

## **Monika Schwarz-Friesel (TU Berlin), Speech on Antisemitism at the ICCA, Bundestag Berlin, 14.3.2016**

“Destroy Israel: Jews are the Evil of the World!” (2014, E-Mail to the Israeli Embassy in Berlin) -Manifestations of Contemporary Antisemitism

Ladies and gentlemen, good morning!

The Gaza conflict in the summer of 2014 brought about an eruption of anti-Jewish and anti-Israeli utterances and manifestations in Germany. On the streets of German cities one could read and hear utterances like “Jew, Jew, cowardly pig” (Berlin), “Stop the Jewish terror!” (Essen); “Supposedly former victims. Now themselves perpetrators” (Essen); “ Hamas, Hamas, Jews to the gas chambers” (Gelsenkirchen); “Child-murderer Israel (Berlin).” The same slogans could be heard in London, Paris, Washington, Istanbul—throughout the world. At the same time, a flood of antisemitic hate speech appeared on the World Wide Web. The question came up whether those incitements were just singular, non-representative slurs, yelled by a few radicalized youngsters. ‘They are just extremists of some kind,’ or ‘merely some immigrants,’ or ‘People don’t really mean it’ were recurrent expressions you could hear in the public and in the media.

Empirical data of our longitudinal corpus study on contemporary antisemitism, however, show that this is not the case; that, in fact, those antisemitic slurs are quite common and can be found on all levels of society. The rich body of empirical data our research is based on - approx. 200,000 texts from the Internet, approx. 20,000 E-Mails to Jewish Institutions, approx. 150,000 texts from the media coverage of the Middle East conflict have been analysed in the last 10 years or so - shows that the old judeophobic resentment is still very much alive, not only on the edges of society, but also in the mainstream of society.

In the twenty-first century, the official ban on antisemitic utterances has lost its influence, and the articulation of traditional antisemitic stereotypes by projecting them on Israel has increased significantly. In fact, antisemitism turns out to be a worldwide phenomenon on the rise. Jews have been attacked and killed in Belgium and in France, spit upon in Rome and in London, and more. In Berlin, there is a growing hostility (both verbally and physically) toward Jews on the streets of certain areas. Jewish institutions in Germany have to be kept under constant police supervision. International polls show that the attitude toward the Jewish state of Israel has become extremely hostile and aggressive everywhere; this hostility is based on Judeophobic stereotypes and an age-old bias in new garb.

All over the world, frantic and obsessive anti-Israel boycott movements have spread, gaining influence especially in left-wing circles, but also in parts of the Christian Church and public institutions. There is a virulent campus antisemitism in both U.S. and British colleges and universities that claims to be critical of Israel but in fact is based on hostility toward Jews and uses the same demonizing verbal strategies as do right-wing extremists and neo-Nazis.

Let me present to you now the main results of my empirical research that focuses on the main conceptual and verbal characteristics of today’s antisemitism:

- We see the persistence of age-old classical stereotypes and argumentation patterns in modern discourse, in spite of coping with the past after the Holocaust: Jews and/or

Israelis are described as murderers of little children, blood libel users, shylocks, traitors, liars, land robbers, disloyal strangers, as a collective with specific characteristics. Jews are still conceptualized as “the others”, as “the most vile and mean creatures on earth” by antisemites. They are perceived as “a threat to mankind”.

- The experience of Auschwitz and years of education did not change the age-old hostile conceptualization of Jews: We see the recurring conceptualization of ‘Jews are the evil in the world’ re-activated as ‘Israel is the evil in the world’ as in the following e-Mail to the Israeli embassy: “Israel is an illegitimate evil state and threatens world peace.” (IBD; Gaza-14)<sup>i</sup>. And a journalist, member of a left-wing party writes that “Only by the complete dissolution of the illegal Zionist ‘construct’, peace will come to the world.”
- Antisemitism is not primarily a phenomenon among Neo-Nazis or Muslim fundamentalists, but found on all levels of society. More than 60 per cent of the antisemitic writings to the Central council of Jews in Germany and to the Israeli embassy in Berlin are from people belonging to the so called middle of society: students, architects, bankers, lawyers, doctors, priests and so on, often highly educated people with an academic background who know exactly what happened in the Holocaust. Those anti-Semites pose as Anti-antisemites fiercely denying being anti-Semitic. “Israel’s cruelty...Now I understand why Jews are said to be rotten, brutal, lying, greedy and ruthless. Many of my classmates feel exactly the way I do!” states an E-mail to the embassy of Israel in Berlin from an 18 years old high school student, who “is politically left”, “works for Amnesty International”, “is against all kinds of racism”. Thus, modern judeophobia is not necessarily connected to racism and xenophobia and combating antisemitism in an effective way has to acknowledge that fact.
- There is a fierce antisemitism from the left that appears camouflaged as “criticism of Israel” or as “Anti-Zionism”, at the same time educated people from the mainstream articulate verbal antisemitism, as well: The following e-mail to the Central Council of Jews in Germany has been sent by a law professor: “... all your crimes ... The reason for this must be the Zionist idea to be the chosen people.” Here, you see one of the most dominant argumentation patterns in anti-Semitic discourse, the conflation of Jews and Israelis that goes along with ascribing collective responsibility for everything bad going on in the world to the ‘collective Jew’. Further, causal explanations for the existence antisemitism are given, namely blaming the Jews and/or Israel.
- There is hardly any difference between the texts of right, left and mainstream antisemites: they evoke the same stereotypes, they use the same patterns of argumentation. The difference lies only in the style, the less radical language use, but the semantics of devaluation is the same. The antisemitic texts of mainstream writers are not as vulgar as extremist’s writings, they avoid death threats, but instead propose other genocidal solutions in the name of “humanity”. Lethal “solution plans” are being transferred from “the Jewish question” to the state of Israel. “Dissolve the state of Israel with the help of UN!” (a left-wing „Peace Activist“ to the Israeli embassy in Berlin) articulates the old anti-Semitic “salvation phantasy” just as the following E-mail does: “Only by your complete extermination we will get peace on earth. Heil Hitler! He was a humanist since he wanted to bring salvation to the world through your extinction.” (E-Mail to the IBB, 2012 from a Neo-Nazi).

