Patterns of Prejudice

Fighting with phantoms: a contribution to the debate on antisemitism in Europe

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ABSTRACT The point of departure of this paper is the polarization of ways of thinking about antisemitism in Europe, between those who see its recent resurgence and those that affirm its empirical marginalization and normative delegitimation. The historical question raised by this polarization of discourses is this: what has happened to the antisemitism that once haunted Europe? Both the current camps—'alarmists' and 'deniers', as they are sometimes known, or, perhaps more accurately, new antisemitism theorists and their critics—have the strength to challenge celebratory views of European civilization. One camp sees the return to Europe of an old antisemitism in a new and mediated guise. The other sees the return to Europe of a rhetoric of antisemitism that is not only anachronistic but also delusory and deceptive. Overshadowing this debate is the memory of the Holocaust and the continuing presence of the Israel–Palestine conflict. The aim of this paper is to get inside these discourses and deconstruct the dualism that generates homogenizing and stigmatizing typifications on either side. The spirit of Hannah Arendt hovers over this work and the question of the meaning of her legacy runs through the text.

KEYWORDS antisemitism, critical theory, denial, Europe, Hannah Arendt, new antisemitism theory

> *But it is the black dogs I return to most often . . . the bigger one trailing blood on the white stones. They are crossing the shadow line and going deeper where the sun never reaches . . . fading as they move into the foothills of the mountains from where they will return to haunt us, somewhere in Europe, in another time.*
>
> —Ian McEwan, *Black Dogs*[1]

1 Ian McEwan, *Black Dogs* (London: Faber and Faber 1999), 174.

Antisemitism and the new Europe

What happened to the antisemitism that once played such a murderous role in Europe's past? Did it evaporate in the defeat of Nazism and revelations of the Holocaust? Did it survive in the cracks and fissures of post-war Europe? If it did, was it at last overcome with the subsequent project of European reconstruction and reunification? It is tempting to say that the Holocaust served Europe as a learning experience and that the extremity of its horror taught Europeans the lesson that antisemitism can only lead to barbaric consequences. This view is seductive but is it true?

These questions concerning the relation of Europe to antisemitism have come to the fore in recent years and have met with opposing judgements. Some look back to a period of European history when antisemites, as it were, wore their antisemitism on their sleeve, announced their antisemitism, were proud of being antisemitic—to a time when antisemitism was written into the political language, visual images and presentation of self in everyday European life—and observe that today, by contrast, there are few people who proclaim a positive adherence to antisemitic ideologies or are comfortable making use of explicitly antisemitic stereotypes.[2] They conclude that in the new Europe antisemitism has been empirically marginalized and normatively discredited and that to speak of European antisemitism in these circumstances can only be anachronistic, a language either of delusion or deceit. Others agree that the old European antisemitism had an explicitness that is no longer in evidence but maintain that antisemitism has continued to exist in a more mediated and hidden form than in the past. They say that antisemitism lies hidden beneath the surface of public life and that *work* is required to recognize it, the work of understanding and judgement.

The division between those who 'see' antisemitism only as a phenomenon of Europe's past and those who 'see' it still threatening the new Europe structures much of the contemporary literature. On the one hand, the central thesis of 'new antisemitism theory' is that Europe is now confronted by a new antisemitism: 'new' in the sense that it will not or cannot speak its name but in other respects closely connected with the antisemitism of old.[3] On the other hand, we find a way of thinking that has no proper name but whose central

2 The term 'antisemitism', introduced into the German language by Wilhelm Marr in the 1870s, is like the term 'totalitarianism' in that it was originally conceived by those who believed in it and only later redesigned as an analytical or critical category.

3 The literature on the 'new antisemitism' is expansive. For a good overview in this journal, see Jonathan Judaken, 'So what's new? Rethinking the ''new antisemitism'' in a global age', *Patterns of Prejudice*, vol. 42, no. 4–5, 2008, 531–60. It should be noted that the 'new antisemitism' literature includes both Americans and Europeans and individuals associated with the right and the left. See, for example, Pierre-André Taguieff, *La Nouvelle Judéophobie* (Paris: Mille et une nuits 2002); and David Hirsh, *Anti-Zionism and Antisemitism: Cosmopolitan Reflections*, Working Paper no. 1 (New Haven: Yale Initiative for the Interdisciplinary Study of Antisemitism 2007).

thesis is that antisemitism is by and large a historical problem and that to dwell on it today in the context of contemporary Europe is not just anachronistic but, in some more troubling sense, misguided and misleading.[4] Between these polar positions there is much that is in-between but one of the characteristics of the current period is the extent to which these ways of thinking have crystallized into opposing discourses. The question I put is this: how are we to understand this polarization and how are we to find a space between camps? This question arguably has less to do with antisemitism itself than with our ways of thinking about it.

What happened to European antisemitism after the war?

The question of what happened to European antisemitism after the war is one that has long been addressed within social theory, albeit on its margins. In the 1950s and 1960s Theodor Adorno deployed the term 'secondary antisemitism' to conceptualize the attitude he found common in Germany that the Jewish people were culpable of exploiting German guilt over the Holocaust.[5] On her return to Germany in 1950 Hannah Arendt wrote of the resentment many ordinary Germans felt at being blamed for Auschwitz. It was as if the real culprits were Jews who exploited the Holocaust for their own benefit, made money out of their suffering, denied the right of Germans to express their own suffering, and accused the Germans of being uniquely evil in their treatment of others.[6] Some survivors of the Holocaust spoke of the realization of what had once been a mere nightmare, the reluctance of fellow human beings to hear the story of their experiences.[7] Some told of the hostility they faced on the ground when they tried to return to their old homes.[8] Some told of the official restrictions imposed on them by western

4 An informative and diverse collection of essays critical of the idea of 'the new antisemitism' and expressive of this alternative radicalism is to be found in Anne Karpf, Brian Klug, Jacqueline Rose and Barbara Rosenbaum (eds), *A Time to Speak Out* (London: Verso 2008).

5 Theodor W. Adorno, 'Was bedeutet: Aufarbeitung der Vergangenheit', in Theodor W. Adorno, *Eingriffe. Neun kritishe Modelle* (Frankfurt on Main: Suhrkamp 1963). See also Clemens Heni, 'Secondary anti-Semitism: from hard-core to soft-core denial of the Shoah', *Jewish Political Studies Review*, vol. 20, no. 3–4, Autumn 2008.

6 Hannah Arendt, 'The aftermath of Nazi rule: report from Germany' [1950], in Hannah Arendt, *Essays in Understanding 1930–1954* (New York: Harcourt Brace 1994), 248–69.

