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Continuity and Discontinuity: From Antisemitism to Antizionism and the Reconfiguration of the Jewish Question

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Analogy . . . does not save us the work of comparison.

—Robert Fine and Philip Spencer¹

Abstract

This paper argues that antizionism must be understood, like the antisemitism that came before it, as an ideology. Here I draw upon Arendt's definition of ideology as a radical distortion of social and political relations. I draw also upon Fine and Spencer's understanding of the *Jewish question* as the antisemitic reaction to Jewish emancipation. I argue that antizionism is a reconfiguration of that reaction in the context of Jews' modern emancipation in the form of national self-determination in the State of Israel. While that modern reaction, antizionism, displays both continuity and discontinuity with the antisemitism that came before it, it remains a manifestation of the Jewish question.

Keywords: Jewish question, Ideology, Antisemitism, Anti-Zionism, Antizionism, Hannah Arendt

INTRODUCTION

Today, antizionism, like antisemitism before it, is coming to serve as a rallying call that, transcending regional and national borders, is taking on an almost global complexion. And, again like its predecessor, antizionism could well be on its way to gaining ascendancy over other competing "isms"² as a rallying call to the disaffected. Antizionism, in other words, risks reigniting the Jewish question and putting Jews once again in "the storm centre of events."³ Using Hannah Arendt as my guide, I offer some reflections on the nature, meaning and consequences of the shift from antisemitism to antizionism or, more accurately, from the *ideology of antisemitism to the ideology of antizionism*.

A recurring question within some sections of antisemitism studies is the "hyphen". Should we write "anti-Semitism" or "antisemitism"? It seems, however, that consensus has now been reached. Despite the existence of

"semitic" or "semitic" as a legitimate category within the study of languages. in the context of antisemitism, there is, in reality, no "semitic" or "Semitism" to be "anti." Antisemitism was, and is, never about Jews: it is about the *concept* of "the Jews" imagined by antisemites. With this thought in mind, I turn to the question of antizionism.

If it is the case that antisemitism has nothing to do with (flesh and blood) Jews, but has everything to do with the image of "the Jews" it conjures up, so too is antizionism detached from both the theory and practice of Zionism and the State of Israel. Intimations of this detachment between imagination and reality, between anti-Zionism as opposition to an actuality and antizionism as "opposition" to its own imagination of what "Israel" and "Zionism" "is," is often present, but the relevant conclusions of this detachment are rarely drawn. Thus, Alvin Rosenfeld notes,

Those who hold aggressive views [about Israel and Zionism] . . . hide behind the facade of anti-Zionism [*sic*], but the issue here is not Zionism. Most of today's fervent anti-Zionists [*sic*] probably know little, if anything, about Zionism and simply do not like Jews or the Jewish state.⁴

Here, Rosenfeld is intimating that, like "antisemitism" (which he writes without a hyphen), "anti-Zionism" (which includes the hyphen) has nothing to do with the theory, history, and practice of Zionism as it has existed in the real world. The presence of the hyphen, however, dilutes that insight leaving the nature of the Zionism that is actually opposed ambivalent or ambiguous. Is it referring to actually existing Zionism or to the imaginative projections of antizionists onto their own image of Zionism and Israel?

This "merely" semantic point has vast implications, not least because not addressing it may be ceding too much ground to the distortions that are the essence of antizionism. More specifically, it highlights the core of the issue—that of the continuities and discontinuities within the history of anti-Judaic *praxis*.

There is little doubt that the concept "antisemitism" is used often as generic shorthand for this entire history from its earliest beginnings in classical and pagan times through to the present. At other times, however, it refers uniquely to the modern period beginning sometime in the latter part of the nineteenth century.⁵ Yet, even when used in this narrower sense, "antisemitism" is subject to further distinctions: liberal antisemitism, nationalist antisemitism, genocidal antisemitism, cultural antisemitism, political antisemitism, antisemitic antizionism, and so forth. In the present context, though, confusion and controversy surrounds not so much antisemitism's *starting point*, but rather its (putative) endpoint.

For those who reduce the distinction between antisemitism and anti-Zionism to a matter of *form* rather than *content*, continuity is

emphasized. For example, Rosenfeld characterizes, anti-Zionism as a "newer form [of antisemitism], a "resurgent antisemitism," a "façade," a "label," and a "camouflage term"⁶ the purpose of which is to hide "older forms" of antisemitism (that, after the Holocaust, dare not speak their names). In this sense, therefore, antizionism is presented as little more than "old wine in a new bottle."

