories of oppression and degradation of both groups served as a springboard for general empathy and principled alliances'.¹ In his impressive study of this 'better age' and then its rupture the American scholar Eric J. Sundquist concluded his analysis on this note: 'although the points of disagreement (between Jews and Blacks) were and remain intense, their dialogue created a profound sense that the shadow of the Holocaust not only stretched forward and backward, forever a confirmation of Jews' precarious existence, but also reached out to encompass other acts of genocide and racial violence in purpose or effect' (2005: 527).

2. Explorations into connectivity: Fanon and Du Bois

We can illustrate the connectivities established in this 'better age' and its equivocations through the writings of two 'classical' theorists of racism: W.T.B. Du Bois and Frantz Fanon. Du Bois (1903: 19) is often quoted as

1. In a similar vein Paul Berman recalls a time when there was genuine popular enthusiasm among liberal Jews for the Civil Rights Movement. Noting that Jews accounted for almost two-thirds of the white volunteers who went south for Freedom Summer in 1964 and that three-quarters of the money raised by the civil rights organisations at the height of the movement came from Jewish contributors, Berman discerns behind this solidarity a politics of recognition able to associate slavery and Nazism, lynching and pogroms, Jim Crow and Czarist antisemitism, bigotry and bigotry. Berman sees in this solidarity a mix of idealism and self-interest: 'the higher-ups in the Jewish establishment always knew that people with sheets over their heads were no friends of Jewry either, and blacks were a good ally to have' (Berman 1994: 66).

declaring in 1903 that ‘the 20th century is the century of the color line’. Yet he revisited the starkness of this declaration in the light of his observations of the ill-treatment of Poles under German domination and his growing awareness of the horrors of antisemitism. In the 1930s, Du Bois made academic visits to Berlin under Nazi rule (Oppel 2008). Having witnessed Nazi violence against German Jews, he compared it both to the Inquisition inside Europe and to the European enslavement of Africans outside Europe. His eye-witness experiences in Europe revealed to Du Bois the reach of racism beyond the black/white binary. After one particular antisemitic episode involving a Jewish travelling companion, Du Bois (1952: 251) remarked that ‘It had never occurred to me until then that any exhibition of race prejudice could be anything but color prejudice’. This was a relatively trivial episode. Later a visit to the Warsaw Ghetto clarified to him ‘a more complete understanding of the Negro problem’ as a problem connected to other forms of racism. Du Bois’ experiences in Europe prompted him to deepen his understanding of racism as a form of ‘human hate’ capable of ‘reaching all sorts of people’ of all kinds of skin colours:

The ghetto of Warsaw helped me to emerge from a certain social provincialism into a broader conception of what the fight against race segregation, religious discrimination, and the oppression by wealth had to become if civilisation was going to triumph and broaden in the world. (1952: 253)

In the struggles for civil rights Du Bois expressed a concern for antisemitism and welcomed the active support of Jews for the National Association for the Advancement of Coloured People, which he co-founded. He acknowledged the contribution of Jews to the civil rights movement and their own continued vulnerability to racism. However, the ‘Israel question’ created signs of a new rift. In line with the Communist Party, of which he was a loyal member, Du Bois at first supported the establishment of the state of Israel in 1948 but soon renounced support in favour of Arab nations aligned against Zionism. In his poem *Suez* he wrote that Israel had betrayed the murdered of the Holocaust and become a pawn of Western imperialism (Sundquist 2005: 154). This poem does not necessarily signify a diminished commitment to the fight against antisemitism, but it prefigures the rise of a new division.

Frantz Fanon was similarly troubled by the persecution of Jews in Europe. While Du Bois’ initial reference point was the legacy of slavery and the denial of equal rights in the United States, Fanon coming from the French colony of Martinique was more exercised by the effects of European colonialism. Fanon shared Du Bois’ horror of Nazi atrocities. ‘Anti-Semitism’ he wrote ‘hits me head-on: I am enraged, I am bled white

by an appalling battle' (1993: 88). Fanon was at pains to state his solidarity with the persecuted Jew. His ethical stance was informed by Jaspers' concept of metaphysical guilt: 'if he does not stand with his Jewish brother, he stands against him by default' (1993: 89). This reflective empathy prompted Fanon to ask:

Is there in truth any difference between one racism and another? Do not all of them show the same collapse, the same bankruptcy of man? (Fanon 1967: 86)

Fanon offered an equivocal response to his own question. Despite his evident anguish about the cruelties of antisemitism and the shared symbolic meaning assigned to Jews and Blacks as 'evil' counterpoints to the 'good' Christian, he ultimately judged that colour divides Black from Jew:

The Jew can be unknown in his Jewishness. He is not wholly what he is. One hopes, one waits. His actions, his behaviour are the final determinant. He is a white man, and, apart from some rather debatable characteristics, he can sometimes go unnoticed ... (Fanon 1993: 115)

In *The Fact of Blackness*, a moving essay on the devastating effects of a racist white gaze on black people, Fanon's reasoning is that unlike the black man who is inescapably Black, the Jew 'can be unknown in his Jewishness' within a community of Europeans (Fanon 1993: 115). 'I am the slave' he wrote, 'not of the "idea" others have of me but of my own appearance' (Fanon 1993: 116). Inasmuch as Fanon saw Jews as 'white', he could not see how they could share his existential agony. He revealed how difficult it is for Black people to escape the racist gaze but the visibility/invisibility contrast Fanon drew with antisemitism downplays the various ways in which differences are made visible (Gilman 1992). If persecutors want to mark out a particular group as 'Other', they can brand them or enforce the wearing of a yellow star or pink triangle; sometimes visible differences are self-declared, as when Jews elect to wear distinguishing markers such as a skullcap or Muslim women elect to wear a headscarf. These qualifications do not undermine Fanon's understanding of the 'fact of Blackness' but they may temper the contrast he draws with antisemitism.

Fanon exposed the European hypocrisy of setting aside the rights of man when it came to colonial domination: colonialism was not about imposing the colonisers' way of life on colonised peoples but on reserving the colonisers' way of life – their freedoms, rights, democracy and material benefits – for themselves and imposing servitude on the colonised. Fanon located the predicament of Jews alongside that of

colonised Blacks but only within limits set by his perception of Jews as white Europeans (Cheyette 1997). On one occasion he characterised the mass murder of Jews as the product of ‘little family quarrels’ between Europeans – an unfortunate comment echoed by some anti-colonial writers to minimise the significance of European antisemitism (see Finkelkraut 1992). Cheyette (1997: 124) identifies the limitations of Fanon’s identification of Jews simply as white Europeans: ‘Jews are ambivalently positioned as both black *and* white, self *and* other, as both inside *and* outside Western culture’. If we disconnect European racism from European antisemitism, it becomes all the more difficult to understand the ties that bind what Europeans have done to the colonised and what Europeans have done to their own ‘outsiders’ (Cousin 2010).

Fanon’s equivocations are palpable. On the one hand, he heeded the connections his Professor encouraged him to make between racism and antisemitism:

‘Whenever you hear anyone abuse the Jews, pay attention, because he is talking about you’. And I found he was universally right – by which I meant that I was answerable . . . for what was done to my brother. Later I realised that he meant, quite simply, an antisemite is inevitably anti-Negro. (Fanon 1993: 122)

On the other, he resisted the implications of the shared predicament of Blacks and Jews that he raised. His equivocations, however, may matter less than the fact that he, like Du Bois, helped to open up the question of connecting racism and antisemitism as a matter of public discussion and political concern. These connections were a subject of keen interest for a tradition of antiracist thought that focused on three loci of persecution: segregation (in the United States), colonialism (by European powers and settlers), and the Holocaust (largely inside Europe). The scholars of this period struggled toward a universalistic understanding of these phenomena.²

3. Equivocations of the post-’68 period

In the post-1968 period the legacy of this universalistic understanding of racism was retained in a number of ways (see for example Back and

2. Paul Robeson, wonderful bass singer, political activist, member of the Communist Party, notably sustained a commitment to the connected struggles against racism and antisemitism. Lapierre draws attention to his insistence that ‘a direct line leads from Mississippi, South Carolina, Georgia and Alabama to the Berlin and the Dachau of Hitler’ (Lapierre 2011: 86).