7 Primo Levi recounted this nightmare in his Auschwitz memoir *Se questo è un uomo* (1947) (published in English as *If This Is a Man*), and then experienced it in real life.

8 Tony Judt writes: 'The returning remnant was not much welcomed. After years of antisemitic propaganda, local populations everywhere were not only disposed to blame "Jews" in the abstract for their suffering, but were distinctly sorry to see the return of men and women whose jobs, possessions and apartments they had purloined . . . The choice for most of Europe's Jews seemed stark: depart . . . or else be silent and so far as possible invisible': Tony Judt, *Postwar: A History of Europe since 1945* (London: Pimlico 2007), 804–7.

governments. On the other side of the Iron Curtain, new regimes in Eastern Europe presented the nations they ruled as victims of National Socialism, not perpetrators of crimes against Jews, and it is now well documented that official antisemitic campaigns were planned and conducted in the Soviet Union and its satellite countries in the name of extirpating 'Zionism' and 'cosmopolitanism'.[9] Tony Judt summarizes the issue very well when he writes: 'what is truly awful about the destruction of the Jews is not that it mattered so much but that it mattered so little.'[10]

To be sure, there were exceptions to this rule. For instance, although the Nuremberg trials of 1945 focused on crimes against peace and war crimes that had little to do with the Holocaust, the invention of the new category of 'crimes against humanity' was an original legal attempt to come to terms with the mass destruction of European Jewry, even if it was largely suspended with the onset of the Cold War.[11] However, what was common in the aftermath of the war was either non-responsiveness to the specific fate of Jews or, in the worst cases in Eastern Europe, the construction of a new antisemitism disguised as campaigns against 'intellectuals', 'Zionists' and 'cosmopolitans'.[12]

Most commentators agree that in Western Europe a significant change began to take place in the 1960s in relation to the Holocaust. The trial of Adolf Eichmann in Israel and the conceptualization of the Holocaust as 'the Holocaust' marked the beginning of a shift in Western Europe's relation to antisemitism. By the 1980s West Germany and Western Europe more generally appeared far more conscious of the enormity of the crimes committed against Jews and their own responsibility for them. The story of the destruction of the Jews of Europe became a familiar theme in books, cinema and television and, by the 1990s, official apologies, national commemoration sites, memorials, museums and laws criminalizing Holocaust denial were widespread.[13] After 1989 the 'Europeanization' of Eastern Europe drew the former satellite countries of the Soviet bloc into the orbit of Holocaust commemoration. The Holocaust and Auschwitz became universal references for absolute evil.

9   Stalin's ideologues were perhaps the first to suggest a correspondence between what the Nazis did to Jews and what Zionists did to Palestinians. See Zvi Gitelman 'The Soviet Union', in David S. Wyman and Charles H. Rosenzveig (eds), *The World Reacts to the Holocaust* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press 1996), 295–324.

10 Tony Judt, 'The problem of evil in postwar Europe', *New York Review of Books*, vol. 55, no. 2, 14 February 2008.

11 Robert Fine, *Cosmopolitanism* (London: Routledge 2007), ch. 6, 'Cosmopolitanism and punishment: prosecuting crimes against humanity'.

12 In post-war Russia the categories of 'Zionists', 'secret Jews', 'rootless parasites', 'cosmopolitans', 'Jewish nationalists' and 'Jewish spies' were intermingled to justify antisemitic campaigns. See Orlando Figes, *The Whisperers: Private Life in Stalin's Russia* (London: Allen Lane 2007), 493–521.

13 See Deborah Lipstadt, *Denying the Holocaust: The Growing Assault on Truth and Memory* (New York: Plume 1994).

In this context one temptation is to give the story of European antisemitism a happy ending and to pay tribute to the success of the new Europe in transcending its most longstanding hatred. Antisemitism is tucked away safely in Europe's past, overcome by the defeat of fascism and the development of the European Union. The rise of political antisemitism in the late nineteenth century, and its consolidation as an exterminatory antisemitism in the twentieth century, are associated with the ethnic nationalism that prevailed in Europe at the time, especially in Germany and Eastern Europe, while the end of antisemitism is associated with the universal civic values now embodied in the European Union and European Convention of Human Rights. At a more general level, while nationalism was a major threat to the acceptance of all minorities in European nations, notions of difference and plurality have now been liberated from this old nationalistic straightjacket. This reassuring narrative looks back to an era in which antisemites saw themselves as guardians of the ethnically pure nation–state and forward to a post-national Europe in which antisemitism is remembered, but only as a residual trauma or a museum piece. The optimism of this narrative is confirmed by the perception that Jews are now safely integrated at most levels of European life. Thus the idea of Europe as the civilized continent is rescued from the wreckage.[14]

The banality of this 'Europeanist' way of thinking is expressed by Hannah Arendt at the start of her work *The Origins of Totalitarianism*: it is 'to take that which was good in the past and simply call it our heritage, to discard the bad and simply think of it as a dead load which by itself time will bury into oblivion'.[15] The task of critical theory, as Arendt recognized, is not to confirm that Europe is the civilized continent notwithstanding the fact that its history of imperialism, inter-state wars and murder of 'pariah' peoples looks more like a 'slaughter-bench', to use Hegel's phrase, than a march of progress, but rather to face up to the threat that the subterranean streams of European civilization, including antisemitism, might once again come to the surface and 'usurp the dignity of our tradition'.[16] One of Arendt's fears, expressed in

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14 In *The Civil Sphere* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press 2006), 503–47, the sociologist Jeffrey Alexander traces a continuous thread of antisemitism in the American context from the eighteenth century to the twentieth but argues that, with the advent of a multicultural polity in the 1960s, antisemitism declined. Alexander attributes this partly to the learning experience provided by the Holocaust in the United States, where antisemitism has been represented as the enemy of Americanism and where being 'against the Nazis' has meant being 'with the Jews' (522). Alexander draws a distinction between the United States and continental Europe, maintaining that this outcome was not possible where 'important members of core groups . . . had themselves directly or indirectly collaborated with anti-Jewish murderers' (523). He concludes his narrative on an upbeat note, celebrating a philosemitism indicated by a 'growing Christian interest in marrying Jews'.

15 Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (New York: Harcourt Brace 1979), ix.