Conversely, antizionists stress a radical discontinuity between the two. They argue that, even if traces remain, antisemitism ended in the mid-twentieth century, coinciding with the end of the Holocaust and the defeat of Nazism.⁷ This view is accompanied often by the belief that Jews are today, fully and finally, not only assimilated into their host countries, but also share the same privileges as the most dominant sectors of those societies.

The political stakes at issue on the question of continuity and discontinuity should not be underestimated. If antizionism is separate per se or has shed any antisemitism, then antizionism can take its place among the respectable (if contested) political ideas of the present moment.

This idea is illustrated in the byline to an article discussing the recent attempts to ban Jewish marchers from the Washington, DC, Dyke March on the grounds that their flag contained the Star of David. For those seeking exclusion, this symbol was said to represent "Zionism," while the Jewish contingent argued that it represented Jews and Judaism:

IfNotNow's support for barring the Jewish Pride flag from the Dyke March was another example of the failure to distinguish anti-Zionism from antisemitism. The left's overall ability to make the distinction, and challenge antisemitism in its ranks, has been a key source of the progressive movement's weakness. To overcome it, we need clearer boundaries and a new agenda for the Jewish left.⁸

In other words, if only antizionism can be freed from the taint of antisemitism, its political

legitimacy can be secured. Antizionism can then take its place within the world of “rational” debate alongside that, of say, Brexit or housing shortages.

Rather than treating the question of the connection of antisemitism with antizionism as an either/or—one that does injustice to both—I approach the matter dialectically. This approach allows us to recognize the *novelty* of antizionism at the same time as recognizing antisemitism as one of its elements. Put in different terms, antizionism subsumes the antisemitism(s) of the past just as “modern” or “classic” antisemitism contained within it earlier, premodern forms of anti-Judaic *praxis*. In this way, any implication that non-antisemitic antizionism is legitimate can be challenged. I am arguing, in other words, that antizionism can never be legitimate contemporary political speech in the way that anti-Zionism may have been in the nineteenth century through to the mid-twentieth century.

In what follows, I will place the dialectic of continuity and discontinuity in the connections between antizionism and antisemitism in the broader framework of the Jewish question. The advantage of this approach is that, on the one hand, it recognizes an overarching (negative) narrative of Jews’ relationship to the world in which they are a part, while, on the other hand, it recognizes historically distinct forms each with its own *content* in which the attempt to keep Jews apart have been articulated. The Jewish question, therefore, allows us to understand and explore the “universality” of that question in its particular articulations.

The Jewish Question

In their recent investigation, Robert Fine and Philip Spencer identify the Jewish question as emerging in opposition to Jewish emancipation. Posing as “objective” or “innocent,” the Jewish question, they demonstrate, is little more than an anti-emancipationist tautology.⁹

Beginning with “the idea of the Jewish question [as] the classic term for the representation

of Jews as harmful to humanity as a whole,” Fine and Spencer break the “question” into three interrelated parts: “the nature of the harm Jews supposedly inflict on humanity, the reasons why the Jews are so harmful and what is to be done to remedy this harm.” The “answers” provided, though diverse, are, nonetheless, unified by an overriding negativity and hostility; they provide a litany of crimes and wrongdoings which include, but not exhausted by: “economic harms like usury and financial manipulation; political harms like betrayal and conspiracy; social harms like exclusivity and indifference toward others; moral harms like greed and cunning; and cultural harms like abstract intellectualism and contempt for nature.”

Likewise, the varied reasons and causes for such Jewish harmfulness include, “the restorative conditions in which they were once forced to live, the ‘tribal’ assumptions of Judaism as a religion, the ‘self-promotion’ of Jews as the ‘chosen people,’ the virulent character of ‘Jewishness’ itself and . . . the self-fulfilling effects of antisemitic labelling.”

It is in the wake of these harms and the reasons proffered that the “question” gives rise to a diversity in unity of “answers” or “solutions.” These responses range from the seemingly benign (which do nothing to challenge the question a priori, but rather assume its terms) such as, improving “the Jews’ ‘defective’ moral character . . . combatting the mindset of antisemites,” to overtly “malign solutions” including, “rolling back the rights of Jews, expelling Jews from their host countries to some foreign territory [and vice-versa] and eradicating Jews from the face of the earth.”¹⁰

What is important is that

we find that the Jewish question keeps re-appearing in different times, in different places. It is like a ghost that haunts how others see Jews and sometimes how Jews see themselves.¹¹

As will become apparent, understood in the context of the Jewish question, “therefore,

antizionism is one of re-appearance. Both continuous and discontinuous with prior manifestations, antizionism articulates a particular historically situated moment within the overarching presence of the Jewish question as a whole.

