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Reflections on Contemporary Anti-Semitism in Europe

KENNETH WALTZER | *2015*



Reflections on Contemporary Anti-Semitism in Europe

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The editors are proud to launch a new longer-term publication. Each 'Fathom Insight' will allow writers and readers to explore in great depth a range of key contemporary debates about Israel's future, regional dynamics and the global rise of the 'new antisemitism'. In this inaugural 'Insight', Kenneth Waltzer – the former director of the Jewish Studies program at Michigan State University (MSU) – offers some urgent critical reflections on the growth of antisemitism in Europe.

Authorities in Oslo, Norway, have permanently closed streets to traffic around the Jewish synagogue. In Berlin, Germany, the Jewish community newsletter is sent without any identifiable markings on the envelope, so as not to 'out' recipients as Jews or members.

In Amsterdam, police trailers stand before the 17th century Portuguese Synagogue, the Jewish high school, the Anne Frank Museum, and other institutions. Military police guard the buildings, and Jewish leaders desire that they carry automatic weapons. In Antwerp, an elite army unit patrols the Jewish quarter.

One small group of European Jewish leaders, the European Jewish Association, petitioned the European Union in January to pass new legislation permitting Jewish community members to carry guns 'for the essential protection of their communities.' Observers say that, 70 years after the Holocaust, Jew-hatred is spreading in Europe. Jews are seeing their religious freedom violated, their grave sites vandalised, their synagogues desecrated, and Jewish lives lost.

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In Paris, an Islamic extremist tied to the Charlie Hebdo killers took over the Hyper Cacher kosher grocery and wantonly killed several Jewish hostages. The Charlie Hebdo killers themselves murdered only one woman, a Jewish woman, at the journal's offices, intentionally sparing all others. Soon after the events unfolded in Paris, another jihadist in Copenhagen attacked a free speech gathering, and then murdered a voluntary Jewish community guard outside a bat-mitzvah. In each of these events, Jews were coerced to cower in basement hiding places, as if in a classic Bialik poem, to avoid being massacred.

But such recent events hardly stand alone, following a year during which large public marches in Paris, Brussels, Berlin, and elsewhere included demonstrators calling on Jews to leave France, Belgium, or Germany, and chanting that Hitler didn't finish the job. 'Jews to the gas, Jews to the gas!', hundreds of demonstrators marching away from the Bastille in Paris called out in mid-July. Mob actions occurred against synagogues and Jewish stores in and around the city, including at the Don Abravanel Synagogue; further mob action came a week later at a synagogue in Sarcelles. Moreover, the events in 2014 came after a rising number of killings since the early 2000s, culminating in jihadi killings of children in Toulouse in 2012 and of tourists at the Brussels Jewish Museum in 2014. The brutal slaying of a Jewish child in 2012 by a jihadist was even celebrated by some French Muslims on social media.

What is going on? How shall we understand the shape and meaning of contemporary anti-Semitism in Europe? How shall we begin to come to terms with the rising danger?

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I

Historians of Nazi anti-Semitism are quick to assess these events and stress the need for a sense of proportion. David Cesarani, a leading British Holocaust historian, Professor of History in Royal Holloway, University of London, observes that there is not ‘a wave of anti-Semitism’ – there are no mass movements or significant political parties in Europe that are officially anti-Semitic. Jews are equal citizens with full civil rights in European states with strong claims for protection. Jews are thriving in every walk of life in Europe.¹

Deborah Lipstadt, a leading American Holocaust historian, the Dorot Professor of Modern Jewish History at Emory University, who attended the important Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) Conference on Anti-Semitism in fall 2014, offers similar advice. We are light-years away from the 1930s and 1940s. When anti-Semitism rears its head today, European officials forthrightly deplore and condemn it, she says.²

Nor are the things we see today, these scholars suggest, entirely new. Arab terrorists attacked Jews in London and Paris during the 1970s and 1980s – and a bomb killed people in the synagogue on the Rue Copernic in Paris; another killed people in Jo Goldenberg’s restaurant in the Marais. Personally, when my wife and I visited the Centre de Documentation Juive Contemporaine in the Marais with our young children a few years later in 1985, the building bore signs of having recently been raked by machine gun fire.

