SOME REFLECTIONS ON CONTEMPORARY ANTISEMITISM

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ABSTRACT

We live in an age where stunningly false analogies, misleading amalgams, and the general corruption of language (especially in the name of political correctness) are rampant. Nowhere is this more apparent than in relation to Zionism. This is a fact which has greatly contributed to the negative symbolization of Israel and the Jewish people in the Diaspora during the past forty years. In demonizing Israel, "anti-Zionist" voices in the media, the universities, and public life invariably employ militant, aggressive, stigmatizing and *dehumanizing* discourse.

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What has transpired is that the primary scapegoat has undergone a slight name-change, but it is a cosmetic change at best. The hatred is ostensibly directed at the present-day Jewish State, rather than at the mythical "Jewish race" but this barely affects the core of the matter. In demonizing Israel, "anti-Zionist" voices in the media, the universities, and public life invariably employ militant, aggressive, stigmatizing and *dehumanizing* discourse. Their vocabulary tends to be obsessive, repetitive, and vindictive in a way that is increasingly reminiscent of fascist intellectuals before the Holocaust. The vilification of "the Zionists" today, like that of "the Jews" (or "the Jew" per se) in the 1930s is intended to negate, to efface, or to symbolically wipe out the adversary in preparation for his physical elimination in the future. The rhetoric of radical anti-Zionism, even when it sails under the flag of "anti-racism" is proving itself a "worthy" heir of racist antisemitism. Like its prewar predecessors, it, too, claims to be "liberating humanity" from a highly dangerous and universal yoke; this time round the "tyrant" is Israel, the collective Super-Jew, rather than the spectre of *Das Weltjudentum* (World Jewry) as the Nazis preferred to call their global enemy.

But the semantic modification should fool nobody. The entire Jewish people is ultimately implicated in the negationist anti-Zionist methodology even though for the

present there is a distinction which is usually drawn by liberals between "good" and "bad" Jews. The good guys, it seems, are the universalist, humanist, pro-Palestinian Jews who tirelessly undermine Israel's moral or historical legitimacy. The bad guys are those tiresomely parochial, "chauvinist", tribalist, Zionist Jews who insist on the independence of their tiny though nonetheless sovereign nation-state and its irksome though undeniable right to self-defense. This dubious distinction between "good" and "bad" Jews is, however, largely tactical for those (and there are many of them, especially in the Muslim world) who genuinely believe in a Jewish or Zionist world conspiracy. For these true believers in the "final solution of the Palestinian Question" (which they falsely accuse Israel of seeking to bring about) the disappearance of the Jewish State and the definitive elimination of Jewish influence is the real goal.

In my book, *A Lethal Obsession: Anti-Semitism from Antiquity to the Global Jihad*, a central theme is the demonstration of how and why the "Zionist peril" has come to replace the "Jewish peril" in the lexicography and political demonology of the post-1945 world. This displacement of classical *Judeophobia* and its subsequent channelling into raw hatred of the Judenstaat is particularly obvious in Palestinian and Muslim rhetoric, as well as in the ideologies espoused by the radical Left, the neo-Nazis, and the far Right, which have also made some necessary adjustments in focusing on Israel's sins. I do not in principle regard this radical anti-Zionism as being identical in *all* respects with pre-1945 antisemitism. Obviously, there are identifiable nuances, emphases, and focal points which come to the fore in different periods. Through the ages, adversaries of the Jews have always known how to adapt themselves to the *Zeitgeist*.

Anti-Judaism (negation of the Jewish religion) was the central paradigm for Jew-haters in the Christian world until the age of emancipation. Antisemitism in the nationalist and racist sense of the term (the loathing for "Semites" or Jews as a race) rose to dominance in the post-emancipation era between 1870 and the end of the Second World War. Since 1948, it is anti-Zionism (the negation of Israel's legitimacy as a Jewish State) which has obtained the upper hand. This shift in terminology and focus (as I point out in my book) towards the *negation of Jewish national identity* is no less discriminatory than earlier forms of hostility directed at Jews as a religious or social group. It denies freedom to Jews to define themselves on their own terms, to enjoy the same rights as other oppressed peoples to self-determination, autonomy, and independence. Anti-Zionist ideology tries to turn back the clock to a time before the Holocaust and Israel's creation, when Jews as a nation were essentially divided, dispersed, disorganized, partly ghettoized, stateless, and above all, powerless to determine their fate. We need to remember that Zionism aimed primarily at normalizing the status of Jews among the nations; anti-Zionism would have them return to the dependent position of having a permanently anomalous status at the mercy of other nations – subordinate to their shifting interests and whims.

Although anti-Zionism as the "new" antisemitism has a different tactical and strategic agenda from its predecessors, it nonetheless contains within itself the legacies of Christian and Muslim anti-Judaism as well as that of racist antisemitism. Like the Hegelian triad – formed out of a thesis and its antithesis, the radical anti-Zionist synthesis does not abolish the earlier stages of anti-Judaism and racist antisemitism: it simply absorbs the earlier constituent elements into itself raising them to a new level of hostility by seeking to cancel out the very basis of Israel's existence. At the same time, throughout all three major phases in the history of Judeophobia, there has also been much overlap. Jews have been objects of extreme suspicion and victims of a "teaching of contempt" – whether the source was theological, socio-economic, political, or even metaphysical. In all three periods, there has been a kind of seamless interaction between the anti-Jewish motifs of religion, race, economics and politics alongside demands to isolate, exclude, boycott, sanction, disenfranchise, expel and ultimately mass murder Jews.

