Shulamit Volkov

Interpreting Antisemitism

Perspectives on Jewish Texts and Contexts

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Vivian Liska

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Interpreting Antisemitism

Studies and Essays on the German Case

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Preface

The hope of having a Europe free of Antisemitism after the Second World War proved to be no more than wishful thinking. The same was specifically true with regard to Germany. However, when the impact of Nazi propaganda weakened and the country – particularly its western part – began to enjoy long years of prosperity and an ever better functioning democracy, liberal anti-Antisemitic forces appeared to have gained the upper hand. It was later on, following the most recent wave of refugees, who were crossing the borders into Germany in 2015, that the far Right began to agitate as it had never done for decades and predictably, Antisemitism followed suit. At the same time, critics of Israel on the Left often seemed to cross the fine line separating this critique from sheer Antisemitism and one wondered how far would such criticism – legitimate, though sometimes excessive or disproportionate – be still considered decent in post-Nazi Germany.

Meanwhile, the debate was also manifested in a growing interest in the *history* of Antisemitism. It is in this context that I thought to contribute to the discussion by offering a collection of my studies and essays on this topic, written during the last fifty years. I hoped that by presenting them together, old insights would be recovered and new ones gained. This book includes works dealing with various aspects of Antisemitism in Germany since the late 1870s. It documents the way I have proceeded in studying this phenomenon and brings to the reader the fruits of my efforts in an orderly way, usually though not always chronologically.

As I was preparing this volume for publication, I quickly realized that I could not possibly update such a corpus, considering the huge bibliography that has meanwhile been assembled and the changes that have occurred in my own interests and my own views on this theme during the last fifty years. Instead, I decided to leave the collected pieces as they were with only few corrections and some stylistic improvements. This does create a certain amount of repetition, but it seems to me unavoidable. In addition, I have also left the notes practically unchanged and only slightly shortened. Naturally, these notes refer to literature that may now seem outdated. But this is not always the case. Having seen how even outstanding masterpieces are being forgotten in the face of so much new research, I hope that younger historians will find useful and interesting material in my somewhat antiquated apparat. Hebrew and German texts have been translated by me, unless otherwise indicated, and the sources for all previously published texts are given, with thanks, at the end of the book. As for the term Antisemitism: I am using it despite recent efforts to provide ever more precise definitions of this term and even suggestions to avoid it altogether. I find the discussion on terminology more distracting than productive. Moreover, I do not believe it is in our

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hands, as historians, to dispose of the term even when we wish to do so. Here, in any case, I have decided to use the unhyphenated form, since in this way it clearly denotes hatred of or opposition to Jews and to Judaism, not to some undefined Semites. For the sake of uniformity, I have replaced other ways of spelling it everywhere, even in my own previous texts.

Naturally, during a period of so many years, I have been helped by innumerable colleagues and profited from discussions with many of them or from reading their related works. Equally important for me were my many graduate students in four decades of intense teaching at Tel Aviv University. A few of them are mentioned in the notes, but I am deeply thankful to all of them. In preparing this book, I was helped by the editor of the series in which it appears, Professor Vivian Liska, who accepted the book with warmth and followed its progress throughout with useful advice. Dr. Ulrike Krauss and Mrs. Katja Lehming from the DeGruyter publishing house, were likewise welcoming and helpful. I am deeply grateful to all three of them. The careful work done by Ms. Anna Leah Berstein Simpson, my English language editor, and by Mr. Luis Gruhler in Munich, who did some translating and much too much proofreading and technical work, was indispensable. I thank them both most especially.

In working on this book, realizing its auto-biographical sub-text, I am often reminded of my esteemed teacher at Berkeley, an outstanding historian, a friend and mentor, Hans Rosenberg. Everything of value that I know about history I have learned from him. This book is dedicated to his memory.

Tel Aviv, 2023

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Introduction

On Interpreting Antisemitism: An Autobiographical Sketch

I never intended to study or work on Antisemitism. Although hating Jews is clearly, though perhaps not exclusively, a matter for non-Jews, the topic has traditionally been studied by Jewish historians, or, more precisely, historians who write about Jews and Judaism. At the Hebrew University in Jerusalem, where I began my studies in 1963, it was taught, of course, in the Department of Jewish History. I, however, chose to study what was then and is today still being called in Israeli universities "general history."[1] It was in observing the struggle among states and nations that one confronted the drama of world history, I thought. And after all, it was also in that Department that one could attend lectures given by renowned historians such as Yaakov Talmon, Yehushua Arieli and Michael Confino. The first, by then already world-famous for his book *The Origins of Totalitarian Democracy,* lectured in the largest hall on the university campus in West Jerusalem, where students crammed onto window sills and stairs to hear his performances.[2] I, too, listened excitedly, fascinated by what Talmon had to say as well as by the way he said it. He was a brilliant lecturer and an eloquent orator.

When I moved to Berkeley, California a year later, there was not even the *option* of studying Jewish History, and in any case Berkeley's Department of History provided sufficient intellectual nourishment. Moreover, outside the classroom, the so-called Free Speech Movement was taking shape and, though as a foreign student I always remained an observer rather than an active participant, there could be no better schooling for a beginning historian. It was only there and then that history began to interest me in earnest. I heard Karl Schorske on European Intellectual History, a course in which he surely provided no less eloquence and passion than Talmon had in Jerusalem. I took Richard Herr's seminar on Tocqueville and Wolfgang Sauer's course on Germany in the nineteenth century. I wrote seminar papers for Gerald Feldman on the revolution of 1918 and the early Weimar Republic, and then, significantly, participated in Hans Rosenberg's graduate seminar on the social history of the *Kaiserreich*. At the same time, I was learning German, though not diligently enough, preparing myself for a

1 On this division see [in Hebrew], Ariel Rein, "History and Jewish History: Together or Separate? The Definition of Historical Studies at the Hebrew University, 1925–1935," in: *History of the Hebrew University in Jerusalem*, vol. 1: *Origins and Beginnings*, eds. Shaul Katz and Michael Heyd, Jerusalem (2nd edition) 2000, 516–537.