The Jewish Question, Antisemitism, and Antizionism: Continuity and Discontinuity

The dialectic of continuity and discontinuity has been a constant feature within the history of the Jewish question. Each new formulation of the Jewish question is accompanied by what I have termed elsewhere, the play of disavowal and distinction.¹² This play expresses itself in the opening gambit of a disavowal from prior articulations of the question, followed immediately by drawing a distinction between the disavowed history and a new “novel” contribution. Often, authors articulate this duality of disavowal and distinction with claims to “objectivity” such that, though some might find what they have to “report” as negative as regards “the Jews,” their own work is the result of the rigorous rules of academic and scientific endeavor.

Two examples of this phenomenon can be offered—the first from the dawn of the concept “antisemitism,” and the second in the more contemporary shift from antisemitism to “antizionism.” Thus, in the opening sentences to *The Victory of Judaism over Germanism*, Wilhelm Marr (attributed with coining the pseudo-concept¹³ “antisemitism”) writes,

What I intend to accomplish is less a polemic against Judaism than it is a statement of facts regarding cultural history. I, therefore, unconditionally defend Jewry against all religious prosecution and this it is hardly more possible to express this more closely than I have done here. . . . On the other hand, I emphasise the indisputable truth. With the Jews, the Romans have forced a tribe on the West which, as history shows, was thoroughly hated by all peoples of the world.¹⁴

Just over a century and a quarter later, writing in what he sees as the errors of speaking of a “new antisemitism” (i.e. antizionism), Alain Badiou applies the same rhetoric of disavowal and distinction:

This being the case, it doesn't seem to me that in data [recording antisemitism], which are freely available, are such that they justify a full alert, although it should be clear that, on such questions, the imperative of vigilance admits of no interruption. . . . Nowadays, Jews are pretty well integrated, and this kind of antisemitism and racism finds other targets. . . . *Today*, it is not uncommon to read that “Jew” is 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 but to all who come under the predicate in question, be they heads of states or armies engaging in the severe oppression of those whose lands they have confiscated.¹⁵

On the other side of the coin is what Hannah Arendt refers to as “eternal antisemitism”¹⁶ and which, to all intents and purposes, reduces anti-Jewish hostility to little more than a “law of nature.” In her account, specific instances of antisemitism are seen as, “normal and natural reaction[s] to which history gives only more or less opportunity.” For Arendt, three problems follow from this approach. First, no further explanation is deemed necessary, but rather manifestations of antisemitism are treated as “natural consequences of an eternal problem”:

If it is true that mankind has insisted on killing Jews for the past two thousand years, then Jew-killing is a normal, and even human, occupation and Jew-hatred is justified beyond the need of argument.¹⁷

Secondly, and following on from this point, if it were true that antisemitism was akin to a “natural phenomenon,” it would, almost by definition,

absolve antisemites of their individual responsibility on the grounds that one cannot escape one's own (human) nature.¹⁸ And, thirdly, as we shall see in more detail below, "eternal antisemitism" mirrors the Jewish question in the sense that specific articulations of anti-Judaism appear as little more than abstract "repetitions" of the same "natural" phenomenon.

A more promising approach to the play of continuity and discontinuity is David Nirenberg's recent encyclopedic *Anti-Judaism: The Western Tradition*. The image Nirenberg presents is of a historical "snowballing" of anti-Judaic thought and images in which ideas developed in earlier anti-Jewish manifestations serve as resources for and come to be included in later instances." Each renaissance of anti-Judaism, therefore, comprises a mixture of its forerunners while at the same time expresses something new or novel. However, as Fine and Spencer note, although Nirenberg "captures very well the recurrence of the Jewish question both in traditional and modern societies . . . [he] is less dedicated to working out what keeps it alive in the modern world."¹⁹

This lacuna within Nirenberg's work is the lack of consideration of the connection between the *ideas* of a given era and the social and political conditions in which they are located. In the context of this essay, therefore, the change in those conditions—the founding of the State of Israel in 1948 as a homeland for the Jews—is central to inaugurating a new episode in the overarching history of the Jewish question. As we will discover, 1948 presents a shift from antisemitism to antizionism or, rather, from the ideology of antisemitism to the ideology of antizionism. It is in this discussion that the interplay of continuity and discontinuity within the Jewish question appears in relief.