On the campuses of universities in the West today, this policy is advocated in the name of "solidarity with Palestine" or human rights. A hundred years ago, the self-declared goal was to preserve the "Christian" or "national" character of individual states by restricting the entrance of Jews, the so-called *numerus clausus*. Admittedly, the labels and the rationalizations employed to exclude Jews have changed, but the same techniques of slander, demagogy, disinformation, stigmatization, and intimidation are still used by the boycotters. Then as now, the militant opponents of Jewish civil or national rights were full of righteous indignation, convinced that *their cause was just.* They thought that by excluding Jews they had found the key to solving all social, national, and international crises. The "Jewish Question" literally obsessed them. Then, as now, the actions and beliefs of Jews were *a priori* criminalized and deliberately distorted as if they were the expression of a totally corrupt essence, an irremediable genetic taint, or a diabolical conspiracy to exploit and rule over non-Jews.

Anti-Zionism, like anti-Judaism and antisemitism, has today acquired the same toxic aura. It is chilling to observe how the objects of its wrath are treated in terms quite different from those applied to other groups. Jews are, for example, depicted in ways that de facto isolate and potentially can turn them once more into a *pariah* people. Worse still, the grotesque efforts to brand Israel as a *satanic* entity (practiced in the Iranian media and in much of the Arab world) are fully consonant with Nazi-style genocidal

antisemitism which aimed at the total demonization of the Jews as a group.

Today, the word "Zionist" has mutated into a term of pure opprobrium, an anathema and an insult in many different parts of the world. This almost exactly corresponds to the pattern of the 1930s, when "sale juif", "youpin", "Jude", "zhid", or "Jewboy" were commonplace curses – used even in public discourse.

In recent years, the mask has begun to come off and the older, more primitive slanders are making a comeback. Nevertheless, the more educated and civilized adversaries of the Jews still prefer euphemistic language. Explicit racist demagogy and xenophobia are generally left to the populist far Right or skinhead neo-Nazis. Against them it is relatively easy to mobilize protests, especially when antisemitism is submerged into a broad struggle against racism and Islamophobia. But much liberal and leftist opinion reacts with intense suspicion and even hostility to any specific and focused campaign against antisemitism, often twisting such ventures into a "Zionist plot" or a cynical manoeuvre to deflect what they define as justified "criticism" of Israel. This has helped to paralyze anti-antisemitism.

There is also a growing trend on the Left and the far Right that has crystallized since the late 1960s which sees Zionism not only as intrinsically "racist", but regards this characteristic as being anchored in Judaism itself. In point of fact, it would be more correct to say that the accusation of "Jewish racism" has deep roots in the history of anti-semitism, going back to the charges of pagan Antiquity against Jewish *misanthropia*, isolationism, segregationism, originating in Hebrew monotheism. Radical anti-Zionists like Roger Garaudy in his *Les Mythes fondateurs de la politique israëlienne* (1996) typically went back to the Bible and the book of Joshua to indict Judaism as a religion of "ethnic cleansing". In the 1930s, notorious French anti-semites like Céline, Drieu la Rochelle, and Georges Montandon regularly denounced the "racist" Jews (Zionism playing only a secondary role in this indictment) as did some Nazi ideologists who claim that the Nuremberg race laws of 1935 were only a pale copy of the biblical legislation of Ezra and Nehemiah against intermarriage with Gentiles.

Indeed, it was a prominent theme of European antisemites like Houston S. Chamberlain since the late 19th century to assert that Jews had founded their religion on racial purity. Hitler himself would periodically evoke this Nazi signature tune – claiming that the laws of blood and race were taken from biblical sources. In asserting the doctrine of Germanic chosenness (the *Herrrenvolk* ideology) in place of that of Israel as the "chosen people", he emphasized, of course, that Aryans were the "people of light" while Jews were the people of Satan. This Manichaeism is a hallmark of all forms of antisemitism. What is forgotten today is how frequently the Nazis, fascists, and leading nationalist antisemites have used the mendacious accusation of "Jewish racism" to justify their own discriminatory policies of segregating and persecuting the Jews.

For the Islamic fundamentalists from Iran to the Hamas, the operational conclusions are clear. It is a question of physically eradicating Israel as the "racist tumour" in the Middle East – a terminology typical of Nazism and of the neo-Nazis today. The anti-racist Left in the West, is usually a little more circumspect, preferring euphemisms like a "bi-national" or a "unitary" Palestinian State into which Israel would simply dissolve and fade away. It should be added, that for the Islamo-Marxist axis, the aim is not only to sap the very foundations of Israel or to unequivocally support the Palestinian cause, but also to undermine the United States, globalization, Western democracy, and the dominant liberal order. As a result the radical left has become the willing accomplice of Islamist fanatics addicted to destruction and revenge.