2 See Jacob L. Talmon, *The Origins of Totalitarian Democracy*, London 1952, printed later in numerous editions.

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career in *social* history, as befits a young scholar who sought to be politically aware, socially engaged, and intellectually daring.

Antisemitism was not on the curriculum. But as I was galloping towards my Ph.D., preparing a dissertation on the handicraft masters in the later years of the nineteenth century, I was rather unexpectedly confronted with it. To be sure, Rosenberg's opus magnum on the *Kaiserreich* did include a short and illuminating chapter on Antisemitism, but at first its significance was completely lost on me.[3] By then I was focused on what had been Rosenberg's main topics: economic cycles, class relationships and – further on the horizon – the preconditions for Fascism. However, reading documents on the masters' assemblies during the 1848 revolution and later in the late 19th century, I could no longer avoid addressing their Antisemitism.

Then in 1972, as I was busy completing my dissertation, I was asked to contribute to a *Festschrift* for Hans Rosenberg's 70th birthday. It was an extraordinary honor for me at that stage in my career and feeling indebted to him in many ways, I readily agreed. The volume eventually included thirty-three contributions, written mostly by far more experienced scholars than I; many more men than women. The essay I submitted was, in fact, my first truly independent academic work, and the topic was the social and political function of Antisemitism among handicraft masters in late nineteenth century Germany.[4] It is included in this volume as no. 2, despite the fact that it is by no means a ripe piece of work. Like more than a few other essays reprinted here, I would have written it differently today.

To be sure, studying the master-artisans' history, regardless of their Antisemitism, seemed fitting at the time. It was a typical case of research on a lower social stratum, neglected by previous historiography, a group composed of men, whose voices were previously lost to later generations. In addition, this topic allowed me to inch beyond the evolving social history at the time, in the direction of E.P. Thompson's *The Making of the English Working Class,* a greatly influential book at the time.[5] Thompson presented a mixture of social and what could already be called cultural history. While as students of Hans Rosenberg, we learned to write a history that was above all linked to economics, Thompson's approach called for the inclusion of more social and anthropological considerations. Moreover, the urge to contribute to the understanding of *political* events, above all to matters

3 Hans Rosenberg, *Grosse Depression und Bismarckzeit. Wirtschafatsablauf. Gesellachaft und Politik in Mitteleuropa*, Berlin 1967, and see especially 88–117.

4 See *Sozialgeschichte Heute*, ed. Hans-Ulrich Wehler, Göttingen 1974, and in it my essay: 416–431.

5 The book appeared in New York, 1963.

concerning the rise of National Socialism, had remained present as well. After all, politics is always an important aspect of writing history and at that time the riddle of Nazism was never far from our minds. Soon it would become apparent, of course, that social history based on the economy alone did not suffice to accomplish political tasks. I was ready to move on and use other analytical tools for my purposes.

In the meantime, the sense of intellectual-cum-political excitement so prevalent in Berkeley during the late 1960s followed me to London, where I then lived with my small family, as well as to the different German towns I visited during my archival research trips. I was still acutely aware of this sense when I returned to Israel in 1972, although just here, at home, I now felt like a complete stranger. In the aftermath of the Six Day War, Israel became triumphant and complacent. Preoccupied with its own problems, it was oblivious to the revolutionary waves that shook the campuses of North America or England and the boulevards of Paris. At the University of Tel Aviv these were still the heydays of the "second-generation scholars."[6] The Institute for German History had been established shortly before my arrival and its faculty members were all men in their late fifties, some of whom had even studied in pre-Nazi Germany or Austria, and I – not yet 30 and a woman to boot – did not fit in at all. I felt somewhat disoriented, not sure how to handle the situation and above all confused as to the direction I ought to be taking in my further academic work.

Early in 1974, I was approached by Shlomo Na'aman and asked to contribute to a symposium he was organizing on *Jews and Jewish Aspects of the German Working-class movement*.[7] Other participants were renowned experts in the field. It was an honor. Once again, I agreed, and even if they were not too impressed by my performance, the work I did in preparation for this conference proved to be important in moving me forward. In fact, the building blocks for my later piece, namely "Anti-semitism as a Cultural Code," were by then almost all there, and in this case, too, one piece proved to be more crucial than others. Just as Thompson's book was instrumental for my thinking about the master artisans, now an article by the German sociologist Mario Rainer Lepsius, under the English title "Party-System and Social

6 For this expression see *The Second Generation. Émigrés from Nazi Germany as Historians*, eds. Andreas W. Daum, Hartmut Lehmann and James J. Sheehan, New York – Oxford 2016. My essay on Israel: 261–270.