And yet, while there is not a ‘wave’ of anti-Semitism and terrible things have occurred before, and while it is not a matter of centralised political mobilisation or state policy anywhere in Europe, the current upsurge of attacks on Jews and Jewish institutions and the deepening antagonisms directed from specific segments of European society are seriously worrying. The cumulative danger, stress, and burden of self-protection threaten lives and communities and also undermines liberal society.

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‘Seventy years after the Holocaust, many Jews in Europe no longer feel safe,’ Lipstadt said before the murders in Paris and Copenhagen. ‘This is not another Holocaust, but it’s bad enough,’ she observed.³ ‘Make no mistake – we have a problem,’ American UN ambassador Samantha Power, speaking forthrightly, told the OSCE conference months before Charlie Hebdo.⁴

No one writes more pessimistically than Polish Jewish writer in Germany and satirist Henryk Broder, a prominent journalist who is a frequent opponent of anti-Semitism. Broder writes pointedly in *Die Zeit*, and with only slight exaggeration, that Jews barely exist as subjects in their own history in Europe today. Rather, they have become wards of the state, protected Jews, as once they were before emancipation.

‘What we are witnessing is not a renaissance of Jewish life in Germany and in Europe, but the end of an experiment. It’s over,’ Broder declares. Things will not get better but will inevitably become worse. ‘Toulouse was the prelude to Brussels, Brussels led to Paris, and Copenhagen will not be the last stop.’⁵

Most recently, American journalist Jeffrey Goldberg – who was in Paris during the Charlie Hebdo events – wrote about the crisis in a dramatic cover story in the *Atlantic Magazine*. ‘Is It Time for the Jews to leave Europe?’ Goldberg asked. His conclusion was grim: ‘European Jewry does not have a bright future.’⁶

II

The new anti-Semitism in Europe appears to come in part from traditional sources on the right side of the political spectrum. Amidst growing economic crisis, there is an intensifying mobilisation of populist responses against immigrants and others and against established elites – in France, Hungary, Greece and elsewhere – which is sharpening antagonisms directed also against Jews. However, the main sources of the new anti-Semitism in most European states are the hard anti-colonial left, which attacks America and Israel as the cornerstones of Western imperialism, and alienated segments of the growing Muslim population, especially marginal youths. French Islamist scholar Olivier

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Roy talks about the upsurge of a ‘globalised Islam’ in areas of Muslim concentration on the periphery of French cities – a militant Islamic resentment against Western dominance – along with a serious and rising anti-Semitism. French sociologist Gilles Kepel writes about the ineffectiveness of French republican ideals in these spaces and, by contrast, the increasing power of an extremist version of Islam.⁷ Already 10 years ago, French philosopher Pierre-Andre Taguieff was writing about a new Judeophobia rising from the muck in France and contributing to increased antagonism toward and rising violence against Jews. Taguieff remarked too – tellingly, at the time, and true ever since – about the absence of anti-racist actions to protest against or blunt the new anti-Semitism.⁸ Many on the hard left prefer to think that anti-Semitism is not a real problem, and to insist that claims about anti-Semitism are offered in bad faith to deflect criticisms against Israel. This also appeared as a stock response immediately after Charlie Hebdo, when several commentators worried not about the attacks on Jews but about a projected Islamophobic backlash to come against Muslims.

Several recent studies based on extensive interviews carried out with Muslim youths, including *The Lure of Anti-Semitism: Hatred of Jews in Present-Day France*, by French sociologist Michel Wieviorka and his team, report on a Manichean view about Jews that is held by many ‘disenfranchised youths’ among Muslims of North African origin in France. These elements talk about Jews as powerful, privileged, and evil, as inveterate enemies of Muslims, and as conspirators against humanity. Jews are rich and stingy, these youths say openly; Jews in Europe side with Israel which has stolen Palestinian land and is an unrelievedly evil nation in the world of nations. Jews are treacherous and unscrupulous. The word ‘Jew’ itself is a negative epithet again – Goldberg heard the neighbourhood parlance of ‘Feuj’ (a reversal of ‘Juif’, a street slur) in the Paris outskirts – and many among such youths believe that the Holocaust is a Jewish swindle. ‘Jews, and all those who massacre Muslims, I detest them,’ said the sister of the jihadist who killed Jews in Toulouse.