The Jewish Question as Ideology

Fine and Spencer's definition of the Jewish question as an *idea* of "Jews as harmful to humanity as a whole" indicates that we have left

the realm of reality and entered that of "ideology." What, then, is the meaning of ideology in general? And what is its connection to Jews in particular? It is to Hannah Arendt's account of these issues that I will now turn.

Arendt's understanding of ideology turns on its inherent connection with a totalitarian worldview. This connection expresses itself by the ways in which ideology presents itself as a *key to history* and, as such, reduces entire swathes of history and the present—along with all their conflicts and complexities, contradictions, and contingencies—into a unidimensional, predetermined "theory":

Ideologies pretend to know the mysteries of the world-historical processes—the secret of the past, the intricacies of the present, the uncertainties of the future—because of the logic inherent in their respective ideas.²⁰

Arendt explains this point further by noting that the *logos* (the -ology) of ideology resides not in its erstwhile subject matter or content, but rather in the belief that it is the *idea itself* that possesses its own logic and propels it forward. Arendt's point, therefore, is that an ideology tells us nothing of the historical, social, or political developments that it pretends to capture in its presentation of the world, but, rather, that it is the idea that becomes "the subject matter of science itself."²¹ Nowhere is her observation more on point than with the Jewish question in all its manifestations. For example, the ideology of antisemitism tells us nothing about Jews, but everything about the nature and development of the antisemitic *idea* of "the Jews." In the same way, the ideology of antizionism tells us more about itself than it does about Israel, Zionism, and what is euphemistically referred to as its "supporters." For Arendt, then, the study of the ideology of antisemitism and/or antizionism, is the study of an idea and the logic of its propulsion:

Ideological thinking orders facts into an absolutely logical procedure which starts from an

axiomatically accepted premise, deducing everything else from it; that is, it proceeds with a consistency that exists nowhere in the realm of reality.²²

For the Jewish question, therefore, the “axiomatically accepted premise,” and its “key to history,” is the “harmfulness of Jews to the rest of humanity.”

However, it is important to recognize that the specific *content* of an ideology cannot exist without at least some connection with the actually existing world, no matter how much its incorporation suffers malevolent distortion. Without this tenuous connection, ideologies in general and the ideologies of antisemitism and antizionism in particular, would simply not have the power or traction to convince population after population of their claims to explain (away) the complexities of past and present (and, it follows, the uncertainties of the future) and to *re-present* these complexities as little more than repetitious “proofs” of their initial *idée fixe*.

Nowhere is this point more in evidence than in Arendt’s own account of the Jewish question that comprises the first section of *The Origins of Totalitarianism*.²³ Although Arendt does not express it in this way (the section of ideology was written later) it can be read as tracing the way in which the actual history of Jewish relations (including Jewish agency) within the emerging nation-state crystallized into their particular ideological formation: the ideology of antisemitism. She illustrates the way in which the *content* of that ideology presents a radical, malevolent distortion, if not mythologization, of the actually existing social and political relations and the place and agency of Jews within them.

It is in this context that we read how and why some Jews came to be involved in financing both absolute monarchs and the early modern state. We read how and why, in this political context national “Court Jews” or “State Jews” maintained, and were expected to maintain, transnational family and communal connections;

how and why such connections resulted in Jewish families funding opposing armies while also ensuring channels through which the warring nations could communicate; and, finally, how and why Jews could also serve as the financiers of peace conferences and treaties. We read that Jewish emancipation’s uneven development (the reasoning behind which section of a nation’s Jewry was emancipated and when) was intimately connected to this intimacy between Jews and the state. We also learn why some of the sons and grandsons of these Jewish families were attracted to and entered the liberal professions and the “culture industries” and why others were drawn to social democratic and revolutionary politics. Naturally, Arendt describes the toll assimilation took on Jews, which in turn gave rise to talk of “Jewishness.”

It does not take a great leap of the imagination to see how these social and political realities were distorted through the lens of the Jewish question and its articulation through the ideology of antisemitism. Animated by its “axiomatically accepted premise” of the “harmfulness” of what now became “*the Jews*,” and captured within its unfolding stream of nonsense, these realities reappeared in the ideological staples that Jews are the “power behind the throne”; that “the Jews” dominate and controlled national and international finance and financial markets; that “no war can be fought without the agreement of “the Rothschilds””; that all wars are fought for Jewish interests and from which only “the Jews” will profit; that “the Jews” constitute a transnational secret world power to which all national governments and international organizations were in thrall and to whom they had to bow; that “the Jews” control the media; that “they” are both capitalists and communists. In short, “Jewishness” became an innate and determining essence of “the Jews” from which all these harmful attributes could be traced and the Jewish question explained.