7 See Beiheft 2 of the *Jahrbuch des Instituts für Deutsche Geschichte*, ed. Walter Grab, Tel Aviv 1977.

Structure: On the Problem of Democratization in German Society," gave me the clue I needed.[8] Lepsius suggested a division of German society since the late nineteenth century into "blocks" based on socio-economic characteristics, but each representing a cultural milieu as well, supported by a more or less outspoken *Weltanschauung*. The Social-Democratic workers' "block," the inner structure of which had been previously analyzed by Gunther Roth in an English-language thesis published in 1963, seemed ready-made for this kind of analysis. Dieter Groh added another important layer to this edifice by describing the way in which this unique block had managed to be integrated into the overall social web of the Kaiserreich, namely through a process he had named "negative integration."[9] I referred to all of these in my lecture (here appearing as number 3), while I was trying to say something new, not so much about Social Democracy, but on the role of Antisemitism within it; something beyond the bare facts and the familiar quotes brought forward by other historians. Now it became clear: Antisemitism was an interesting topic; more importantly, perhaps – it was relevant to my life. After all, it was present as a concept and major historical component of the Zionist ideology, constantly used in the Israeli political discourse, for me often an irritant for the way it had been used or rather manipulated. At first, I tried my hand in a lecture on what was often named, following a memorable book published as early as 1930 by the German Jewish philosopher and publicist Theodor Lessing, Jewish "Self-Hate."[10] The main motivation was my objection to the branding of all radical political critics as self-hating Jews. More generally, the stress on the presumed fact that "the whole world was always against us" seemed excessive to me, making improper usage of a much more complicated and many-sided history. By then my interest narrowed on this history.

At this point, I began to sense not only what *kind* of history I wished to apply to the study of Antisemitism in pre-Nazi Germany, which I now considered my field of expertise, but also what kind of history was *not* appropriate to the handling of this topic. It was then that in attempting to scrutinize the Israeli literature

8 Mario Rainer Lepsius, "Parteiensystem und Sozialstruktur. Zum Problem der Demokratisierung der deutschen Gesellschaft," in: *Festschrift F. Lütge*, ed. Wilhelm Abel et al., Stuttgart 1966, 371–393.

9 See Gunther Roth, *Social Democrats in Imperial Germany*, Ottawa 1963, and Dieter Groh, *Negative Integration und revolutionärer Attentismus. Die deutsche Sozialdemokratie am Vorabend des 1. Weltkrieges, 1909–1914*, Berlin 1973.

10 Theodor Lessing, *Der Jüdische Selbsthass*, Berlin 1930 and my "Selbstgefälligkeit und Selbsthaß: Die deutschen Juden zu Beginn des 20. Jahrhunderts," in: *Geschichte in Wissenschaft und Unterricht*, 1986, no.1, 1–13. This essay appeared earlier in Hebrew in: *Zemanim. A Hisorical Quarterly*, no. 14, 1984, 28–41. Another version was included in Shulamit Volkov, *Germans, Jews and Antisemites. Trials in Emancipation*, New York 2006, 33–46.

on Antisemitism, I was preparing a review-essay for the new Hebrew-language periodical of the School of History at Tel Aviv University, *Zemanim* (Times), that was later published in 1982. It was based on two new books in Hebrew. One was a collection of essays by the doyen of Jewish history at the Hebrew University, Shmuel Ettinger, and the other, a modern history of Central European Antisemitism by another highly respected professor at the Hebrew University, Jacob Katz.[11] Here I tried to combine my appreciation of the two elder scholars with a fundamental critique of both their books, concentrating on two aspects of their oeuvre. Above all, I was irked by their insistence on the permanence and continuity of Antisemitism all the way to National Socialism and beyond.[12] I myself focused on the novelty of Antisemitism in modern times, stressing change over permanence. Furthermore, I thought of the two scholars as intellectual historians; Ettinger in a principled way and Katz, known in fact as a social historian even a sociologist, despite himself. Identifying what I thought was wrong with the actual study of Antisemitism helped me define the way I wished to proceed in revising its history. Thus, although chronologically it belongs slightly later than the two following pieces, I decided to place this essay as number 1 in this volume.

In parallel, I set out to write a piece on Antisemitism for the Leo Baeck Institute Yearbook. However, while a few building blocks for the new essay were already there, the theoretical framework was still missing; its elements were still hanging unattached.

What happened next was fairly typical of my haphazard modus operandi. One sunny afternoon, on my way to the university library, I met a colleague and friend of mine, Haggai Horowitz, a historian of the United States, who has since sadly passed away. I told him of my predicament, and he asked if I knew the work of Clifford Geertz. I do not remember whether Horowitz ever explained why he suggested just that, but in any case, I hurried and got myself a copy of Geertz's collected essays.[13] This was an eye-opener. I read some of the essays again and again and felt that I found here the clue to my new essay. To be sure, quite a lot of

11 Shmuel Ettinger, *Modern Antisemitism. Studies and Essays*, {Hebrew} Tel Aviv 1978; Jacob Katz, *From Prejudice to Destruction. Antisemitism 1700–1933*, Cambridge Mass. 1982. The Hebrew edition was published in Tel Aviv 1979.

12 For a useful and concise review of the present historiography of Antisemitism, albeit in Hebrew, see Scott Ury and Guy Miron, "Antisemitism: On the Dialectical Relationship between a Historical Concept and contemporary Debates," in: *Antisemitism. Historical Concept, Public Discourse* [Hebrew], edited by the authors above, and published as volume LXXXV, 1–4, 2020 of the journal *Zion*, 7–30.

13 See Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of cultures*, New York 1973, especially "Ideology as a Cultural System", 193–233, printed earlier in: *Ideology and Discontent*, ed. David E. Apter, New York 1964, 47–60.

additional thinking and extra work was needed before the piece was completed, and early in 1978 I presented the final draft of my "Antisemitism as a Cultural Code" (appearing in this book as number 4), to a small crowd assembled at St. Antony's College, Oxford. The reception was cool. Historian Geoff Eley was unconvinced. Above all, he found fault with my analysis of German society during the late Kaiserreich; it was too schematic and thus, unjustifiably too negative. He was adamant and no support was coming from other colleagues in the hall. In hindsight, much of their criticism was correct. The same aspects of this essay would be contested by later reviewers, too.[14] But in the end, perhaps it was the tone, rather than the content of the critique, that made the feedback so painful.