Solomos 2000; Bulmer and Solomos 1999; Donald and Rattansi 1992). Representations of the Holocaust were deployed by antiracist movements – sometimes under the banner of ‘anti-Nazism’ or ‘Never Again’ – to create resonances between the history of European antisemitism and emergent forms of European racism. Enlightened architects of the ‘new Europe’ saw the European project as bound together by the signs and symbols of Europe’s past and committed the new Europe to teaching afresh to each passing generation the history of barbarism lurking beneath the surface of European civilisation (Habermas 1998, 2001). Their aim, as Tony Judt put it, was to ‘furnish Europe’s present with admonitory meaning and moral purpose’ (Judt 2007: 831). Social and political theorists sought to uncover the kinds of political community that once allowed racist and antisemitic movements to thrive and to diagnose the shape of new political communities in which these negative aspects of Europe’s past might be overcome (Fine 1994). This was the key, for example, to Jürgen Habermas’ thinking about the transition from nationalism to postnationalism as the basis of solidarity in European political communities: nationalism as the deeply equivocal form of solidarity in the past that on the one hand allowed for the development of social democracy and on the other created fertile conditions for the growth of racism and antisemitism; postnationalism as an emerging form of solidarity for the future that could, in Habermas’ view, at least create the political conditions for overcoming racism and antisemitism. Although Habermas, writing as a German, may have attended more to antisemitism than to other forms of racism, the struggle to come to terms with the subterranean history of both racism and antisemitism has been a critical aspect of the European postnational project (Fine 2010; Habermas 1998, 2001).

However, the legacy of connected resistance to racism and antisemitism was in some tension with countervailing tendencies to disconnect opposition to racism from antisemitism and vice versa, as part of a growing scepticism toward universalistic forms of reasoning. If radicalisation of resistance to racism was sometimes accompanied by various forms of particularisation on the street, e.g., in the movement from civil rights to black power, this was reflected to some extent in academe.

First, in the study of ‘race relations’ emphasis tended to be placed on the social disadvantage and discrimination suffered by mainly non-European and Southern immigrants and on the need to ameliorate the social conditions faced by immigrants and to construct a more inclusive democracy. The relatively small number of Jews who survived in Europe after the Holocaust did not figure strongly in this framework (Sweiry 2007). The upward mobility of many Jewish communities in Europe and America and the increasing perception of Jews as white, European and

privileged seemed to remove antisemitism from the list of current racisms that needed to be addressed. The tendency to measure the gravity of a problem along empirically grounded social scales tended to overlook the *symbolic* terrain on which antisemitism thrives.

Second, while the development of ‘multiculturalism’ in the UK offered the potential for Black-Jewish solidarity by encouraging rainbow alliances based on the mutual right to be different, it also leant toward a cultural relativism that treats every culture as a distinct entity. By proposing difference as a key response to racism, the multicultural approach emphasised what distinguishes Jews and Blacks over what they have in common. Keenan Malik has gone so far as to argue that the multicultural emphasis on difference is the glue that conceptually attaches antiracism to the racism it opposes. If the racist says we are irretrievably different, the antiracist contests the sense of superiority and inferiority that lies behind this claim but at the same time endorses the notion of difference in positive ways. Malik maintains that antiracists who follow this logic do not transcend the thought structures of their adversary:

Challenging the politics of difference has become as important today as challenging racism; this does not mean ignoring the reality of race but seeking rather to transcend the politics of difference, whether promoted by racists or antiracists . . . The concept of race is irrational. The practice of antiracism has become so. We need to challenge both, in the name of humanism and of reason. (Malik 2008: 288)

Malik’s critique does not take into account the diversity of multiculturalisms and the more open views of culture developed in its more critical variants, but it highlights ways in which a disconnection between racism and antisemitism can be encouraged from within a multicultural perspective. In practice antisemitism played a marginal role in multicultural perspectives, where colour became the more important determinant of difference (Delgado 2000).

Third, the development of critical race theories further illustrates the allure of disconnection. For example, Derek Bell (1992: 114), one of the architects of this approach, argued that Black opposition to antisemitism was less an expression of genuine solidarity than a means of status enhancement for Blacks in the eyes of Whites, and conversely that the solidarity of Whites with Black victims of racism was to be explained in terms of ‘interest convergence’, that is, the privileged express solidarity with the under-privileged only when it is in their own self-interest. This stance makes genuine solidarity between Blacks and Jews difficult to conceive. A thread running through critical race theory is that Blackness and Whiteness are primary sources of power and inequality and that in

this dichotomy Jews have generally become advantaged ‘White ethnics’ (Bell 1989: 122).