16 Ibid.

her analysis of the Eichmann trial, was that European liberalism would be more inclined to indulge in nostalgia for a supposedly still intact pre-war past and blame the Holocaust on a handful of criminals than assume any more universal responsibility.[17]

In the 1980s and 1990s a more active and less assured version of Europe's confrontation with its own antisemitism was promulgated by critical theorists identified with the new European project. Aware that manifestations of antisemitism at both intellectual and political levels continued to offer reminders of the work still to be done, Jürgen Habermas wrote of the danger that the new Europe might 'inherit antisemitic temptations symmetrical to those faced by the old nation states'.[18] Although Habermas did not see antisemitism as a danger within the larger population, he advocated resistance to antisemitism as a necessarily ongoing feature of the 'post-national' European project. In the final pages of his book on post-war Europe Tony Judt articulates a similar note of caution about the end of antisemitism in the new Europe:

> The new Europe bound together by the signs and symbols of its terrible past, is a remarkable accomplishment; but it remains forever mortgaged to that past. If the Europeans are to maintain this vital link—if Europe's past is to continue to furnish Europe's present with admonitory meaning and moral purpose—then it will have to be *taught* afresh with each passing generation. The European Union may be a response to history, but it can never be a substitute.[19]

Against a form of liberalism all too willing to bury the question of antisemitism beneath its seemingly unshakeable belief in European progress, critical theory sought to develop an integrated approach to remembering and reconstructing the past as well as maintaining vigilance in the present. Since 2001, however, this tradition of critical theory has split into radical extremes.

17 Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil* (Harmondsworth: Penguin 1977), 269.
18 Pauline Johnson 'Globalising democracy: reflections on Habermas's radicalism', *European Journal of Social Theory*, vol. 11, no. 1, 2008, 71–86 (77). Habermas had in mind both the antisemitism of the Baader-Meinhof variety that had its roots in anti-Zionism and anti-capitalism, and the antisemitism of a conservative kind that had its roots in the normalization of the Holocaust among revisionist German historians. See Jürgen Habermas, *The New Conservatism: Cultural Criticism and the Historian's Debate*, ed. and trans. from the German by Shierry Weber Nicholsen (Cambridge: Polity 1989), 187–95. After Black September kidnapped and killed Israeli athletes at the 1972 Olympics in Munich, Ulrike Meinhof celebrated the massacre as an anti-imperialist strike against 'Israel's Nazi fascism'. The antisemitic violence present within the West German student movement became apparent in 1976 when two young West Germans who had been active in various left-wing splinter groups in Frankfurt took part in the Entebbe hijacking and helped separate out Jewish from non-Jewish passengers.
19 Judt, *Postwar*, 831.

The polarization of ways of thinking about antisemitism

The historian, Matti Bunzl, has formulated the polarization of contemporary intellectual viewpoints on antisemitism in terms of an opposition between 'alarmists' and 'deniers'. He writes:

> On the one hand are what some have called the 'alarmists'. They tend to see the recent rise in anti-Semitic violence as an immediate and massive threat, not only to Europe's Jews but to Jews worldwide. This is not really surprising, since anti-Semitism appears to them as a kind of historical constant. Holocaust guilt may have suppressed it somewhat in the last few decades. But now, Israel's policies in the struggle with Palestinians are giving Europe renewed licence to openly despise the Jews. For alarmists, anti-Zionism and anti-Semitism are close to indistinguishable, any critique of the Jewish state carrying potential residues of the longest hatred . . .
>
> Their opponents in the debate on the new anti-Semitism tend to be critics of the Israeli and American governments, and they generally make their home on the Left of the political spectrum. In the course of the debate, they have been called 'deniers', although the term is rather inaccurate given that none of them actually dispute the reality of anti-Semitism. They do, however, question its current salience. Rejecting the idea that criticism of Israel is inherently anti-Semitic, they discount a whole set of phenomena—pro-Palestinian demonstrations, angry attacks on Israel's government, etc.—alarmists regularly invoke to buttress their case for Europe's anti-Semitism.[20]

According to Bunzl, both sides are wrong because of their reliance on 'overly static views of history'. 'Alarmists' see antisemitism as an immutable force of European history, 'deniers' see right-wing politics and racism in equally unchanging terms. What is missing, he argues, is recognition of the 'radical historical transformations in the status and function' of both European antisemitism and racism.[21]

Bunzl offers us a helpful way into the debate. I think it is fair to say, however, that he sees 'alarmists' as more wrong than 'deniers'. In his view 'alarmists' are fundamentally misguided—empirically about the resurgence of antisemitism in Europe and normatively because a focus on antisemitism 'obscures the far more pressing reality of Islamophobia'.[22] By contrast, Bunzl argues, 'deniers' have the merit of understanding that antisemitism has run its historical course and that in Europe other forms of racism, especially Islamophobia, prevail.[23] He criticizes only those in the denial camp who overstate the thesis: those who claim there is *no* antisemitism whatsoever

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20 Matti Bunzl, *Anti-Semitism and Islamophobia: Hatreds Old and New in Europe* (Chicago: Prickly Paradigm Press 2007), 3–4.
21 Ibid.
22 Ibid., 107.
23 Ibid., 4.

remaining in Europe (whereas Bunzl identifies radicalized Islamism as a potential new source of antisemitism) and those who attribute the subordination of Muslims to the very constitution of Europe (whereas Bunzl attributes it to the mutable politics of Islamophobia and declares his own adherence is to a vision of Europe as a 'secular, pluralist and tolerant continent for Muslims, Jews and all Europeans').[24]

There is no doubting Bunzl's moderation but some of the respondents to his essay have been quick to radicalize his thesis and intensify criticism of the 'alarmists'. Paul Silverstein writes, for example, that what really motivates the 'alarmists' is their insistence on a 'fundamental incompatibility between Islam and Europe', and he portrays 'alarmists' as rejecting the very possibility that Muslims can become insiders to Europe. The image he paints of 'alarmists' is resolutely negative: they think about the world as if there were a zero sum game of suffering in which any recognition of Islamophobia would dilute 'the narrative of Jewish persecution' and break 'the Jewish monopoly on victimization'; they falsely equate anti-Zionism with antisemitism and the Palestinian struggle for freedom with the Nazis.[25] Other respondents ratchet up this critique of alarmism alleging, for instance, that it encourages fear of offending Jews and provokes anti-Arab racism. These comments skirt on the borders of accusing 'alarmists' of racism. The questions I would raise here are whether this hostile reading of those dubbed 'alarmists' is justified and whether 'alarmists' are as homogeneous a grouping as they appear in this rendition. May not the differences Bunzl identifies within the camp of the 'deniers'—between his own moderation and more radical variants—also apply to the camp of the 'alarmists'?