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Some scholars like Brown University historian Maude Mandel have sought to understand this sharpening antagonism between Muslims and Jews by painstakingly retracing the complex history of Muslim-Jewish relations against the backdrop of the North African anti-colonial revolutions and the ongoing Israeli-Palestinian conflict. She also probes the impact of the migration of Jews and Muslims to France, where the two groups underwent divergent integration processes. Still others see such animosity as deriving from a broad anti-colonial resentment against Western hegemony and actions in the Middle East and North Africa, hence not to be considered a base hatred at all but really part of an anti-imperialist resistance outlook.⁹ But to this writer, it appears that a good deal more than inter-ethnic community political friction and resentment among people of different identities is happening, and that more than a general anti-colonial outlook affects thought and sentiment among the resentful in the banlieues. For myself, I see a new anti-Semitism that is growing and metastasising, absorbing earlier forms and themes of Jew hatred but adding new ones fit for the current age. Jeffrey Goldberg observes of Europe that, ‘Traditional Western patterns of anti-Semitic thought have now merged with a potent strain of Muslim Judeophobia.’

Shalom Lappin of Kings College, London, has communicated with this writer that we should comprehend the wider context in order to better comprehend the moment. Lappin argues that European nations have been living through an extended period of economic recession with resultant wrenching social dislocations. These developments have affected living standards and blunted the prospects of large parts of Europe’s population, especially the most marginal members among the immigrant minorities. The failure of European states to address the economic causes of the recession and their toleration of deeply misguided austerity policies has extended the stagnation. The failure by social democratic or liberal parties to deal well with the situation has given rise to right-wing xenophobic parties which threaten mainstream politics. At the same time, European Muslim communities have been deeply infected by the rising influence of Islamists who carry on education and recruitment in these communities without much interference from moderates. Dislocated youths without real prospects encounter such people in the mosques, on the streets, in

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the underground economy, and in the prisons, where such anti-Jewish hatred is clearly communicated.

‘The Jews of Europe are [thus] now caught between the anvil of right-wing populism and the hammer of virulent anti-Jewish racism promoted by radical Islamism,’ Lappin says.¹⁰ Mainstream politicians pay lip service to defending Jews from attack and engage in ceremonial hand ringing and issue proclamations after major violent incidents. However, they are more likely than not to eventually return to more pressing political concerns after the violent events pass. Much of the ‘liberal’ elite in European countries cannot be counted on, Lappin worries, for the Jews are not a demographically significant population in anyone’s electoral calculations, and so – with few exceptions (French Prime Minister Manuel Valls is clearly one) – Jews lack for serious long-term allies. Momentary protection from European leaders and state security forces continues to be highly visible, but Jewish communities are nonetheless increasingly oppressed by the burdens of fear and self-protection, until individual Jews can feel barred from living robust and openly Jewish lives. Others – still a small minority, contrary to recent speeches by self-serving Israeli leaders – contemplate joining in an exodus.

III

Jeffrey Goldberg wrote that a post-Holocaust dispensation has broken down or come to an end in Europe. ‘The Shoah served for a while as a sort of inoculation against the return of overt Jew-hatred – but the effects of the inoculation, it is becoming clear, are wearing off. What was once impermissible is again imaginable.’ Laws that prevent Holocaust denial, so many Holocaust-related films and books, changes to school curricula, state-of-the-art Holocaust museums and memorials, even the sponsored trips by students for on-site learning to infamous Holocaust sites, serve now mainly as imposed rituals from the past which work to persuade others in the present that the Jews receive too much attention and are over-privileged. Youths whose parents migrated after the war, and who feel strongly the tensions of living still at the periphery in their adopted nations, feel little connection with Europe’s dark history during the

Second World War and even less responsibility for internalising past lessons about hate, intolerance, and mass murder.