Fourth, there also emerged an identity politics in which antisemitism was seen primarily as the concern of Jews and racism as the concern of Black people. In either case victim experience was presented as a privileged source of knowledge-construction. This approach encouraged the writing of identity scripts that treat membership of a particular category as fundamentally determining of people’s lives (see Sen 2006 and 2009). Theories of ‘intersectionality’ allowed for both intrinsic and extrinsic connections between scripts to be made especially within the context of individual experience and biography – Black or White, gay or straight, male or female, Jewish or non-Jewish, etc. – but this kind of connectedness was arguably caught in a world of multiple particularisms (see Yuval Davis 2011 for a nuanced and connective reading of intersectionality). Commitment to particular identity scripts could be justified by compelling historical experiences, but the temptation was to reduce human experience to victim narratives and place them in competition with other victim narratives (see Appiah 2005).

Fifth, the splitting of racism and antisemitism was given an explicit temporal reading by those who argued that racism and Islamophobia are present-day realities in Europe, but that antisemitism is a problem of the past thankfully marginalised in the post-Holocaust period (e.g., Bunzl 2007). In this temporal mode of disconnection it is acknowledged that antisemitism was once a terrible stain on the European landscape, but it is now said to be safely tucked away in the past except for various Far Right groupings, and to have been overtaken by the defeat of Nazism, the fall of the Soviet Union and the rise of the European Union. Antisemitism is associated in this temporal discourse with the ‘national’ period of European modernity and in particular with the ethnic forms of nationalism that took hold of Germany and Eastern Europe. In liberal versions the story of European antisemitism is then given the happy ending of its displacement by ideas of right, difference and plurality (Beller 2007); in radical versions it is seen as supplanted by other kinds of racism, especially against immigrants, in which Jews themselves might also now participate. Either way, this periodisation functions to exclude antisemitism from the list of racisms that Europe now has to confront.

Sixth, and finally, we should note that the imperatives of intellectual specialism that occurred with the separate development of Postcolonial Studies and Holocaust Studies may have augmented this split. These research fields engendered rich findings on the workings of racism and antisemitism respectively but arguably at the cost of neglecting connections between them. There have been exceptions to this rule in both cases but unitary conceptions of ‘the West’ on one side (see Cousin 2011) and of

the ‘uniqueness’ of the Holocaust on the other (see Rose 1996: 41–62) make connections difficult to discern.

Much more could be said about these and doubtless other sources of potential separation between the study of racism and antisemitism (Jacobs 2005 and 2011), but the following qualifications may be worth stressing. If a way of thinking about racism or antisemitism is *one sided*, this does not mean it is wrong in its own area of expertise; and if a way of thinking about racism or antisemitism is a source of a *potential* disconnection, this does not mean that it is inevitable that this potential will be realised.

It was, however, around the turn of the millennium that these different forms of disconnection began to gel into a phenomenon we might call ‘methodological separatism’. What started off more like disciplinary divisions of labour turned into intellectually and politically disabling schisms in which racism and antisemitism were torn apart and resistance to racism and resistance to antisemitism became markers of opposed camps, each with its own friends and foes, each actively inhibiting cross-border connections, each tempted to define itself in opposition to the other camp, each foregoing empathy for the other (Lapierre 2011). Social antagonisms between Black and Jewish actors could make the split between the study of racism and that of antisemitism appear as an expression of actual splits within everyday life. In France, for example, the growth at one time of communitarian conflicts between Jewish and Arab immigrants from Maghreb North Africa was a case in point (see Altglas: this volume). But it was around the question of Israel – and political attitudes to Zionism, Palestine and Arab nationalism – that this split was consolidated in the form of an often bitter public confrontation between two emergent ‘camps’.