The sense of alarm registered by the 'alarmists' (under the title of the new antisemitism) is triggered above all by the perception of a structural homology between hatred directed at Israel and Zionism, on the one hand, and old antisemitic tropes, on the other. What alarms 'alarmists' is a discriminatory logic that seems to have taken hold of significant sections of European public opinion: one that depicts Israel as a uniquely illegitimate state, Zionism as a uniquely noxious ideology, supporters of Israel as a uniquely powerful lobby, and collective memory of the Holocaust as a uniquely self-serving reference to the past. Beneath the surface of this political argument 'alarmists' hear echoes of old antisemitic tropes: conspiracy theory, blood libel, national betrayal and secret global power. It is not criticism of Israeli policy and practice that most alarms 'alarmists' (for their views on Israeli policies and practices stretch from the most uncritical to the most critical) but representations of Israel that suggest that Europe's

24 Ibid., 112.
25 Paul Silverstein, 'Comment on Bunzl', in ibid., 61–9.

antisemitic past has not altogether gone away. The past weighs heavily on their apprehension of the present.[26] If blaming Jews once provided a unifying ideology for a diverse array of social and political grievances, today's alarm is born out of the perception that 'anti-Zionism' may be providing a point around which sections of the far right, the anti-imperialist left, radical Islam and the liberal establishment are coalescing.[27]

The alleged deficiencies of new antisemitism theory are regularly exposed by those dubbed 'deniers'. Among the charges they level against 'alarmists' are: exaggerating the incidence of antisemitism in Europe; stigmatizing as antisemitic whole categories of people (immigrants, Muslims, the left, European liberals, the European Union itself); indifference to other forms of racism, especially against Muslims; dismissal of concepts that address other forms of racism such as 'Islamophobia' and 'anti-racism'; invoking the charge of antisemitism to obstruct legitimate criticism of Jewish communities and especially Israel; misappropriating the memory of the Holocaust for political purposes; treating antisemitism as a single, undifferentiated and timeless phenomenon from whose clutches Europe can never escape; isolating the critique of antisemitism from any broader social agenda; and dissolving the differences between an alliance against Zionism and an alliance against Jews.[28] This sweep of charges raises the question of precisely who or what is their target, and why alarm about the re-emergence of antisemitism should foster such antagonism.

Disenchantment with the language of antisemitism

Since the Holocaust was first conceptualized as 'the Holocaust' in the 1960s, there has been a history of normative debate around this naming. Does it isolate the genocide of Jews from other instances of totalitarian terror? Does it separate the murder of Jews from the murder of other non-Jewish human beings by the Nazis? Does it remove this event altogether from the order of historical enquiry, comparison and representation? Does it mystify the murder of Jews in theological language? Does it impede the possibility of understanding this event or undermine its necessity? Does collective memory simplify history into a fable of monsters and victims, and how can we avoid this outcome? The concern behind these questions is that the

26 See Walter Laqueur, *The Changing Face of Anti-Semitism: From Ancient Times to the Present Day* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press 2006).

27 'Antisemitism in modern France . . . united not only the losers in the process of political and economic mutations, but all the opponents of parliamentary Republic': Veronique Atglas, 'Anti-Semitism in France: an overview and a sociological interpretation', *Jewish History* (forthcoming).

28 For a cautious analysis of this phenomenon, see Michel Wieviorka, *La Tentation antisémite: haine des juifs dans la France d'aujourd'hui* (Paris: Hachette 2005).

Holocaust should not be enveloped in an aura of piety or sentimentality that actually leaves complacency intact.[29]

Today a new set of political questions has been raised over the formation of Holocaust memory and how the present determines what we remember of the past and how we remember it. The Israel–Palestine dispute hovers over this questioning. Does memory of the Holocaust underwrite an inward-looking attitude that says, as Peter Novick puts it: 'why should Jews concern themselves with others' when the entire world wants the Jews dead or is 'indifferent to Jewish agony?' Does it mandate 'an intransigent and self-righteous posture in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict'?[30] Beneath such questions lies the fear that suffering may not after all lead to a passion for justice but rather to resentment, hatred and an inability to trust. Is it the case that the abused (Jews) have now become the abusers (the Israeli state), and can the Holocaust still offer the learning experience envisaged by the architects of the new Europe?

The criticism we now hear is that collective memory of the Holocaust is too exclusive to meet the universalistic aspirations of the new Europe. Tony Judt, for example, expresses his concern that Holocaust memory privileges the suffering of Jews at the expense of other sufferings, converts the cry 'never again' into an injunction that such a crime should never again be done *to Jews*, and crowds out all other injustices, by treating the Holocaust not as one evil among many but as radical evil. The normative import of this criticism is that no *universal* meaning is drawn from collective memory of the Holocaust because the emphasis on *Jewish* suffering undermines the universalistic ethos that the new Europe is now supposed to reach towards. The Israel question overshadows all these concerns. The most urgent objection put forward by critics of Holocaust memory is that the Holocaust is used to protect Israel from criticism or even to justify the crimes Israel commits. Judt writes:

> Today, when Israel is exposed to international criticism for its mistreatment of Palestinians and its occupation of territory conquered in 1967, its defenders prefer to *emphasise* the memory of the Holocaust. It you criticise Israel too forcefully, they warn, you will awaken the demons of antisemitism. Indeed, they suggest, robust criticism of Israel doesn't just arouse antisemitism. It is antisemitism.[31]

29 Gillian Rose employs the term 'Holocaust piety' to characterize the representation of the Holocaust as the emblem of the breakdown in human history: 'To argue for silence, prayer, the banishment equally of poetry and knowledge, in short, the witness of ''ineffability'', that is, non-representability, is to *mystify what we dare not understand*, because we fear that it may be all too understandable, all too continuous with what we are—human, all too human': Gillian Rose, *Mourning Becomes the Law: Philosophy and Representation* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press 1996), 43.
30 Peter Novick, *The Holocaust and Collective Memory* (London: Bloomsbury 1999), 10.
31 Judt, 'The problem of evil in postwar Europe'.

Judt reports his own findings from the chalk-face: students no longer need to be reminded of the genocide of Jews since they know about it in ways their parents never did. They suffer not from a lack of Holocaust awareness but from a surfeit. The questions they ask are: Why do we focus on the Holocaust? Why is it illegal in some countries to deny the Holocaust but not other genocides? Is the threat of antisemitism not exaggerated? Judt adds his own: 'By shouting "anti-Semitism" every time someone attacks Israel or defends the Palestinians', by 'ransack[ing] the past for political profit', are not 'defenders of Israel' robbing the Holocaust of its 'universal resonance'?[32] It seems it is no longer antisemitism that is troubling Europe but talk of antisemitism.