Walking to 'high-table' in college later on, Reinhard Rürup, in private, was far more complementary. He liked the idea of a cultural code, but he thought it was more fitting to see *anti*-Antisemitism as a code for the liberal Left and Center in Germany and not Antisemitism as a code for the anti-modern, anti-democratic, imperialist and colonialist Right. Could both be applied, I then wondered, but at the time it did not seem to matter, though later on, using anti-Antisemitism as code often seemed enlightening, too.

The critique and the atmosphere in that hall in Oxford unsettled me. It was not an easy trial, but in the end I was sure that by using the cultural code metaphor as I did, I would be able to both sustain the novelty of so-called modern Antisemitism and explain the gap between it and Nazi Antisemitism. This last point seemed crucial to me, and soon I would have the opportunity to stress it again, in preparing a lecture for a conference dedicated to National Socialism and the Holocaust, organized by the well-known historian of the French Revolution, Francois Furet, in Paris. Surprisingly, in contrast to my embarrassment in Oxford, the new paper was received with enthusiasm by a number of my French colleagues and by at least some of the other participants from Israel, Germany and the United-States. To be sure, I was no expert in the field of Nazi history; I spoke mainly on the pre-Nazi period. In addition, I was, once again, one of two women among twenty-five older men. Nevertheless, this was definitely an encouraging experience.

It seems that in the years between 1978 and 1982, the scholarly community, perhaps especially in France, became more open to what would be later known as "the cultural turn," and therefore my approach better fitted the overall historiographical discourse of the day. The Paris essay (here reprinted as number 5)

14 See Eley's critique of both my and especially Hans Rosenberg's work in his, *From Unification to Nazism. Reinterpreting the German Past*, Cambridge Mass, 1986, 23–41. And from among later commentators see Gideon Reuveny, "'Productivists' and 'Consumerist' Narrative regarding Jews in German History," in *German History from the Margin*s, eds. Neil Gregor, Nils Roemer and Mark Roseman, Bloomington 2006, 165–184.

opened with the usual review of the existing writings on Antisemitism in modern Germany, while I then proceeded to list the various functions of Jew-Hating during the *pre*-Nazi era: The strengthening of a new German national identity in the Kaiserreich; the channeling of fear, anxiety, and hate vis-à-vis rapid industrialization away from the capitalist system and the new state towards the Jews; the role all of these played in transferring voters to the Right, and finally, the function of Antisemitism as a code of belonging to the anti-modern camp. Section 3 dealt with Antisemitism in France and gave me the opportunity to show that it had had similar functions there as in Germany, namely strengthening Nationalism, channeling anxiety concerning economic hardships in times of industrialization, and helping lower middle-class elements move from the Left to the Right. Most importantly, in France, too, it served as a cultural code, I argued, a code of belonging to the anti-republican camp.

Having expanded upon the situation in France during the Dreyfus affair, I reached the most important section of this essay, arguing that both in France and in pre-Nazi Germany, Antisemitism had remained a matter of the "written word," a literary affair. Hitler diagnosed its limits. *His* Antisemitism was instead a matter of speech – in the open, in the larger city-squares, and in crowded Beer-halls. The force of his attack was in hateful rhetoric, in the "spoken word," an action in itself, soon to be turned into violence and finally into expulsion and extermination. In Nazi culture, to put it differently, spoken Antisemitism was clearly *intended* to lead to action, and this made it, I claimed, different than nearly all previous kinds of Jew-hating.

As in previous articles, new readings lead me to some of the ideas and formulations in this essay, too. This time, it was above all Victor Klemperer's brilliant book of 1947, *LTI* [Lingua Tertii Imperii] *Notizbuch eines Philolgen*, and George Steiner's essays on what he called the "Language Revolution."[15] These sources allowed me to stress once more the break with the past in reaching National Socialism and the fact that Nazi Antisemitism was neither yet another chapter in the history of an old phenomenon, nor the final peak of its prolonged procession.

It was ten years later, in 1993, that I once again assessed the merits and weaknesses of the idea of Antisemitism as a cultural code. Shortly before, I wrote an essay for *Zemanim*, this time on the differences between Antisemitism and anti-

15 I noticed especially his "The Hollow Miracle" (1959), in George Steiner, *Language and Silence*, London 1967, 117–132, and "The Language Animal" (1969), in his, *Exterritorial Papers on Language and the Language Revolution*, London 1972, 71–88.

Feminism, of which a somewhat shorter English version (reprinted here as essay number 6) was later re-printed in my Cambridge University Press book of 2006.[16] In contrasting cultural codes with social norms, I was able to show from another standpoint that Antisemitism had not been particularly central or widespread in Imperial Germany, and was surely not as central or widespread as anti-Feminism. The latter was the *norm* against which feminists had to struggle in order to gain greater equality for women, while the former was unique for a particular section, the Right and perhaps segments of the Center-Right. *Because* it was not so central or widespread, I added, it could well serve as a code of belonging to one camp and not to another. At the same time, the argument in this piece weakened the option of using anti-Antisemitism as a proper code, an issue that has been still unclear in my mind. Furthermore, presenting this contrast made clearer the nature of a code, any code, and at the same time, it enabled me to acknowledge that there were also autobiographical sources, as opposed to academic or intellectual ones, for my enthusiasm vis-à-vis this concept.