Moreover, as researchers have indicated, attitudes of Muslim youths in Europe about the Holocaust itself are shaped by widespread and negative views held about Jews. Günther Jikeli of the University of Potsdam and the Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique (GSRL/CNRS) writes in ‘European Muslim Antisemitism: Why Young Urban Males Say They Don’t Like Jews’, and in numerous additional articles in contemporary essay collections, that anti-Semitic views of the Jews shape distorted views of the Holocaust by Muslim youths, including minimizing the Holocaust, drawing inappropriate comparisons, outright Holocaust denial or even the approval of the Holocaust.¹¹ Rather than serving as a prophylactic, then, against future occurrences of ethnic hatred or violence, or even helping cement a pluralist consensus about tolerance, the Holocaust today becomes a brickbat in contemporary intercultural conflicts, abused to create a new claim that the Jews manipulate reality to their advantage and – sliding over to a classic trope – hold unjust, extreme power over others.

This is clearly the message, for example, of Dieudonné M’bala M’bala, the French-Cameroonian demagogue whose anti-establishment and anti-Jewish messages in comedy shows and in various tangles with the French courts, stirs widespread support among youth in the banlieues. Manuel Valls told local authorities even before the Charlie Hebdo events they could shut down Dieudonné’s miserable performances as potential threats to public order, citing their ‘anti-Semitic and defamatory’ material and ‘virulent and shocking attacks on the memory of Holocaust victims.’ After recent events, the French state quickly detained and successfully prosecuted Dieudonné – a man who has been arrested numerous times for violating French hate speech laws – for remarks favouring and inciting to terrorism and for additional outright racist comments. Dieudonné claims openly that France is run by Jewish slave drivers and that ‘the big crooks of the planet are all Jews.’ He complains ‘the Holocaust has become almost a dominant religion’ in France, and attacks Manuel Valls as ‘a little Israeli soldier’. His shows turn out thousands of young people from immigrant backgrounds and also from the white lower middle class in the cities, uniting

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these patrons in anger at the elites that run France. Dieudonné introduces to his audience the ravings of established French Holocaust deniers and activists in the right-wing National Front. His anti-establishment salute, the *quenelle*, which resembles closely an inverted Hitler salute, is performed at all such shows, making them resemble Nazi mass meetings. His followers purposefully perform the gesture, photograph themselves in front of prominent Jewish or Holocaust-related institutions and circulate the images on social media.¹²

All this suggests indeed that when it comes to anti-Semitism, a post-war, post-Holocaust consensus is coming apart, at least in some quarters and among certain groups. While the state acts to protect Jews and even polices the most radical anti-Jewish speech, a significant anti-Jewish social movement spreads in several European societies and retails allegations that Jews exert excessive national power here and abroad, seek nefarious ends, and scheme to impose special burdens on Muslims.¹³ This movement works to elevate the Palestinians into transcendental victims (like the Jews once were elevated in the aftermath of the Second World War), and condemns Jews – and friends of Jews – as Israeli auxiliaries. The Jews next door or nearby, or in the next district, are held responsible for events far away in the Middle East, yet are also blamed for events at home, especially those seen to be tied to exercises of supposed ‘Jewish power.’ Ironically, even the state protection that is offered to Jews and Jewish institutions in the wake of violence is seen as a reflection of Jewish power rather than relative powerlessness.

Even still, the sources of anger among Muslim youth continue to be somewhat difficult to pin down precisely, and a healthy discussion continues about the causal factors. Many observers talk about the structural causes behind anti-Jewish violence, like narrowed opportunities and urban ghettos that isolate many youths and bar their integration. Others report on cycles of discrimination and marginalisation, crime, and imprisonment that work in dynamic ways to cumulatively disadvantage such youths. Still other observers, however, including Günther Jikeli, think that cumulative disadvantage is not exactly the case, that many youths are less isolated and better integrated than usually thought and that their anti-Semitism and ripeness for trouble is unconnected with poverty or

narrowed chances. Such youths, including the jihadis in the Charlie Hebdo and Hyper Cacher events, appear ripe for what Gilles Kepel calls recruitment in a third wave of international jihad, which is focused on carrying out violent attacks on targets in Europe; at the same time it is becoming clearer that such youths also include university students who are well integrated in their local settings and pursuing advanced education, and possessing skills, but who are deeply alienated from their French or Belgian identities.