Judith Butler pursues a similar thematic in her work on the political functions of the rhetoric of antisemitism. In an article on 'the charge of anti-Semitism', she quotes a speech in which Lawrence Summers, the president of Harvard University, expresses an apprehension: 'Profoundly anti-Israeli views are increasingly finding support in progressive intellectual communities. Serious and thoughtful people are advocating and taking actions that are anti-Semitic in their effect if not their intent.'[33] Rather than address the validity of Summers's apprehension, Butler expresses her own: that the charge of antisemitism might 'exercise a chilling effect on political discourse, stoking the fear that to criticize Israel during this time is to expose oneself to the charge of anti-Semitism'.[34] She acknowledges we must challenge antisemitism wherever it occurs but warns that this charge should be used with care since it can mean that 'certain actions of the Israeli state—acts of violence and murder against children and civilians—must not be objected to . . . for fear that any protest against them would be tantamount to anti-Semitism'.[35] Butler maintains that the charge of antisemitism is regularly used to translate what one is actually hearing, a protest against the killing of children and civilians by the Israeli army, into nothing more than a cloak for hatred of Jews. Her concern is with what is lost in this translation.

Addressing the relation between antisemitism and Islamophobia, Matti Bunzl maintains that a focus on antisemitism deflects attention from the real racism of the moment, namely, Islamophobia. According to Bunzl, antisemitism has run its historical course and Islamophobia has emerged in its place as the defining condition of the new Europe. Islamophobia, fuelled by the social forces that brought millions of Muslims to Europe, no longer turns on a question of race or nation but on that of civilization: 'the notion that Islam engenders a world view that is fundamentally incompatible with and

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32 Ibid.
33 Quoted in Judith Butler, 'The charge of anti-Semitism: Jews, Israel and the risks of public critique', in Judith Butler, *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence* (London: Verso 2004), 101–27 (101).
34 Ibid., 102.
35 Ibid., 109.

inferior to Western culture'.[36] The issue is no longer whether Jews can be good Germans or good Frenchmen but whether Muslims can be good Europeans. The transition from European nationalisms to European post-nationalism accounts for the insignificance at the current time of antisemitism (as well as for the philosemitic reconfiguration of Jews as the 'oldest Europeans') and, at the same time, the growing significance of Islamophobia. Bunzl finds supporting evidence in what he sees as the decline of antisemitism and rise of Islamophobia in the practices and programmes of right-wing parties as well as in the alleged receptivity of various Jewish communities to the politics of Islamophobia. Bunzl in other words inverts the opposition he sees at work among 'alarmists'. While they say antisemitism is a genuine political issue and Islamophobia is not, he says Islamophobia is the genuine issue and antisemitism is not.

A final example of disenchantment with the language of antisemitism can be found in the hostility shown in some quarters to official European and national initiatives to monitor and combat antisemitism in Europe. In recent years a number of European and state-based commissions and reports on antisemitism have warned about the resurgence of antisemitism in an anti-Zionist form. While they re-affirm that criticism of Israel is not as such antisemitic, they also warn that it can and does overlap with antisemitism.[37] This may be the case if, for example, 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 military occupation of Palestine is compared with the Nazi extermination of Jews. They aver that some negative representations of Israel refer to long-established antisemitic myths of world conspiracy, control of the media and murder of non-Jewish children, and that the substitution of the word 'Zionist' for 'Jewish' may at times make little substantial difference to the hostility in question. They pose in short the thorny question of where legitimate political criticism of Israel stops and antisemitism kicks in.

Echoes of alarmism in these official reports have drawn upon them the criticism that they exaggerate the threat posed by antisemitism, give

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36 Bunzl, *Anti-Semitism and Islamophobia*, 13.
37 See, for example, reports of the former European Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia (EUMC, now the Fundamental Rights Agency, FRA): *Manifestations of Antisemitism in the EU 2002–2003* (Vienna: EUMC 2004) and *Perceptions of Antisemitism in the European Union* (Vienna: EUMC 2004), both available on the FRA website at www.fra.europa.eu/fraWebsite/products/publications_reports/pub_cr_antisemitism02-03_en.htm (viewed 18 August 2009). See also EUMC, 'Working definition of anti-Semitism', 16 March 2005, available on the FRA website at www.fra.europa.eu/fraWebsite/products/publications_reports/studies_discussion_papers/studies_antisemitismreport_en.htm (viewed 18 August 2009); and the 'European Parliament resolution on remembrance of the Holocaust, anti-Semitism and racism', 19 January 2005, available on the European Parliament website at www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?type=MOTION&reference=B6-2005-0073&language=EN (viewed 18 August 2009).

excessive weight to the subjective claims of Jews that they suffer from antisemitism, give credence to the false notion that criticism of Israel is a form of antisemitism, and give support to restrictions on free speech and the right to political criticism. The 'deniers' express particular concern about the role of Jewish lobbies in shaping the reports of these official bodies. Bunzl, for example, notes that a 2003 report by the European Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia addressed the use of antisemitic stereotypes in criticism of Israel, such as the juxtaposition of swastikas with stars of David at left-wing demonstrations, and stated that antisemitic offenders were in some cases members of European Muslim communities. After a number of protests, the EUMC withdrew the report on the right and proper grounds that it was 'not in the business of stigmatizing whole communities on the basis of the actions of racist individuals'. It was careful to avoid blaming Muslims, declaring that most antisemitic perpetrators appeared to be 'young, disaffected white Europeans',[38] and that it could not verify the victims' frequent classification of perpetrators as 'young Muslims', 'people of North African origin' or 'immigrants'.[39] The World Jewish Congress described the findings of the 2004 report as a 'blatant whitewash for the sake of maintaining political correctness' and pressured the EUMC to be more resolute in its opposition to antisemitism.[40] Two distinct issues are drawn together in this critique: the identification of contemporary manifestations of antisemitism (the strength of the 'alarmists') and the tarring of collectivities with the brush of antisemitism (the temptation and weakness of the 'alarmists').

Critical theory and the claim to universalism

The normative premise of critical theory—the critics of alarmism—is resolutely universalistic. Memory of the Holocaust ought not to be used to privilege the suffering of Jews at the expense of other sufferings. The cry of 'never again' ought not to be converted into an injunction that this crime should never again be done *to Jews*. The memory of the Holocaust ought not

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38 EUMC, 'EU anti-racism body publishes antisemitism reports', press release, 31 March 2004, available online at www.eu-un.europa.eu/articles/en/article_3341_en.htm (viewed 2 September 2009).