However, it is important to emphasize here what Arendt is *not* saying about the (tenuous) connection between Jewish agency and the

ideologization of antisemitism. She is *not* making antisemitism's claim that antisemitism is an unmediated consequence of what Jews do or not do. What she is saying is that that agency, that acting in the world, once ensnared within the unfolding logic of the Jewish question, is distorted and mythologized within its unwavering malevolent narrative.

This point comes into relief through one of Arendt's own critical comments on the Zionist movement four years before the founding of the State of Israel. With hindsight, it is of special interest since it is often cited by antizionists as showing that Arendt herself believed Jews and Zionists were responsible for bringing down upon themselves the wrath of Jew-hatred.

In her 1944 essay, *Zionism Reconsidered*, Arendt expressed dismay and disappointment in the direction Zionism was taking. Criticizing the decision of the "General Zionists" to seek assistance for the creation of Israel from the "big [i.e. colonial] powers" rather than seeking agreements with the Arab inhabitants of Mandate Palestine and its neighbors, she writes:

If, in the present situation, the powers should be willing to help the establishment of the Jewish homeland, they could do so only on the basis of a broad understanding that takes into account the whole region and the needs of all its peoples. On the other hand, the Zionists, if they continue to ignore the Mediterranean peoples and watch out only for the big far-away powers, will *appear* only as their tools, the agents of foreign and hostile powers.²⁴

The sentence that follows immediately spells out the implication of the previous lines:

Jews who know their own history should be aware that such a state of affairs will inevitably lead to a new wave of Jew-hatred; the antisemitism of tomorrow will assert that Jews not only profited from the presence of big powers in that region, *but had actually plotted it and are guilty of the consequences.*²⁵

In these passages, the *appearance* of the relationship between Jewish agency and the ideology of antisemitism is clearly articulated. To phrase the matter in contemporary terms, the relationship between "criticism" of Jewish agency (in this instance, the direction taken by mainstream Zionism) and antisemitism (the myth of Jewish domination and the inversion of the actual relationship between Jews and the "big powers") is completely rejected. For Arendt, decisions (even ones she considered wrong) taken "innocently" can be, indeed, will be, filtered and re-presented through the Jewish question.

As such, it would be the gravest of errors to interpret Arendt's words as claiming that the antisemitism (and what would become antizionism) of which she warns is a *direct* consequence of decisions and acts made by Jews. Not only does this error rest on a complete misunderstanding of Arendt's critique of antisemitism, especially in its ideological formulations, it also overlooks her reference to "Jews who know their own history."

In addition to recognizing the *mala fide* of antisemitism and antizionism, we see Arendt's frustration with the General Zionists. For her, their decision to seek out support of the "big powers" replicates the older Jewish tendency, in the age before rights, to seek support and protection from Kings and Lords rather than from the peoples among whom they lived. From Arendt's perspective, therefore, this latest decision was part and parcel of Jewish "worldlessness" and political naiveté which she believed was possibly *the* major characteristic of Jewish history. While Arendt may have been mistaken as to the veracity of this history,²⁶ it nonetheless explains the nature of her angry chiding of mainstream zionism.

This reading of Arendt's anger and frustration with contemporary Zionist and Jewish politics is supported by her more measured consideration of the alleged relationship between Jewish agency and antisemitism. Fine and Spencer frame this aspect of her thought in the context of the confusion "between how Jews

responded to antisemitism and their responsibility for antisemitism.” Noting that, as in the present case, “Arendt’s use of language strayed over this line,” they write:

[H]er considered judgement was best summed up in the statement that to treat the behaviour of Jews as the source of antisemitism is “the malicious and stupid insight of antisemites, who think that this vile tenet can account for the hecatombs of human sacrifice.” Arendt may not have been wholly consistent, but at the core of her argument lay a refusal on the one hand to blame the Jews for antisemitism and on the other to rationalise Jewish responses to antisemitism.²⁷

Arendt was, however, correct about one thing: that the decision of the General Zionists to seek assistance from the colonial powers has become incorporated within the negative framework of the Jewish question. The question to be addressed now, therefore, is whether with the creation of Israel, and the corresponding focus of this “question” onto that State, we can continue to speak of the ideology of antisemitism or whether we are better advised to speak, with reference to Arendt’s comment about a “new-wave of Jew hatred” of the ideologization of antizionism.