- Antisemites from mainstream society prefer to use indirect speech acts (rhetorical questions, allusions of specific kinds and reference shifting) to express their hostility towards Jews and/or the Jewish state of Israel. This implicit verbal anti-Semitism, however, invokes the same traditional stereotypes as in the texts from extremists. Hence, those indirect forms are as dangerous to the collective mind of a society as direct, manifest forms of Jew hatred.
- Overall, there is a global “Israelization of antisemitic discourse”. The articulation of traditional antisemitic stereotypes by projecting them onto Israel is by now the most dominant manifestation of modern Jew hatred. Why Israel? That is self-evident, isn’t it? Israel is not just the most prominent symbol for Jewish survival after the Holocaust, but also the most important symbol for Jewish existence in the world. As such, it is a provocation to anti-Semites all over the world. Thus, claiming to just criticize Israeli politics, but articulating at the same time judeophobic stereotypes, is the most prominent form of camouflaged Jew hatred. Antisemites all over the world have found a verbal strategy to articulate judeophobia according to the social rules and ethical standards of the Post-Holocaust-epoch. Here, once again, antisemitism proves to be a chameleon: it changes its colors according to the social and political situations, to its environment, but stays the same at its cognitive and emotional core.
- Since the most frequent manifestation of contemporary antisemitism is encoded as anti-Israelism and camouflaged as “criticism of Israel”, there is the danger of normalization of verbal antisemitism on all social levels in the public. We do see a double standard when it comes to antisemitism: It is strongly condemned when it comes from the right, it is accepted when it comes from the left (framed as “political criticism”).
- Delegitimization and demonization of the Jewish state is not restricted to the Internet or to private discourse, but also articulated in public discourse and mainstream media: “Israel is an European colony on Arab land, that is the truth“ (said a former German parliamentarian at a prime time TV talk show on 30.07.2014) ascribing “orgies of bombing” to Israel.
- There is an overwhelming emotional dimension in antisemitism that is important to consider: emotion determines and overrules experience, facts and reason, people tend to believe anything bad about the Jews or Israel (without proof or knowledge): “I don’t need to visit Israel. I know everything about this miserable country and its cruel inhabitants.” (E-Mail to the Embassy, Gaza 2014, a history teacher). The judeophobic mental belief system, the “rumour about the Jews, as Adorno called it, overrules and determines everything.
- Denial of antisemitism is by now one of the most frequent techniques in modern anti-Semitic discourse, and it takes the following forms: “I am not an Antisemite!, I am a humanist through and through” (denial and self legitimization), “this is merely political criticism of Israel” (re-framing of speech acts), “we have no serious problem today” (historization of antisemitism), “this is only a phenomenon of right-wing

extremists or migrants” (playing down), (“I do not believe a word of this report” (irrational refusal of facts and research results).

Let me sum up: In spite of the historical knowledge as to what consequences a rhetoric of hate and hostility might have, verbal antisemitism has increased, especially on the World Wide Web, but also in public discourse.

Hatred of the Jewish state of Israel is at the center of the activities of antisemites no matter whether from the right, left, or mainstream. Demonizing Israel “as the most dangerous peril” on earth, delegitimizing and derealizing the Jewish state as an “apartheid regime practicing state terror,” calling it a “child-murderer” and a “disgrace to humankind,” asking people to boycott its products because of its “state racism” is not criticism; it is antisemitism in its current, most dominant manifestation. And it is spreading all over the world.

Hatred of and hostility toward Jews are deeply engraved in the collective memory. Over the centuries, the surface has changed, but the core of hateful feelings and mental stereotypes has remained unaltered. And Judeophobia sometimes proves to be resistant to education, to argument, to reasoning, to facts. In spite of all the efforts to erase the distorted and false picture of Jews and Judaism after the Holocaust, my data reveal the truth about the continuity and persistence of the age-old hostility toward Jews, the stereotypes on which it rests, and its most current verbal manifestations. Deeply rooted in the Western tradition of thinking and feeling for almost two thousand years, it proves to be a central part of Western culture.

Let us reflect on the fact that 2,000 years of Jew-hatred stand against only 50 years or so of officially combating antisemitism. To cope with contemporary hatred of Jews, to find a solution so as to seriously and effectively fight it, one must take this into account.

Both explicit and implicit verbal antisemitism continually reproduces age-old hostile conceptualizations of Jews and hence validates their existence in the cultural and communicative memory of society.

Verbal antisemitism is a form of mental violence, but a very dangerous mental violence: A greater public awareness of explicit and implicit verbal antisemitism and of its deep impact on society is needed.

Thank you for your attention.

---

<sup>i</sup> Examples are cited from the book *Inside the Antisemitic Mind. The Language of Jew Hatred in Contemporary Germany*“ by Monika Schwarz-Friesel and Jehuda Reinharz, to appear in September 2016, UPNE: Brandeis.