39 EUMC, *Manifestations of Antisemitism in the EU 2002–2003*, 22.

40 World Jewish Congress dispatch, 'From suppression to censorship: the EU report on antisemitism', April 2004. See also Bunzl, *Anti-Semitism and Islamophobia*, 5; Brian Klug, 'The myth of the new antisemitism', *The Nation*, 2 February 2004; Anthony Lerman, 'Antisemitism in the UK: the parliamentary report and the government's response', *Institute for Jewish Policy Research* (blog), 3 May 2007; and Rosemary Bechler, 'A commentary on the All-Party Parliamentary Inquiry into Antisemitism', March 2007, available on the Faculty for Israeli-Palestinian Peace–UK at www.ffipp-uk.org/ AS_All-party_rpt_070317.doc (viewed 18 August 2009).

to protect Israel from criticism. The incidence of antisemitism in Europe ought not to be exaggerated. Concern over antisemitism ought not to blind us to other racisms. Critical theory defends the claim to universality against what is perceived as the particularism inherent in new antisemitism theory and in the practices of combatting antisemitism in Europe. This claim to universalism is indispensable as a regulative idea but, if there is one thing to learn from postmodern and postcolonial critiques, it is the difficulty of realizing the claim in practice.

Should we, for example, buy into the notion that collective memory of the Holocaust now consumes our capacity for compassion and makes us blind to the suffering of others? Compassion is not a fixed quantity of capital, and memory of the Holocaust can equally serve as a 'fire alarm' alerting us to the destructive capacities of the human species wherever they come to the surface. Reference to the particularity of Jewish suffering in the Holocaust, no more or less than reference to the particularity of the suffering of others, does not subvert the universal; it substantiates it.[41] As Hannah Arendt observed, there is no contradiction in principle between treating the Holocaust as a Jewish question *and* as a question of universal significance: 'the physical extermination of the Jewish people was a crime against humanity perpetrated on the body of the Jewish people, and ... only the choice of victims, not the nature of the crime, could be derived from the long history of Jew-hatred and antisemitism'.[42] To be sure, it is possible to interpret the Holocaust purely and simply as a crime against the Jewish people; it was in fact against the proclivity of the prosecution in the Eichmann trial to go down this nationalistic road that Arendt's criticism of the trial was aimed. Her reservations over the Eichmann trial had to do with losing sight of the universalistic meaning of the Holocaust. She heard the voice of Jewish nationalism in the fact that Eichmann was charged with 'crimes against the Jewish people', in the prosecutor's contention that only in Israel could a Jew be safe, in his camouflaging of ethnic distinctions in Israeli society, and in his refusal to face up to the complicity of certain Jewish leaders. For Arendt, the attempted extermination of the Jewish people was to be understood not only as the culmination of modern, political antisemitism but also as 'an attack upon human diversity as such, that is, upon a characteristic of the "human status" without which the very words "mankind" or "humanity" would be devoid of meaning'.[43] What the court

41 In an episode on 'The Bengal famine' of his radio series *Things We Forgot to Remember*, Michael Portillo suggested that the memory of the Bengal famine of 1943 and 1944, in which several millions of people died as a result of British maladministration and indifference, was extinguished after the war by the exclusive European focus on the Holocaust (broadcast on BBC Radio 4, 7 January 2008). What is more probable is that both the Bengal famine and the Holocaust were equally put aside in the post-war European mindset.
42 Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, 269.
43 Ibid., 257.

failed to understand, she argued, is that, in destroying an ethnic group, humankind in its entirety might be 'grievously hurt and endangered'.[44] Her concern was that the trial might reinforce the very situation that the idea of crimes against humanity had sought to correct: the breaking up of the human race into a multitude of competing nations. What is at issue here is *how* the mass murder of Jews is remembered, whether through a universalistic or particularistic lens. She maintained a universal responsibility, especially in Europe, to remember the *particularity* of what was done to Jews and to overcome the *particularism* of national responses.

Should we buy into the notion Butler puts forward (among many others) that the charge of antisemitism is employed to deflect legitimate political criticism of Israel? This may on occasion be true, but Butler herself may be read as translating the stated concern of her addressee—his fear that serious and thoughtful people are advocating and taking actions that are antisemitic in their effect if not their intent—into an attempt to censor or invalidate criticism of acts of violence and murder on the part of the Israeli state. The refrain that every time Israel is subjected to serious criticism the charge of antisemitism is levelled at the critics involves the translation of an original concern (over antisemitism) into a different concern (the defence of Israel).[45]

Or should we buy into the notion Bunzl puts forward that the expression of alarm about the rise of antisemitism deflects attention from the real racism of the moment: Islamophobia. The alleged prioritization of antisemitism over Islamophobia in new antisemitism theory is not resolved by a simple inversion of priorities. There is need not only for further empirical enquiry (for example, into whether right-wing parties in Europe have really dropped their traditional antisemitism) but also for further reflection on the universalistic premises of anti-racism. Anti-racism implies resistance to *all forms of racism*, whether against Jews or Blacks or Muslims, and alertness to their inter-connections. Its impulse is not to create a hierarchy of racisms, as if one were worth addressing and another not, but rather to probe their connected provenance and histories. Paul Gilroy begins his book *Between Camps* with a quotation from Frantz Fanon designed to emphasize the universality of anti-racism and the links between racism and antisemitism:

> At first thought it may seem strange that the anti-Semite's outlook should be related to that of the Negrophobe. It was my philosophy professor, a native of the Antilles, who recalled the fact to me one day: '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

44 Ibid., 276.
45 David Hirsh uses the term 'the Livingstone formulation' to characterize the propensity to reverse the charge of antisemitism by accusing the accuser of playing the antisemitic card in order to stifle debate: Hirsh, *Anti-Zionism and Antisemitism*.

to my brother. Later I realized that he meant, quite simply, an anti-Semite is inevitably anti-Negro.[46]

The racist murder of Bosnian Muslims belongs to the same thought-structure as antisemitism. To say that antisemitism is on the wane and that Islamophobia is rising does not address the connectivity between them. Racists are opportunists who do not hold de-selection and promotion meetings to vote in one group to hate and to let another off the hook.

My argument is that the claim to universalism made by the 'deniers' is exactly right but that this claim is undermined in practice. First, their target ('alarmists') remains non-specific and vague. We hear that 'they' are sensitive only to the mass murder of *Jews*, 'they' turn the Holocaust into an excuse to ignore other crimes, 'they' shout antisemitism every time someone attacks Israel or defends the Palestinians, 'they' ransack the past for political profit, 'they' rob the Holocaust of its universal resonance, 'they' translate a protest against the killing of children into a cloak for hatred of Jews. But who is the 'they' in question? 'They' may be identified rightly or wrongly with particular individuals or bodies of individuals, but I suggest that what counts in this rendition is the construction of an imaginary adversary who is the representative figure of particularism. The extremes of new antisemitism theory are taken as its essence.