Antisemitism and Antizionism

In the chapter “The Return of the Jewish question and the Double Life of Israel,” Fine and Spencer write that

[t]he most significant expression of the reconfiguring of the Jewish question in the present period lies in the negative representations of Israel and Zionism. While the stigmatization of the idea of a Jewish nation may be traced back to the Enlightenment credo that everything should be granted to Jews “as individuals” and nothing to Jews “as a nation,” it frames the Jewish question in ways that could not

have existed prior to the actual rise of Zionism as a political movement and especially prior to the formation of the state of Israel and the Holocaust.²⁸

In this section, remaining sensitive to the dialectic of continuity and discontinuity, I argue that this “reconfiguration of the Jewish question” is represented through the novel ideology of antizionism. On the one hand, continuity can be identified in the general connection between the Jewish question and Jewish emancipation; while, on the other hand, discontinuity appears in the particular nature of that emancipation. In other words, the ideology of *antisemitism* emerged in reaction to the Jews’ emancipation *within the nation state*, whereas the ideology of *antizionism* is the reaction of the Jewish question to Jews’ emancipation *through the nation-state with Israel as the “national homeland of the Jewish people”*.

As the discussion of Arendt’s understanding of ideology illustrates, there is a difference between the actuality of Jewish relations within the emerging nation-state and the ideological formulation of the relations. Looking today at the debates raging in the mid-nineteenth century over Jewish emancipation, it is difficult to recognize any anti-emancipationist argument that did not fall under the spell of the Jewish question. In many ways, the nature of these “debates” was set by what, *avant la lettre*, we can now identify as Bauer’s antisemitic eponymous, *The Jewish Question*.²⁹ Be that as it may, it is obvious that in the era *after* emancipation calls for its reversal could not but be antisemitic. Indeed, in this context, as Arendt shows, it is interesting to note that antisemitism *as an ideology* not only crystallized *after* emancipation was granted to Jews but also emerged at the time when the actual relations between Jews and the nation-state that the Jewish question distorted had ended.³⁰

The same cannot be said of debates around Zionism, at least up to the founding of Israel. Anti-Zionism was a central debating point

within many Jewish communities both within the diaspora and the *Yishuv*. However, like the previous experience of Jewish emancipation within the nation-state, after 1948 the substance of these debates—the for, the against, the maybes—became incorporated within the Jewish question as the ideological formulation of antizionism broke with empirical anti-Zionism.

This confusion, between *historical* anti-Zionism (i.e. intra-communal debates) and the contemporary *ideology* of antizionism, has muddied the waters of the Jewish question. It is not uncommon, for example, to find that antizionists will often not only draw on historical anti-Zionism as justifications for their own position, but, in so doing, claim further that their contemporary articulation of the Jewish question, the ideology of antizionism, represents an unbroken line with that earlier tradition. However, these claims, both of which turn on the dialectic of continuity and discontinuity, can be challenged.

As we have seen, the continuities that exist between antisemitism and antizionism are a staple ingredient of much recent critical literature. Of the concepts that capture this continuity, the most thoughtful is that of “antisemitic anti-Zionism.” At the heart of this concept is the idea that the *content* of the ideology of antisemitism has now shifted its focus from “the Jews” to the Jewish state, Israel. Alan Johnson describes this continuity succinctly:

Antisemitic anti-Zionism bends the meaning of Israel and Zionism out of shape until both become fit receptacles for the tropes, images, and ideas of classical antisemitism. In short, *that which demonological Jew once was, demonological Israel now is*; uniquely malevolent, full of bloodlust, all controlling, always acting in bad faith, the obstacle to a better, purer, more spiritual world, deserving of punishment and so on.³¹

On one level, there is little here with which to disagree. Johnson captures well the echoes of antisemitism within antizionist representations of Israel: the believed existence of an omnipotent

“Israel Lobby”; Zionist “pleasure” in the targeting and killing of Palestinian children; that if it were it not for the creation and existence of Israel, peace would reign throughout the Middle East; etc., etc. All of this is correct.

However, on another level, I see two shortcomings to Johnson’s approach. First, if, as I am arguing, the creation of Israel, the national emancipation of the Jews brings with it a corresponding shift in the Jewish question, then treating antizionism as a reworking of the “classical” tropes of antisemitism, overlooks what precisely is new or novel about it.