It was during my time in Berkeley, where I had first confronted the anti-Zionism of the New Left on campus, and now I realized that in fact their anti-Israel rhetoric had served them as a cultural code. In my contribution to a conference at Brandeis University in 2004 (reprinted here as number 7), I recounted this experience. Usually it is the study of the past that informs events and experiences in the present, I argued. Here it was the other way around. Events and experiences at the time informed my study of the past and prepared me to grasp Geertz's ideas and make use of them in my own work. Having observed the role of Antisemitism and anti-Israel sentiments on the contemporary Left, I only needed to find the correct concept for characterizing and then applying it to events in the past.

Meanwhile, in parallel to working on my ideas concerning Antisemitism, I continued to work on various aspects of German social history, gradually moving to intellectual and political history, as well. And while I was lecturing and writing on these topics, I often revisited and revised my view on Antisemitism. The third section of this book brings together a number of essays in this category, under the heading 'Revisions and Related Themes'.

The essay on the link between Nationalism and Antisemitism (here reprinted as number 8), was written for a conference celebrating the 65th birthday of Hans-Ulrich Wehler, a friend from my early research visits to Germany. The conference was a festive occasion and the resulting volume brought together articles written

16 See my *Germans, Jews, and Antisemites* (note 10 above), and for this section especially: 129–144.

by a whole generation of mostly German scholars, by then experienced social historians.[17] Going over the list, it was impossible not to notice the old pattern: these were largely scholars older than myself, among them – yet again – only two women. Still, it was a pleasant reunion, in which I felt warmly accepted, despite the many aspects of my otherness. My contribution pointed to what, at that time, seemed to me an exaggerated attack on the *Sonderweg*-thesis. Like many historians at the time, I too tended to minimize Germany's uniqueness all the way up to the Nazi era. But of late, I was beginning to feel that negating *all* uniqueness cost us the few tools we had had for explaining modern German history, most particularly National Socialism and the vicious Nazi attacks on the Jews. Furthermore, minimizing the role of Antisemitism in the pre-Nazi years and disregarding its link to nationalism – first allied to liberalism on the left and then increasingly bound up with a new kind of conservatism on the right – was particularly misleading. Not only did this approach obscure the history of modern Antisemitism, it also blurred the overall picture of the Kaiserreich – progressive, indeed, in some respects but surely containing the seeds of the approaching catastrophe.

The piece on "language as a site for confronting Jews and Judaism" was written for another conference, this time at the German *Literaturarchiv* in Marbach (and it appears as number 9 in this book). Most of the participants chose to speak on one figure in this context, as the title of the printed book suggests.[18] But the occasion gave me the opportunity to return to some aspects of language and of discourse that I had touched upon before, especially in my Paris paper of 1982. Clearly, my concentration on Jewish history during the years in between made all the difference. Although some Jews spoke German previously, I explained, it was only starting in the mid-eighteenth century that the educated among them learned German and some even made it their only tongue. They soon excelled in all its facets, though the degree of their proficiency never stopped being a matter of controversy, even among themselves. In the Marbach piece, while I did address the Antisemitic attacks against Jewish achievements and failures on this account, I focused on the position of some Jews on this matter.

The next essay goes a step further. I wrote it for the series *Lessons and Legacies*, dedicated to the study of the Holocaust in North America. I travelled to Florida and delivered a lecture entitled "German Jews: The Temptation of Racism"

17 See *Nation und Gesellschaft in Deutschland. Historische Essays*, ed. Manfred Hettling and Paul Nolte, Munich 1996. My essay: 208–219.

18 *Jüdische Intellektuelle und die Philologien in Deutschland 1871–1933*, eds. Wilfried Barner and Christoph König, Göttingen 2001.

(here reprinted as number 10) to a large audience of teachers and scholars.[19] Once again, I hardly belonged. While the other participants were experts on the Holocaust, I specialized in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. What's more, I mainly treated the German *Jews* and their attitudes toward late nineteenth century racial theories. As I was then deeply involved in work on my Rathenau biography, I took the narrative all the way to the early decades of the twentieth century and into the early years of the Weimar Republic. I tried to demonstrate, as the title suggests, the temptation of racism not only for educated Germans in general, but also for many German Jews, despite the danger inherent in racism for themselves and despite the fact they were always potential and sometimes actual targets of the hateful discourse involved. The tensions at play in this topic are reason enough, I think, for including this essay in the present volume.

Next comes an essay (number 11 in this book) in which I finally revisit the question of continuity vs. discontinuity in German Antisemitism. A year or so earlier, I had written an article on Anti-Semitism (so spelled in this case) for a renewed edition of the *Encyclopedia of the Social and Behavioral Sciences*.[20] Naturally, it was not limited to *modern* Antisemitism and so, in preparing it, I had to read the latest literature on earlier periods and other regions, all the way back to antiquity, update my general knowledge of the subject, and gain a new perspective on the issue of continuity. In fact, I have here clearly reformulated the balance between continuity and discontinuity, even more than I had done before in the paper on nationalism, allowing more room for traditional forms of Jew-hating and somewhat relaxing the stress on the fundamental change occurring with the rise of National Socialism. This piece, which I have here entitled 'Interim Balance', documents the way I had been gradually nuancing and refining my original position, and how nevertheless, the same basic themes have preoccupied me all along. In addition, this essay seems to be a fitting opening to the next section of this book, dealing directly with National-Socialism.

In introducing it, a few more general comments are needed. It may seem strange today that historians of my generation only rarely treated the Nazi era. There were exceptions, of course. Saul Friedländer, ten years my elder, made it his main topic of research, though not before the mid-1980s. Moshe Zimmermann, at the Hebrew University, more or less my age, wrote about Nazism in the same series in which I wrote on the nineteenth century. But Reinhard Rürup and Monika Richarz in Berlin, and certainly Steven Aschheim in Jerusalem and the older Jacob

19 See *Expanding Perspectives on the Holocaust in a Changing World*, eds. Hilary Earl and Karl Schleunes, *Lessons and Legacies*, Volume XI, Evanson Ill. 2014. My essay: 211–228.