Second, the tension between facts and norms undermines the claim to universalism. The factual claim that antisemitism is no longer a problem in postmodern Europe excludes it from the list of racisms Europeans now have to confront if their post-national project is to be furthered. Antisemitism is simply bracketed as a problem solved.

Third, the classification of modernity into national and post-national 'periods', and the association of antisemitism with the former and not the latter, leaves out of consideration the multiple ways in which the past weighs upon the present. A formulaic schema is substituted for historical enquiry. It also over-burdens the association of antisemitism with nationalism. Hannah Arendt, for example, observed that the antisemitic parties that surfaced in the 1870s presented themselves as a *transnational* alternative to national govern-ments, their claim to exclusive rule in Europe mirroring what 'the Jews' had already appeared to achieve. The National Socialist movement, in spite of its name, stood against the existing order of nation–states and the values and institutions embodied in it. Nazism had a genuine contempt for the provincialism and parochialism of nation–states. Its leaders were insistent that their movement was international in scope, organization and aspiration, and more important to them than any bounded nation. The conception of race cut across the unity of the nation and was employed to attack the architectonics of the nation–state: its petty nationalism, its parliamentary talking-shops and

46 Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks* quoted in Paul Gilroy, *Between Camps: Nations, Culture and the Allure of Race* (Harmondsworth: Penguin 2001), 1.

its bourgeois legality.[47] There was to be sure an affinity between certain kinds of nationalism and antisemitism: post-imperial nationalist movements that arose out of the wreckage of the old Russian, Austro-Hungarian, Prussian and Ottoman empires blamed Jews *inter alia* for supporting the detested and fallen imperial rulers. However, there was no simple identity.

Fourth, the claim that antisemitism has run its historical course with the rise of post-national Europe needs to be tested.[48] The elevation of post-nationalism into an ideal gives rise to its own temptations towards the exclusion of the Other.[49] This possibility is latent in the notion that Europeans have learned the hard way that nationalism is one of the major pathologies of modern society and that the key political struggle of our age is between those who believe that the state should be based on universal constitutional principles and those who still base the state on some kind of national membership. The conceptual dichotomy between post-nationalism and nationalism puts all that is positive on the side of post-nationalism and all that is negative on the side of nationalism. The good is split from the bad without confronting the equivocations of either side. This dichotomy has the potential to construct a moral division of the world into 'us' and 'them', post-nationalists and nationalists, which stigmatizes the others as much as it idealizes ourselves. It is not inevitable that post-nationalism must be exclusionary in this way, but the urge is intrinsic to it.[50]

Finally, the representation of Israel as the incarnation of the negative properties Europe has succeeded in overcoming—its colonial past, its ethnic divisions, its institutionalized racism, its excesses of violence—may to a greater or lesser extent start with real-world phenomena. However, it translates them into a language of a pariah state. 'Israel' and 'Zionism' serve in such representations not so much as names for a particular society and political ideology, changing and developing historically as a result of both endogenous factors and exogenous relations with others, but as vessels into which Europe can project all that is violent in its own past and present, and

47 See Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, 341–88. She writes: 'Hitler very early promised that the Nazi movement would "transcend the narrow limits of modern nationalism" and during the war attempts were made to erase the word "nation" from the National Socialist vocabulary altogether. Only world powers seemed still to have a chance of independent survival . . . Nazi propaganda . . . discovered in the "supranational because intensely national Jew" the forerunner of the German master of the world' (360). See also Mark Mazower, *Dark Continent: Europe's Twentieth Century* (Harmondsworth: Penguin 1998), 141–84.

48 See Bernard Henri-Levy, *The Left in Dark Times: A Stand against the New Barbarism* (New York: Random House 2008); and Moishe Postone's penetrating analysis of antisemitism and contemporary Marxism in 'History and helplessness: mass mobilization and contemporary forms of anticapitalism', *Public Culture*, vol. 18, no. 1, 2006.

49 Fine, *Cosmopolitanism*, 40–8.

50 See Uday Singh Mehta, *Liberalism and Empire: A Study in Nineteenth-century British Liberal Thought* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press 1999).

preserve the good for itself. In the undercurrents of European thought there has long existed an essentially nihilistic conviction that, if we can only rid ourselves of some alien element on to which we project the ills of society—be it the bourgeoisie, parasites, terrorists or Jews—then all will be well with the world. The representation of Israel as a pariah state or pariah people can perform a similar mythic function for a European consciousness anxious to divest itself of the legacy of its own past. This is not to say that Europeans should not have a role in criticizing manifestations of nationalism and racism in Israeli state and society, in criticizing Israeli military actions, in calling for an end to the occupation and support for an independent Palestinian state, or in advocating the renewal of cosmopolitan values in both Israel and a future Palestine. But this is a long way from a demonizing logic through which antisemitism can wheedle its way back into the new Europe.

Conclusion: alarm, denial, critical thought

Let me at this stage put forward my own conclusions. The 'ism' in the label 'alarmism' appears to indicate that the alarm registered about the re-emergence of antisemitism in Europe is not justified or would be felt whether or not it were justified. It implies a pathological state of mind that is all too ready to 'see' antisemitism, regardless of whether or not it exists. The great strength of new antisemitism theory, however, lies in the work that is done under this label to identify changing forms of antisemitism and marshal active resistance to it. Its insight is that antisemitism is not something we can simply intuit by looking inward into our own motives or simply observe by looking outward for overt declarations of hatred of Jews. Antisemitism may or may not be openly expressed. It may linger in the discursive nooks and crannies of well-honed antisemitic motifs: conspiracy, secret power, blood lust etc. As is the case in the presentation of self in everyday life, the forms of appearance of the new antisemitism may not immediately reveal what lies behind the scenes. Teaching us how to recognize antisemitism is the major contribution of new antisemitism theory to the wider anti-racist movement.