4. The current polarisation: new antisemitism theory and its antiracist critics

We shall illustrate the intellectual expression of this split through the dispute between what is called ‘new antisemitism theory’ and radical left critics of this approach. On the one hand, protagonists of new antisemitism theory come together around the idea that antisemitism remains a pernicious racism in the West and especially in Europe. They maintain that because of the delegitimation of overt antisemitism in mainstream society, the new antisemitism tends to take the covert form of ‘criticism of Israel’ or ‘antizionism’ and even to wear a deceptively antiracist mask. On the other hand, antiracist critics of new antisemitism theory tend to view it as an ideology that serves as a surrogate form of ‘Zionism’ and of a new racism largely directed against Muslims or Arabs. In the last decade the polarisation of these ‘positions’ has been a visible

political process fed by events in the Middle East but located in Europe and America.

The central claim of new antisemitism theory is that a more or less concealed antisemitism has re-emerged in discriminatory discourses in which Israel is depicted as a uniquely illegitimate state, Zionism as a uniquely noxious ideology, supporters of Israel as a uniquely powerful and harmful lobby, and memory of the Holocaust as a uniquely self-serving reference to the past (see Judaken 2008). The concern expressed in this approach is that behind that is called 'criticism of Israel' there can lurk the reconstruction of old antisemitic motifs in a new guise. It is not generally held that criticism of Israel is as such antisemitic but rather that it becomes antisemitic under certain conditions. In 2005, for example, the European Union Monitoring Commission (EUMC) argued that criticism can turn antisemitic if, depending on context, Israel is selected as uniquely evil or violent among nations, or if all Jews or all Israeli Jews are held collectively responsible for actions of the state of Israel, or if the occupation of Palestine is compared with the Nazi extermination of Jews, or if negative stereotypes of Israel refer to long-established antisemitic myths such as world conspiracy, blood libel or Jewish stench. Resonances of antisemitism are heard, for instance, in portrayals of the American 'Zionist lobby' not as one pressure group among many but as a secret world power, a universal conspiracy, even the American Government does not have the power to resist; or in portrayals of Israeli settlers as resorting to the ritual murder of priests or of Israeli doctors stealing the body parts of victims of the Haiti earthquake; or in discourses tracing Israeli violence against Arabs back to the failure of Jews, unlike most Europeans, to learn the lessons of the Holocaust.

The 'new antisemitism' here identified is one that treats Israel not as a real country, embroiled in real conflicts, marked by real defects, characterised by the usual distinctions between state and civil society, but rather as a symbolic vessel into which all that is bad in the world can be projected. Among the negative typifications heaped upon 'Israel' that raise suspicions of antisemitism are: exclusive concern for their own kind, indifference to the suffering of others, belief in an ethnic (Jewish) state, readiness to commit violence, lack of human sympathy for victims, etc.

Within the framework of new antisemitism theory we find differences of opinion concerning both the criteria and examples deployed to distinguish between legitimate political criticism of Israel and forms of criticism that fold into antisemitism. We find general agreement, however, that *some* forms of 'criticism' conceal antisemitic hate speech. The necessity of reflecting on this distinction is no different in principle from that of, say, distinguishing between political criticism of Robert Mugabe and a racism that declares Africans incapable of ruling themselves or, for that matter,

political criticism of Margaret Thatcher and a sexism that declares women incapable of public office.

Criticism of new antisemitism theory comes from various standpoints but there has arisen a particular discourse which states that, except on the Far Right, antisemitism is a spent force in the West. The argument goes that current 'purveyors of antisemitism' (as Badiou and Hazan 2011 have labelled protagonists of new antisemitism theory) are living in the past or worse have a hidden agenda designed to deflect attention from the crimes committed by Israel. Within this discourse we find the argument that new antisemitism theory is only interested in what is done to Jews and bereft of any wider human purpose; or that it exaggerates the incidence of antisemitism at the expense of other, more damaging forms of racism; or that it stigmatises whole collectivities of people as antisemitic, such as Muslims or Arabs or in some cases Europeans or the Left; or that it attempts to devalue concepts designed to designate other forms of racism, such as 'Islamophobia'; or finally that it misappropriates the memory of the Holocaust and the charge of antisemitism for exclusive nationalistic ends usually to do with cancelling criticism of Israel (see discussions in Bunzl 2007; Fine 2009; Judt 2008; Karpf *et al.* 2008).