The second point is that the idea of “antisemitic anti-Zionism” dovetails into the claim made by antizionists (noted above) that their own antizionism continues the tradition of pre-1948 anti-Zionism. In other words, despite the intention of the author, the concept of “antisemitic anti-Zionism” *could* be read that—if scrubbed of its antisemitic dimensions—anti-Zionism or, rather, antizionism can remain a legitimate political aim. Jewish national emancipation can be understood as temporary and reversible, just as was Jews’ earlier emancipation within the nation-state. Understood in these terms, as powerful and accurate the concept of “antisemitic anti-Zionism” is, it perhaps fails to confront fully antizionist claims of a distinction, on the one hand, between antisemitism and antizionism and, on the other, the claim that they are “simply” drawing on the easier Jewish anti-Zionist debates of the pre-1948 era.

The shortcomings of the “continuity” thesis in the concept of “antisemitic anti-Zionism” are less that the concept is inaccurate—far from it—but that it presents an incomplete picture of antizionism. It fails to fully acknowledge discontinuity—that with the founding of Israel a *new episode* within the Jewish Question has been inaugurated.

The Ideologization of Antizionism

I have argued that, just as the “response” of the Jewish question to Jewish emancipation within

the nation-state was an ideology of antisemitism, the response to Jewish national self-determination is the ideology of antizionism. Likewise, just as the ideology of antisemitism incorporated within it aspects of that emancipation, so too does the ideology of antizionism. And, finally, just as the ideology of antisemitism distorted and mythologized those empirical aspects of emancipation so as to fit its “axiomatically accepted premise,” there is something inherent about Jews that not only made emancipation an error, but that, for the sake of the nation-state, needed to be reversed—so too does the ideology of antizionism distort and mythologize; that there is something inherent about the movement for Jewish national self-determination as well as about Israel itself that makes it both illegitimate and reversible. Perhaps the clearest statement on these points was made by Labour NEC member, Huda Elmi:

The biggest contention that my fellow critics of the IHRA have is with a particular one that focuses on calling the [*sic*] state of Israel a racist endeavour. IHRA’s defenders like to say that it allows for criticisms of the policies of Israel, but not on the endeavour of building the [*sic*]³² Israeli state per se. *But that is an impossible distinction to make in practice.* Allowing criticism of policies but not allowing a discussion of the ideologies of political movements that are behind those policies is nonsensical. *It is like saying that you are allowed to criticise privatisation, because it is a policy, but you aren’t allowed to look that to neoliberalism as the ideology that upholds this.*³³

What this statement makes clear is that the very essence of Zionism both in thought and practice is some “original sin” that can never be eradicated and that, until it is, the harm it inflicts on the world can never be undone. Placed in the frame of the Jewish question, Zionism-and-Israel is one emancipation too far.

Implicit in Elmi’s own comments is the slogan, “Zionism is racism.” The origin of this

slogan can be traced back to the propaganda of the Soviet Union. As Tabarovsky shows,³⁴ it is a reworking of the older idea of “Jewish exclusivity” and the image that was later radicalized into the dogma that “the Jews” believe in their “own racial superiority.” The historical source of this slogan demonstrates another continuity. It projects and secularizes onto Jews the religious isolation that was forced onto them in the premodern era and that was repeated in the modern era in the face of the difficulties of assimilation. Today, it distorts the reality of the “right to return” and the historical reasons for this policy. The notion of a malevolence inherent in Zionism and, therefore, in Israel appears in many guises, then. Some are reformulations of older libels, while others are of more recent and specific origin.

Thus, alongside the continuity of reworking of familiar themes as identified by Alan Johnson, novel ones have appeared specifically relating to Zionism and Israel. Here, one need only refer back to Hannah Arendt’s prediction about how the General Zionist decision to seek support from the colonial powers would feed into the Jewish question. Although always a staple of post-war antizionist ideology, Israel’s link with the colonial powers—the narrative that the new state is itself an iteration of “settler-colonialism”—is now becoming the central plank of that ideology.

Further examples include the claim of Zionist-Nazi collaboration. Repeated recently by former Labour MP and Mayor of London, Ken Livingstone, this allegation rests on a distortion of the Haavara Agreement in which an attempt to escape Nazi Germany in 1933 led a tiny minority of Zionists (in a move opposed by almost all other Zionist and Jewish groups) to seek accommodation with the Nazis for passage to Palestine in exchange for purchasing German goods. Here we see a clear example of the way in which a *particular* moment of Jewish agency becomes essentialized into the very practice of Zionism itself.