The anthropologist Scott Atran, who conducts field-based approaches to understanding Muslim youth attraction to radicalism, testified in 2010 that jihadists are mostly youths in transitional stages of their lives who have been influenced by radical Islamist teachings from the media and influential imams. They seek esteem, fulfilment and glory in the eyes of their friends; they are not religious youths, but are reborn with a new meaning and purpose as Islamic radicals; and they are not necessarily marginal economically. As Atran concludes, exploring the paths that these youths take to jihad, 'You find it's especially appealing to young people in transitional stages in their lives: immigrants, students, people in search of jobs or mates, or between jobs and mates, and it gives a sense of empowerment that their own societies certainly don't.'¹⁴ However, Atran's work on pathways to radicalism and violence, which highlights the importance of friendship networks, has not to date focused on those who participate in anti-Semitic mobs or embrace direct violence against Jews. Thus, it is unclear if what he says about recruitment or mobilisation for jihad can also be said about recruitment to purposeful anti-Jewish violence. It is nonetheless tempting to draw similar conclusions.

Historian Robert Wistrich, the Neuberger Professor of European and Jewish History at Hebrew University, suggests that a process began after 2000 in France which as it reaches maturity is creating great danger. Echoing Lappin, he argues that a more general European crisis has developed, dividing the country into an 'elite France' well-adjusted to globalisation, and a 'peripheral France' poorly adjusted to the globalising economy. These changes coincide with a cross-breeding of far-left with far-right and Islamic ideas and ideologies, helping spur a resurgent and potent new anti-Semitism. To the question where did young

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French Muslims acquire their virulent anti-Jewish views, Wistrich argues that it was a component of a militant ethno-religious identity based on hatred of the West and of Jews brought originally from the Maghreb. A Quran-oriented hostility to infidels was then blended with anti-Semitic conspiracy theories drawn from European sources of both the right and far left. This deadly brew has been fertilised in recent years by the ongoing currents of global jihad, nourished by media sensationalism, and influenced by a cult of heroic violence, which have been aided by the failure of state institutions to fully absorb youths in les quartiers, urban anomie, juvenile delinquency, and marginalisation.¹⁵

One must note that there is little which serves to moderate or soften the view of ‘the Jew’ that now circulates in les quartiers, nor is there any deep complexity or nuance in the anti-Jewish portrait. Today, there is little shared experience among Jews and Muslims which might soften the circulated anti-Jewish image. Michael Wieviorka speaks of ‘Un antisemitisme (presque) sans Juifs [Anti-Semitism (almost) without Jews],’¹⁶ and there are tropes in claims about Jews that begin to approach classic mythic beliefs about Jews with magical powers, Jews as shape shifters, Jews as satanic, and more. There is nothing at all subtle in the widespread idea of powerful, evil, grasping Jews. In 2014, Sheik Abu Billel Ismail at the Al Nur mosque in Berlin, called on his followers to kill the Zionist Jews ‘to the last one,’ sliding quickly and easily over into calling for the annihilation of all Jews, ‘the slayers of the Prophets.’ An imam in Copenhagen, speaking the day before the recent anti-Semitic murder, preached that the Prophet did not dialogue with the Jews but identified them as inveterate enemies and made open war on them. This Judeophobia draws together several strands – from left and right, from selective mining of classic Quranic sources, and from recirculation of well-known secular texts, like the Protocols of the Elders of Zion. Little distinction is made between Israel, Zionists, European Jews, and French or Belgian or German Jews – Jews appear as a unified, organic category. Jikeli, who has studied Muslim youth in Paris, Berlin, and London, observes that there are minimal differences in their attitudes toward Jews despite sharp differences in the respective sizes of the national Jewish communities, the relevant background histories, or in the French case, the shared Maghreb origins. Just as European architecture and art once came to

offer an unrelieved portrait of Jewish evil, so now the dominant thought among many Muslim youth on the urban periphery is that Jews are enemies of the good and despicable conspirers against all that is just or holy.