20 See, "Antisemitism", in the new edition of the *Encyclopedia of the Social and Behavioural Sciences*, 2002, vol. 1, 542–549.

Toury in Tel Aviv, who all studied the history of German-Jewry and the relationships between Jews and non-Jews in Germany, made sure to end their studies with 1933. Likewise, this was also the endpoint for the Leo Baeck Yearbook, established 1956, and for most lecture-courses on Germany at the universities at which we have all studied and taught. To be sure, there were also historians, whose research focused on the Holocaust, but we considered them specialists, dealing with a single topic, and tended to stress their ideological and political motivations, at times even doubting their professional objectivity. Even those, who, unlike myself, believed in the continuity of Antisemitism from some undefined past into the 'years of extermination,' like Jacob Katz, for instance, normally stopped at 1933 and in any case proceeded no later than 1938/9 – always short of the Holocaust itself.

With time, this avoidance became increasingly obsolete. It no longer had any professional justification. The archives – even in the countries of the one-time Soviet Union – were usually open to all after the fall of Communism and at the same time, most of us began to be involved in one way or another in the controversies associated with the history of National Socialism. Although I always remained on the margin of these debates, my skepticism toward the centrality of ideology, for instance, may have drawn me more to the "functionalist" than to the "intentionalist" school. Likewise, my longstanding emphasis on discontinuity clearly positioned me against historian Daniel Goldhagen in the debate over his 1996 book, *Hitler's Willing Executioners*. However, I was never too outspoken in such debates. Here and there, I felt the need to express my views but always on the historiography rather than on the actual history of Nazism; more on the way we ought to think about it than in practically researching it. A number of the resulting interventions are collected here.

The first deals with the differences between non-Jewish historians and their Jewish colleagues regarding their attitudes toward Nazism and the Holocaust, a divide that was brought to the fore by Martin Broszat, especially in his exchange of letters with Saul Friedländer in 1987.[21] In another context and without discrediting either group, historian Dan Diner attempted to show that same gap by using the metaphor of a courtroom with prosecutors on the one side and defense attorneys on the other.[22] I chose to discuss the matter when contributing for a book of

21 For the English translation, see Martin Broszat and Saul Friedländer, "A Controversy about the Historicization of National Socialism," *Yad Vashem Studies*, XIX (1988), 1–47.

22 See Dan Diner, "Varieties of Interpretation: The Holocaust in Historical Memory," in: *Language and Revolution. Making Modern Political Identities*, ed. Igal Halfin, London 2002, 379–391. Diner delivered a very similar presentation in a conference at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem in 1995. See *The Third Reich. A historical Reassessment* [Hebrew], ed. Moshe Zimmermann, Jerusalem 2000, 40–51.

essays in honor of Monika Richarz, herself an author of books and essays on various topics of German-Jewish history, whom I knew as colleague and friend for over thirty years. In what appears here as number 12, I disagreed with Diner's analysis, arguing that by then we had managed to create an international community of scholars dedicated to the study of National Socialism, a community in which it was possible to present various, even contrasting, views, without necessarily falling into opposing groups defined by nationality. Clearly, each of us depended on his or her personal experience, and perhaps the fact that Diner lived mainly in Germany and I mainly in Israel affected our different views.

The next essay (number 13 in this book), had been written a couple of years earlier, for a conference that took place in Chicago in the fall of 2001. It remains fixed in my memory because I was on a plane back to Tel Aviv while the catastrophe that closed the twentieth century, 9/11, took place. By sheer coincidence, it seems, the subtitle of the book in which the lectures of this conference were collected was "The Holocaust and the Twentieth Century." Although it was intended to close a chapter in one century, it unintentionally opened a new one, belonging to the next century.[23] In my own essay, I came back to the question of explanation that had preoccupied me since my "Antisemitism as a Cultural Code," some twenty-five years earlier. Here, I argued again for the limited explanatory potential of Antisemitism as an ideology, especially with regard to Nazism. Above all, I stressed the importance of the interaction between ideology and praxis, demonstrating that certain plans and ideas for action became relevant only in particular real situations and that they are in themselves insufficient for explaining the run of events. It was an argument in a losing battle against the over-emphasis on ideology in the study of Nazism, especially in Israel.

In fact, it was once again my lived experience, this time in present-day Israel, that now influenced my thinking on Antisemitism and the Holocaust. By then, I was becoming aware of how the ideology of the so-called "Greater Israel," almost non-existent in the public sphere before the Six Day War, was quickly revived after the conquest of the West Bank. Suddenly, even some of its most ardent former opponents joined its traditional propagators in an orgy of nationalistic victory and overwhelming power. Just as my experiences observing the U.S. New Left of the late '60s informed my study of "Antisemitism as a Cultural Code" in the late nineteenth century, I found myself now once more convinced that one could learn not only from the past about the present but also from the present

23 The title of the book in question was: *Catastrophe and Meaning. The Holocaust and the Twentieth Century*, eds. Moishe Postone and Eric Sautner, Chicago and London 2003.

about the past. It was certainly this belief that inspired the writing of "Antisemitism as Explanation: For and Against."