A provocative example of this kind of discourse is to be found in the work of the French philosopher, Alain Badiou (Badiou 2011; Badiou and Hazan 2011). In response to the contention that antisemitism has made a return to Europe, Badiou rightly acknowledges that it has never ceased to be a feature of the extreme right and insists that it should never be tolerated. However, he distinguishes between a particularistic response which sees antisemitism as essentially different from other forms of racism and an egalitarian, universalistic response which places antisemitism alongside other forms of racist consciousness. Badiou locates himself on the side of the egalitarian and the universal (as do we), but identifies current 'purveyors of antisemitism' firmly on the side of particularism.

Badiou's case is that the word 'Jew' has now been afforded a fictive 'communitarian transcendence', located in a victim ideology referring only to the Nazi extermination of European Jews and ignorant of other persecutions. The signifier 'Jew', he maintains, now enjoys a victim status that places Jews beyond reproach and renders invisible other forms of racism (especially anti-Muslim and anti-Arab). It has shifted, according to Badiou, from that of the abused 'Other' to a protected category that legitimates Israeli violence:

Today it is not uncommon to read that 'Jew' is indeed a name beyond ordinary names. And it seems to be presumed that, like an inverted original sin, the

grace of having been an incomparable victim can be passed down not only to descendants and to the descendants of descendants but to all who come under the predicate in question, be they heads of state or armies engaging in the severe oppression of those whose lands they have confiscated.

Arguing that, for the carriers of this victim ideology, ‘Nazi atrocities . . . validate the election of the “people” that this predicate <“Jew” > . . . gathers together’, Badiou declares on a personal note that it intolerable to be accused of antisemitism simply because he does not conclude that ‘the predicate “Jew” . . . receive some singular valorization – a transcendent annunciation!’ and that ‘Israeli exactions . . . be specially tolerated’ (Badiou 2006a; see Badiou 2005, 2006b). In the ironically titled *Antisémitisme Partout* Badiou and his co-author Eric Hazan pursue this line of argument when they politically situate those who speak of a ‘new antisemitism’ firmly on the side of reaction:

for imperialists against occupied and mistreated peoples, for the police against the popular revolts of youth, for the Israeli government against the Palestinians, for controls and expulsions against undocumented workers – in brief, for established order and against exception. (Badiou 2011: 31 our translation)

The separation of racism from antisemitism, the subject of our essay, finds expression here in the devaluation of the term ‘antisemitism’. Badiou writes that the ‘constant use of the word’ has been reduced to a ‘power of intimidation’ and functions to ‘eradicate forever the very possibility of political universalism’ (Badiou 2006a). Contrasting creative (Christian) universalism to Jewish communitarianism (citing St Paul’s disconnection of Christianity from established Judaism), Badiou calls for a rupture with ‘the exclusive identitarian claim’ of Israel to be a Jewish state and berates ‘the incessant privileges’ he sees Israel as drawing from this claim (Badiou 2006).

Badiou’s use of the passive in these passages blurs the question of referent: that is, who precisely is said to sacralise the word ‘Jew’, or to use the word ‘antisemitism’ only as a means of intimidation, or to resist the very possibility of political universalism? We have no wish to counter the universalistic ideals Badiou proclaims: namely that a ‘truly contemporary state is cosmopolitan’, ‘indistinct in its identitarian configuration’, a state where there is ‘neither Arab nor Jew’, a state in which ‘whoever is here is from here’ (see Fine 2007). However, for this ideal to be universalistic it has to be universalistically applied. When Badiou treats the word ‘Jew’ as *the* obstacle to its realisation, he turns ‘the Jews’ into the particularised signifier *par excellence*. Taken in isolation this construction of ‘the Jew’

removes the question of antisemitism from the antiracist agenda. The performative contradiction here is that resentment against alleged Jewish 'exemption' is treated as the foundation for a universal antiracism.³

5. Conclusion: overcoming methodological separatism

How are we to analyse the emergence of such impassioned hostility to the word 'antisemitism' among antiracists? First, it should be acknowledged that the excesses alleged by critics of new antisemitism theory do indeed exist. There are Jewish ultra-nationalists (including and beyond settler movements in Israel–Palestine) who use the word 'antisemitism' as a stick to beat 'Arabs', 'Muslims' and the 'Left' and use memory of the Holocaust as a justification for their own racism (Israeli 2011). Such ultra-nationalism plays its own role in disconnecting antisemitism from other racisms. However, new antisemitism theory is a broad approach in which many currents co-exist, some of which strive for an egalitarian and universalistic opposition to antisemitism alongside other racisms (Hirsh 2007). The fault lines running through new antisemitism theory become invisible if its critics only relate to it through homogenising and stigmatising stereotypes.