Its defects are the other side of its strengths. They lie partly in not resisting the temptation to stigmatize the antisemite as the antisemite stigmatizes the Jew, by tarring certain collectivities such as 'critics of Israel' or 'the left' or 'Muslims' or even 'Europeans' with the brush of antisemitism without addressing the irreducible pluralism that exists within these categories. They also lie in the temptation to view antisemitism as a unique phenomenon and in isolation from or even in contradistinction to other forms of racism. The point of departure is not universal humanity but a distinct category of people differentiated according to some particular identity. The temptation to respond to contemporary antisemitism through such a particularistic prism may be rightly criticized on the ground that it strips the question of its

universal significance. However, lest new antisemitism theory is pathologized as an especially illegitimate way of thinking, its limitations may be understood as but one instance of the much wider phenomenon, all too often normalized in the literature, of nationalistic responses to racism.[51]

Most of those placed in the camp of the 'deniers' rightly label themselves critical scholars in a broad sense of the term. The issue I have been raising, however, concerns the transition from criticism to denial, from criticism of the limitations of new antisemitism theory to denial of antisemitism itself. The label 'denier' straddles the ground between denial of something because it is not true, and denial as a state of mind that resists the truth because people are presented with information that is 'too disturbing, threatening or anomalous to be fully absorbed or openly acknowledged'.[52] Denial is not of course wrong in itself. If there is no antisemitism, antisemitism *should* be denied. But a 'state of denial', as Stanley Cohen puts it, detracts from critical engagement with the object denied. To deny the issue of antisemitism in Europe on the grounds that Europe has learned the lesson of the Holocaust, or to deny the issue of antisemitism on the left on the grounds that the left is inherently anti-racist, or to deny the issue of antisemitism within radical Islam on the grounds that Muslims are oppressed within Europe and have a history of tolerance, is in every case a kind of closure, a refusal to engage critically with the legacies of European, left and Muslim antisemitism. We may start with a *wholly justified denial* that Europe is 'swamped' by antisemitism or that entire collectivities within Europe ('the Muslims', 'the left', 'the liberals', 'critics of Israel' etc.) are antisemitic. We may then slip into an unwillingness to contemplate whether contemporary Europe has inherited antisemitic temptations from the past, such as, for instance, the temptation to hold the Jews responsible for obstructing 'our' commitments to universal human rights, social equality and anti-racism. And we may end up with the *wholly unjustified denial* (at least within Europe) that antisemitism is any longer a legitimate concern or that the taboo on antisemitism is any longer valid. It is out of such slippages that there arises the emphatic denial of the facticity of antisemitism and the normativity of sanctions against it, conjuring the haunting question of what it is in ourselves we are so reluctant to recognize.[53]

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51 My own research into struggles against apartheid in South Africa highlights the contrast between responses to racism constructed in terms of African or Black nationalism and those constructed in terms of anti-racism, non-racism and working-class unity. See Robert Fine, *Beyond Apartheid: Labour and Liberation in South Africa* (London: Pluto 1991).

52 Stanley Cohen, *States of Denial: Knowing about Atrocities and Suffering* (Cambridge: Polity 2001), 1.

53 Jacqueline Rose pursues the observation that 'resistance' is a defence of the mind that cuts us off from 'the pain and mess of inner life': Jacqueline Rose, *The Last Resistance* (London: Verso 2007), 5.

There is nothing natural in the opposition between 'alarmists' and 'deniers', new antisemitism theorists and their radical critics. A discursive formation of this kind should be understood as a social process. Ernesto Laclau carefully traces the dynamics of discursive formation as a process in which unity is created out of originally heterogeneous elements.[54] He shows that discursive formation is made possible by the inscription of a variety of particular demands within an 'equivalential' chain of demands. This process requires the fulfilment of various conditions: the transformation of one individual demand into the signifier of a wider universality; the naming of the discourse in question; and, perhaps most important, the identification of an enemy and the dichotomous division of society into camps. Laclau describes discourse formation in the context of a larger discussion of populism, but this rubric helps us understand how the polarization of discourses takes place. Alarm and denial become symbols of divergent discourses each made up of multiple elements, each drawn from plural sources, each containing a variety of political accents, societal diagnoses, theoretical presuppositions and normative conclusions, each, in short, less unitary than it appears. Each develops a sense of its own unity by constructing the other as its adversary. Each views the other through a network of negative typifications and caricatures. Each fires polemics at more or less phantasmagorical representations of the other. Each makes the other into its Other.

At present the contestation between 'alarmists' and 'deniers' is generally a verbal matter: rarely a physical encounter between angry crowds but a battle of ideas between opposed publics.[55] At one level the split between 'alarmists' and 'deniers' may be seen as a false debate between publics

54 Ernesto Laclau, *On Populist Reason* (London: Verso 2005), esp. ch. 4, 'The "people" and the discursive production of emptiness'. A related approach is that of symbolic convergence theory. Ernest Bormann argues that a self-sustaining 'rhetorical community' can be formed when people assemble, talk and construct fantasies that weld the group together. Enduring and cohesive symbolic convergence becomes the result of their discussions. See Ernest G. Bormann, John F. Cragan and Donald C. Shields, 'Three decades of developing, grounding, and using symbolic convergence theory', in William B. Gudykunst (ed.), *Communication Yearbook 25* (Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum 2001), 271–313.

55 The sociologist Gabriel Tarde distinguishes between 'le public' and 'la foule' by defining a 'public' as a 'purely spiritual collectivity . . . whose cohesion is entirely mental'. He argues that publics in this sense are a modern phenomena linked to the invention of the printing press in the sixteenth century. He maintains that the revolutionary public of the French Revolution was mainly Parisian, and that it was necessary to wait until the twentieth century to see the emergence of national and then international publics with the development of modern means of transportation and communication. See the discussion in Laclau, *On Popular Reason*, 45–6, and Gabriel Tarde, 'Le public et la foule', in Gabriel Tarde, *L'Opinion et la Foule* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France 1989). Today the public that has developed around hostility to 'Zionism' appears to have a global dimension with related themes emerging in many different countries.

that construct hostile images of one another but actually share similar normative presuppositions. Discursive formation, however, is real in the sense that each camp calls its enemy into existence and prepares the ground for a division of society into friends and foes. One of the aims of this essay is to suggest that to respond to antisemitism we need to escape the binary and find a more cosmopolitan space between camps.

Critical thought is liberating not because it produces any final code of conduct or definition of good and evil but because it questions everything and treats nothing as final. The great power of critical thinking, as Hannah Arendt writes in *Life of the Mind*, is to purge us of 'fixed habits of thought' and 'conventional . . . codes of expression'. The danger present in all critical thinking, however, is the underside of its power: it 'inevitably has a destructive, undermining effect on all established criteria, values, measurements for good and evil, in short on those customs and rules of conduct we treat of in morals and ethics'.[56] Thinking can justifiably undermine established notions of piety, but it can also 'turn against itself, produce a reversal of old values, and declare these contraries to be "new values"'.[57] The devaluation of existing values can at times give rise to a negative radicalism full of images of destruction. This is, we might say, critical theory's own demon and it lurks on the edges of the antisemitism debate.

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56 Hannah Arendt, *The Life of the Mind* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich 1978), 175.
57 Ibid., 176.