In 2008, Jonathan Little's novel, *Les Bienveillantes,* (*The Kindly Ones* in English), describing the life of a fictional SS officer in some 900 pages, came out in Hebrew. In a newspaper exchange on this book, I took the opportunity to draw more attention to the brutal, neurotic side of Nazi Antisemitism and Antisemites. I bring this short piece here (number 14) as an interlude, and it is followed by a much later piece, written for a special issue of the *Journal of Holocaust Research* printed as an homage to Saul Friedländer on his 90th birthday. In organizing the present volume, it has occurred to me that this recent essay supports my somewhat hesitant argument of almost fifteen years ago. In fact, Friedländer was the first to apply psychoanalytical tools to the study of Antisemitism with respect to both individuals and groups. He saw in Jew-hatred a symptom of neurosis, and though later he emphatically rejected this approach, it seems that he never altogether denied its relevance for understanding the decisions and the behavior of at least the core of rabid Antisemites within the Nazi elite. My own essay deals with *his* stance on the matter, not mine, but I find that the piece (appearing here as number 15), contributes to an understanding of that important aspect of Nazi Antisemitism, which I stressed in my literary review. Indeed, I still believe that seeing Antisemitism, especially Nazi Antisemitism, as an individual or collective "craze," to quote Friedländer,[24] has been too often and far too rashly rejected, since we have become accustomed to treating it wholly in terms of an organized, bureaucratic project. The matter is too important to leave to novelists.

Finally, a piece first published in 2011 (number 15 in this book), the last in this volume, deals again with the historiography of Antisemitism. This, too, was written as an homage to another historian, namely Shmuel Ettinger, who died twenty years earlier, in the fall of 1988. Ettinger was one of the two historians I had severely criticized in the first essay reprinted in this book and was not a very likely subject for an homage coming from my pen. But, being invited to participate in a conference in his memory, twenty years later, it seemed like a good idea to write a piece that would acknowledge the changes in my position as a sign of appreciation for his important contribution to the field. In so doing, I observed the circular movement of an entire historiographical school, acknowledging the significance of long term Anti-Jewish views, including religious Antisemitism, the focus of Ettinger's writings. In translating this essay for publication here, I have shortened the parts that re-evaluate Ettinger's writings, though the principle

24 See Saul Friedländer, *History and Psychoanalysis: An Inquiry into the Possibilities and Limits of Psychohistory,* New York 1978, 92.

argument of "Historiography in the Loop" remains intact and is still valid, I think, even today.

Finally, in reviewing the collected pieces in this book I became once more and with particular emphasis aware of the changes that I have made in my interpretation of Antisemitism. I began in rejecting the purely intellectual-history approach to the study of Antisemitism. Soon, however, my alternative, namely the social-history approach proved insufficient and likewise unsatisfactory. I was then groping in the direction of cultural history, before the actual 'cultural turn', and it felt right indeed for a long time. Later on, freed from the dogmatism of my earlier years, I came back to some of the notions I had so energetically rejected before: re-introducing the notion of long term hatred, its religious roots, its deep-seated preview of the Jew as the quintessence of evil, feeding phantasies of extinction and redemption, conspiracy theories, sometimes perhaps and in unexpected contexts, functioning as a cultural code.

Preparing this book for publication almost felt like writing an autobiography.[25] I hope that beyond the attempt to handle an interesting, significant, and politically relevant topic, something could also be learned from a peek into the life of one single historian during these eventful years. In a recent article in Hebrew, entitled "What do we do when we talk about Antisemitism?" historian Yair Mintzker reminds us that "when we talk about Antisemitism we do many things, one of them – doubtlessly – is also to talk about ourselves."[26] Doubtlessly, indeed. This book is a proof of it. The book deals with Antisemitism, yes, but also with myself, though perhaps not exactly in the sense intended by Mintzker. Did I also write about Antisemitism in the sense intended by him, namely out of the pain suffered by all Jews, or rather out of the memory of that pain? Probably. Despite the distance required by academic writing and despite the pretense to objectivity. Perhaps I chose this topic not only because it incidentally presented itself to me but because it was relevant to my life as an Israeli-Jewish historian writing on German history. In fact, this topic chose me, so to speak. It was relevant at the time I began my journey as a historian fifty years ago and unfortunately it is still relevant today.

25 For the form of this introduction and the overall concept of this book I have taken as examples George L. Mosse, *Confronting the Nation. Jewish and Western Nationalism*, Hanover and London 1993, and the more recent James J. Sheehan, *Essays on German History and Historians*, Palo Alto Cal. 2022.

26 *Zemanim*, no. 147, 114–119.

I Preliminaries

1 What's Wrong with the Historiography of Antisemitism? Two Reviews and Two Unanswered Questions

Four ways of conceptualizing Jewish history competed with each other roughly between the end of the nineteenth century and the Nazi accession to power in Germany. The first, and surely the least regarded framework when dealing with the modern period, is the old religious view, radical and self-contained, central not only for the lives of Orthodox Jews in Eastern Europe, but also in this continent's Central and Western parts. The second was the so-called Liberal framework, supporting Jewish efforts at full integration in the surrounding societies by using the opportunities opened to individual Jews through their legal emancipation, aiming at as full a participation in non-Jewish society, economy and culture as possible. The third framework was part of the overall Socialist view of modern history, skeptical with regard to the possibilities of integration within the old, capitalist bourgeois order, hopeful of a new world in which all age old barriers among ethnic, national and religious groups would collapse and be replaced by their sense of human brotherhood and peaceful co-existence. And finally, a new Jewish national history had meanwhile emerged, in parallel with and under the auspices of the new Jewish national movement, which in its Zionist version endeavored to establish an independent and separate cultural and political center for all Jews in Eretz-Ysrael, namely in Palestine.