Second, it should be emphasised that an ultra-nationalist outlook is not the peculiarity of those who combat antisemitism. It may rather be the case that the separatist wings of new antisemitism theory and of critical race theory increasingly mirror one another. Narrowness and exclusivity are no more the defining features of opposition to antisemitism than they are of opposition to any other racism, and opportunist cries of racism or antisemitism will always be part of the story of any field of racist prejudice. To treat concern over antisemitism as exclusively opportunist denies integrity to those vulnerable to it.

3. A related argument, one that stands up for universalism by particularising the Jews, is to be found in a recent commentary by John Mearsheimer defending the work of Gilad Atzmon: 'Atzmon is a universalist who does not like the particularism that characterizes Zionism and which has a rich tradition among Jews and any number of other groups. He is the kind of person who intensely dislikes nationalism of any sort. Princeton professor Richard Falk captures this point nicely in his own blurb for the book, where he writes: 'Atzmon has written an absorbing and moving account of his journey from hard-core Israeli nationalist to a de-Zionized patriot of humanity'. Atzmon's basic point is that Jews often talk in universalistic terms, but many of them (sic) think and act in particularistic terms. One might say they talk like liberals but act like nationalists. Atzmon will have none of this, which is why he labels himself a self-hating Jew. He fervently believes that Jews are not the 'Chosen People' and that they should not privilege their 'Jewishness' over their other human traits' (Mearsheimer 2011).

Third, the argument that the Holocaust has become the means by which the word 'Jew' is placed above judgment and the existence of other racisms neglected generalises from one particular and highly particularistic way of memorialising the Holocaust. To be sure, collective memory of the Holocaust ought not to be used to privilege the suffering of Jews at the expense of other sufferings or to protect Israel from its critics. We can agree normatively. However, the compassion one may feel for Jewish victims does not erase compassion for others. Compassion is not a fixed quantity of capital and memory of the Holocaust serves as a 'fire alarm' alerting us to other human catastrophes. The equation, memory of the Holocaust = defence of Israel = opportunist cries of antisemitism, also ignores the enduring meaningfulness of the Holocaust for racialised groups other than Jews for understanding their own situation (Sundquist 2005: 436–47).

Among critics of new antisemitism theory a two-fold slippage reinforces polarisation between camps: slippage from a specific critique of the separatist wing of new antisemitism theory to a general critique of 'purveyors of antisemitism'; slippage from a general critique of separatist responses to racism to a specific critique of Jewish responses to antisemitism. Together, these slippages foster methodological separatism. The ghost of Israel–Palestine haunts the current separatism between racism and antisemitism. The project of reconnecting racism and antisemitism is timely. The point we would make to critics of new antisemitism theory is not to abstain from criticism of Israel but rather to criticise racism in Israel in the same way we criticise racism in all countries. The parallel point we would make to protagonists of new antisemitism theory is that racism should be criticised wherever it is to be found – including within their own ranks. Universalism is deformed, and has long been deformed, if deployed as a device to particularise the Other.

We would echo the conclusion of Nicole Lapierre (2011: 300) to her recent study of *Causes Communes: Des juifs et des noirs*:

Empathy . . . is not a panacea taking the place of politics, nor a universal key liberating humanity. However, it can humanise political thought and action . . . empathy encourages solidarity founded on respect and reciprocity. It is to them that Franz Fanon pointed at the end of *Black Skin, White Mask*: 'Why not simply try to touch the other, feel the other, reveal the other in oneself? Is not my liberty given to me to educate the world about You'. (Our translation)

Sociology is broken by the schism between racism and antisemitism. These different racisms have distinctive characteristics and an emphasis on *connections* does not imply obliteration of differences. Indeed, it both extends understanding beyond the familiar and sponsors reflection on the familiar. While methodological separatism narrows our lens,

connectedness impels us to enter into the viewpoint of others. It expands our realm of empathy and our analytical reach.

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