IV

So, in face of resurgent anti-Semitism in Europe in increasingly more dangerous and violent forms and its rise in the mental life of specific segments of society, what is to be done? In February, the Simon Wiesenthal Center warned, 'Paris and Copenhagen are bound to be precedents for a pan-European epidemic. Condemnation is insufficient.' So what might be a sufficient policy agenda to begin to deal with the situation?

First, there is the need for continued state protection and rhetorical support for the equal rights of Jews in Europe. Public pronouncements like those made in recent months by French Prime Minister Manuel Valls and others, including the foreign ministers of France and Germany, and the Home Secretary and Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, continue to be important and necessary. They signal concern about the targeted victims and also about anti-Semitism as a barometer of the basic health of their societies. State security agencies have to be bolstered with significant resources, and state intelligence agencies, linked with those in other states, must more efficiently share information and coordinate action against suspects crossing borders to obtain military training and infiltrating back into host European nations. Surveillance must be stepped up at the borders, in the banlieues, and in the prisons. Protection also must continue visibly near Jewish institutions, with the reasons – the universal rights of citizenship – proclaimed to all. The liberal project in Europe is linked with active public embrace of a society of equality before the law for people of all groups. Similar initiative is required at EU level, as well as in individual member states. The adoption of a clear working definition of anti-Semitism similar to the EUMC (European Union Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia, now the Agency For Fundamental Rights, FRA) Working Definition adopted in 2005, since unreasonably jettisoned, and the creation of active monitoring institutions

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tracking and recording onslaughts against Jews and Jewish institutions must be a formal all-European project and a multi-state, trans-national responsibility.¹⁷

Second, there is the equal necessity for active state support for significant initiatives against unemployment, especially youth unemployment, targeted to creating positive and enduring effects among many hard-hit communities on the urban outskirts. More must be done throughout the EU to create economic growth and ladders of youth opportunity and new possibilities for greater integration into the work world for youths who are transitioning from school to work and family to maturity. Actions must also be devised to improve services in these immigrant communities, including better policing, special employment agencies, improvements in health care, and better transportation, all to fight against the dominant feeling in such areas that the people there are ‘second zone citizens’ or outcasts of Europe.

Third, there must be a serious effort undertaken in the schools stressing the relevance and importance of democratic rights to all. How best to carry out such an initiative is debatable – the rigid French approach called *laïcité* continues to be a special problem, pushing away rather than absorbing youths, excluding as well as including – but the bottom line is that many schools have been failing to draw all citizens into a working consensus about the value of the ongoing European liberal project. Central to doing so will be to teach about the current social crisis, discrimination and its effects, and the rights of immigrants. Such relevancy strategies, however, must also be accompanied by courageous teaching about anti-Semitism and its consequences, and about its roots in – amongst other places – radical Islam. There can be no retreat on this. It is already the case that there are very few Jews left in the state schools in most European countries, as Jewish children have been withdrawn for their own safety to private schools. More goes on in this respect than the retreat by Jews for protection to havens, as parallel trends exist in Jewish and Islamic communities highlighting religious as opposed to secular approaches to identity. The failure of the schools reflects multiple problems: failed teaching and curricula, stiff youth resistance, and the radical narrowing of common spaces to learn shared public values.

Fourth, there is a growing need in Europe's social democratic and liberal parties to more boldly and effectively confront the anti-Semitic and anti-Israel currents that course through Europe's hard left, creating insidious effects in discussion of Jews and of the Jewish state. These parties must decide strongly to stand against these trends while at the same time supporting international progress toward an agreed two-state solution in Israel/Palestine, and constructive actions to bolster the human rights of Arabs and refugees caught in the dissolution of Middle Eastern state structures, as well as the ongoing Sunni-Shiite internecine wars. Recent events in Paris and Copenhagen must be understood in the context of an international movement to delegitimise the Jewish state through dangerous forms of Judeophobic discourse and actions mainstreamed by hard left currents. Such talk and actions underwrite damning caricatures of Israel, Zionism, Jews, and Jewish politics, and lead into or strengthen claims of Jewish power and evil. The object must be to affect conversation in the public square and, in the process, to remind people in a globalising world where diverse peoples come together in new and challenging ways of the growing threat that anti-Semitism poses to the European liberal project. More than annual commemorations highlighting the liberation of Auschwitz or on-site school visits are required to reach the public. More than stylised, routinised and vague forms of human rights rhetoric is urgently demanded. The issue of anti-Semitism ought not to be the concern of Jews alone but of larger publics. Anti-semitism does not stop with the Jews.