Each one of these conceptions presumed to be an overall ideology, providing answers to the Jewish existence as a whole, and each had a view of its own concerning Antisemitism. Perhaps with the exception of the orthodox conception, all of these views were shaped in an on-going dispute concerning the meaning of Antisemitism, its sources and its functions. For liberal Jews, Jew-hating was a kind of ancient social disease, a residue of a disappearing world, an expression of temporary social unease or cultural distress. Some considered it a remnant of an age-old Christian obsession that is slowly disappearing as a result of ongoing progress and secularization, and some saw in it a painful but meaningless phenomenon, characteristic of marginal and frustrated social groups or neurotic individuals. Others explained the persistence of Antisemitism by pointing out the deficiencies of bourgeois society and still others stressed the role of the particular abnormal position of Jews in this society, which ought to be overcome in a process of self-critique and self-rejuvenation. Jewish Socialists, too, saw in Antisemitism a reaction to the presumably parasitic existence of Jews in society, a symptom of a general social illness that could be healed only by a change in the overall social

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structure and the creation of an egalitarian one. Zionists, in their turn, insisted on seeing Antisemitism as an imminent component of the European consciousness that could be extinguished only by a radical exodus of the Jewish element from this continent and its settlement elsewhere, preferably in the old Jewish homeland, in Palestine.

The controversy among these views of history became ever deeper during the years prior to the Second World War. Intuitively, one would expect a reshuffle of the relationships among them as a result of experiencing an unimaginable expansion and brutalization of Antisemitism under Nazi rule, first in Germany and then in the occupied countries – east and west. One could expect an overhaul of all the established historical narratives, perhaps even a new breakthrough. In fact, however, nothing happened. The four basic conceptions of Jewish existence among the nations as well as the relevant interpretations of Antisemitism remained unchanged. And if, indeed, the balance among them slightly shifted, the last word has not yet been spoken.

Undoubtedly, the Zionist interpretation slightly gained in influence. In a way, Jewish life in the diaspora was proven impossible, and the potential danger of Antisemitism could no longer be denied. The need to reorganize in a separate national territory and to create an independent state, capable of protecting not only the Jews living within it but, in a way, Jews everywhere in the world; this need, too, seemed now undeniable. But interestingly, the other forms of Jewish existence retained their validity, reasserted old *Weltanschauungen* and historical views, and developed new categories for holding on to old communal ties and lifestyles. For many men and women, religiosity remained intact or strengthened even during the years of the holocaust. They continued to find solace in their faith and in their traditional living habits. They even found religious ways of living with the memory of the Shoah. The horrors of the Nazi era strengthened the Jewish Socialists and Communists in their belief that the world had to be changed according to their doctrine. To be sure, they soon had to come to terms with the claims of totalitarianism, bringing them together with the Fascist world, and even more concretely, with the new Antisemitism in the Soviet Union. But true believers withstood this test, too.

No less difficult to uphold was the Liberal position. The strengthening of the Jewish communities in the United States and the revival of Jewish life in the "new" Europe, reconstructed after the war, gave their argument a new thrust. Now it was possible to claim that following the experience of National Socialism and the confrontation with the holocaust, a comprehensive recovery of the Western, Liberal countries from the Antisemitic affliction, and a secure Jewish existence in that part of the world became a hopeful solution once again. The memory of Nazism served as a vaccine against Antisemitism, it was claimed. For those who held on to the

belief in human progress, the holocaust was a catastrophic set-back, no doubt, but not a proof of necessary failure in the future. Early in the 1950s, a new liberal historiography began to take shape. One was ready to refashion the old narrative but not to give up its basic principles. Hannah Arendt, in her book on the origins of Totalitarianism, did so with the help of two assumptions: The one was the negation of continuity in the history of European Antisemitism; the other was shifting the focus of investigation from the general society to the role of the Jews in it and their part in sustaining Jew-hatred throughout the ages – the modern age included. Her book, though surely befitting the *Zeitgeist* of the early Cold War, caused a veritable storm among Jewish scholars, especially in Israel. And indeed, Arendt's two assumptions remain at the heart of the historiography of Antisemitism, expressing the main ideological split within contemporary Jewry.

Let us attempt to formulate the two questions defined by Arendt in the following way: (1) Is Jew-hating a permanent feature of the non-Jewish world that only takes various forms since Antiquity and till today, or are the differences among its various manifestations greater and more important than the similarity among them? And (2) What ought to be the focus of the ongoing research effort in this field: The Antisemitic society which hosts the Jews or the unique diasporic life-style of the Jews and their behavior while living among the nations? In other words: What is it that we ought to investigate: the pains and hardships experienced by the members of the host society, their ideologies, *Weltanschauungen* and psyche, or the Jewish object of their fear and antipathy, its uniqueness on the one hand and the transformations that it underwent, on the other hand?

Liberal historians tend to stress in their studies the uniqueness of *modern* Antisemitism. Usually, they begin either early in the nineteenth century or in the late 1870s. Sometimes it seems that they accept the Antisemites' own narrative, when they insist on the role of the Jews in the advance of modern Capitalism or in propagating and executing a world revolution. Jewish prominence in some specific areas of culture could turn into envy and then to total rejection and even hatred. Zionist historiography in its turn tends to stress the continuity of Antisemitism and to minimize the role of the Jews themselves in reinforcing Antisemitism. In its primitive version, this approach reiterates the claim that "the whole world is against us" and sees in every critique – mild or radical – a sign of a revived Antisemitism. One version of this approach blames the non-Jewish society only, while the other stresses the misery of Jewish existence in the *Golah*. In both it seems unnecessary to take into consideration the unique and changing Jewish place in the host society and the complex interactions between Jews and non-Jews. The force of every new history of Antisemitism would be in rejecting every easy solution, even if one's own ideology depends on it. Today we need, more than ever, a level-headed and balanced historiography.