Yet it is around the Holocaust and Holocaust memorialization that the interplay of continuity

and discontinuity becomes apparent. In many ways, they are the hinge that connects the ideology of antisemitism with the ideology of antizionism. This point comes into relief in the presentation of the Holocaust as an “end point” of the ideology of antisemitism at the same time that it becomes a key component of the ideology of antizionism. This duality appears in the antizionist notion that Israel was “gifted” to “the Jews” because of the world’s guilt about the horrors inflicted on Jews by the Nazis; that the memory of the *Shoah* is abused by “the Zionists” not only to legitimize an otherwise illegitimate state, but also to mask—and justify—its own “Nazi-like” crimes against Palestinians; that “the Jews,” now cast as “the Zionists,” have failed to “learn the lesson of the Holocaust,”³⁵ as if the Nazi “final solution of the Jewish question” was nothing other than an exercise in moral pedagogy; that “the Zionists” exploit the memory of the Holocaust as a tool to silence its “critics”; that in referencing the specific place of Jews within the Nazi antisemitic imagination, “the Jew” and “the Zionists” are seeking special privileges for themselves. Put plainly, while the ideology of antizionism recognizes the ideology of antisemitism at play in the mass murders of the Nazis, it simultaneously inverts the Holocaust—the moment of Jews’ ultimate powerlessness—into that of their ultimate power.³⁶

These observations around the place of the Holocaust as the hinge between the ideology of antisemitism and the ideology of antizionism return us to Marr and Badiou. In both instances, claims were made for a radical breach between previous formulations of anti-Jewish hostility and their own contemporary formulations. Yet, as we have seen, these claims are spurious at best. Just as the ideology of antisemitism, as a “response” to the actuality of Jewish emancipation within the nation-state was a combination of the old and the new, so too is the ideology of antizionism a “response” to the actuality of Jewish emancipation through national self-determination.

Taken together, the point is less the play of continuity and discontinuity, and the provenance of the distortions, than their combination and realignment within a novel ideological formulation of antizionism—an ideology that, although part of the overarching Jewish question has been fitted to the circumstance of a new era and new praxis of Jewish emancipation. This realignment has its own consequences.

As we have seen, the nature of the Jewish question is to oppose Jewish emancipation in all its forms. At its heart, therefore, is the consequence of Jewish *exclusion*. It follows from this point that, although the shift from the ideology of antisemitism to the ideology of antizionism brings with it the demand for such exclusion, the basis on which it is justified also shifts. To put it another way, in keeping with this ideological shift, contemporary calls for Jews’ exclusion are no longer premised on the basis of religion or “race.” Instead, they are predicated on “political” grounds: whether Israeli nationals or citizens of other countries, Jews are defined as “supporters of Israel” or “Zionists.” Needless to say, the “Israeli” or the “Zionist” that must be excluded from the international polity, has little to do with the reality of Israel (including all its flaws) or the reality of Zionism—rather, it reflects the distorted picture of both that results from the continuity and discontinuity of the Jewish question.

In a further attempt to disassociate the ideology of antizionism from antisemitism, while simultaneously reducing the latter to the pseudoscience of “race,” the much older myth of Jewish “stubbornness” makes its return. It is in this context that the claim that it is only “Zionists” and not “the Jews” who are demonized gains its justification. Since Jewish harmfulness is no longer presented as “racially” predestined, those who remain committed to the image of Israel and Zionism as projected by the ideology of antizionism are treated as *freely choosing* evil and its harmfulness. Since it is a matter of free will, the demand for exclusion is further legitimized and the responsibility for

exclusion passed onto the excluded themselves; those who will not renounce the malevolence inherent in this latest episode of the error of Jewish emancipation.

CONCLUSION

I have argued here that antizionism is distinct from anti-Zionism. Like antisemitism, anti-Zionism falls within Arendt's definition of ideology. Further, I have argued that both must be understood in the context of the Jewish question and that, in this context, the breaks between antisemitism and antizionism display both continuity and discontinuity.

The necessity of recognizing the existence of the ideology of antizionism as connected to, but distinct from, the ideology of antisemitism is more than a matter of semantics. The ideology of antizionism represents a new and novel "reconfiguration" of the Jewish question.

Although the nature of its anti-Jewish nature remains constant, its particular form and content is intimately connected to the specificities of Jewish emancipation. As much as Jewish emancipation adopts new forms so too does the ideological form of the Jewish question alter. In content and form, the ideology of antisemitism emerged and crystallized precisely at the moment Jews finally gained emancipation within the nation-state, achieved national self-determination. Moreover, antizionism, like antisemitism, was itself a combination of the old and the new, of continuity and discontinuity. Israel is new to the world and so too is the response from, and shape of, the Jewish question. The ideology of antizionism is that response. What is called for is not the subsumption of antizionism beneath antisemitism. What is needed is recognition of the ways in which the ideology of antizionism has incorporated the ideology of antisemitism.

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