Finally, to the extent that the motive and energy for hate and violence in Muslim areas comes from international developments in Islam rather than European social realities, rhetorical initiatives, employment efforts, social programs, schooling campaigns, and efforts aggressively to reclaim the public square may not work fully to change the new reality. There will still be some Muslim youths motivated by rage from currents flowing abroad and influenced by Islamic radicals at home, and there will be marginal youths prone to engage in criminal actions, participate in street mobs, and carry out violence aimed at Jews. So, Jewish communities will also have to work independently – in cooperation with local authorities – to efficiently organise their resources to enhance their self-protection. As in earlier periods of modern Jewish history, Jews must organise

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self-defence to protect individuals and communities. Already, some rabbis have begun learning simple self-defence tactics, and Jewish youths are being organised in several places into community-based guards. In July 2014, only the Jewish community self-defence force (the SPCJ, or Service de Protection de la Communauté Juivenel) in Paris warded off mob action against the Don Abravanel Synagogue. All such Jewish defence forces will need communications and protective equipment. Jewish groups elsewhere in the diaspora should be organised to support such efforts to strengthen Jewish self-defence, especially when and where state protection begins to wane or weaken.

V

The second week in April marked the 70th anniversary of the liberation of Buchenwald, and several score survivors made their way back to Weimar, Germany to honour comrades and to share in remembrance. One survivor told of a fellow prisoner in the camp who believed that whoever survived that hell would live in paradise, because when people learned of the Nazi atrocities, they would lose their desire to kill. This sounds hopelessly utopian today and fits poorly with recent terrible events. No one appreciates this better than the survivors. My current scholarship focuses on the rescue of children and youths at Buchenwald, so I continue interacting with a large, if dwindling, group of these survivors. One told me recently how, living in Europe, he feels as if he is reliving, if not the same then certainly a very familiar history. This fellow willingly shares his experiences, believing that his testimony serves as a warning and helps to shape a better world. Such commitment to persistent witness rests on a faith that we can and must do certain things to avoid the worst. This is instructive. Today, we too need to keep on reflecting and talking about what things we and others can and must do to avoid the worst.

Acknowledgments

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Endnotes

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Anthony Julius



Emily Landau



John Lloyd



Andrei S. Markovits



Yossi Mekelberg



Alan Mendoza



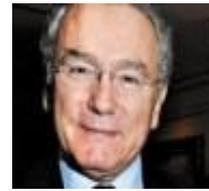
Shany Mor



Joshua Muravchik



**Donna Robinson
Devine**



Robert Perlman



Jonathan Rynhold



Anita Shapira



Asher Susser



Gadi Taub



Einat Wilf



Michael Walzer



**Alexander
Yacobson**

About Fathom

Fathom is BICOM's quarterly journal. It was created in 2012 to answer the need for a deeper understanding of Israel – a complex and fast-changing society, commanding global attention, but often reduced to a caricature by parts of the mass media, civil society and our intellectual culture.

Fathom maps the revolutionary changes in the Arab world that have transformed Israel's neighbourhood; we are partisans and artisans of the two-state solution, aiming to put some intellectual substance back into the project of mutual recognition and peaceful coexistence between Israelis and Palestinians; we explore the strategic relationship between Britain and Israel.

Fathom's contributors and advisory editors are drawn from across the political spectrum because our goal is not to push a narrow party line but rather to build a global intellectual space for serious and constructive bi-partisan debate. Ours is a more interesting conversation about Israel – more knowledgeable, more nuanced and more challenging (for all parties).

Cover Image: French soldiers guard the entrance to a synagogue in Paris, 2 March 2015.

Photo by Serge Attal/Flash 90.