

**This is a draft of a chapter to be published as:**

Andre Oboler, "Zionism through the Internet's looking glass" in [From Antisemitism to Anti-Zionism: The Past & Present of a Lethal Ideology](#) (Academic Studies Press, forthcoming in 2017).

## Zionism through the Internet's looking glass

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### Introduction

There are two concepts which inspire more online passion than almost any other. Both concepts relate to Zionism, yet they are as different from each other as night and day. The one is the view of Zionists, the other a concept of evil promoted by various types of anti-Zionists who would more accurately be described as antisemites. Anti-Zionism is not always antisemitic, but any form of anti-Zionism which demonizes the concept of Zionism is antisemitic by definition. This chapter introduces these two diametrically opposed views of Zionism then discusses the resulting clash in the online world and its significance in efforts to combat global antisemitism.

The Zionist's concept of Zionism sees Zionism as the liberation movement of an oppressed people, a movement designed to protect the people's future.<sup>1</sup> This is reflected in Theodore Herzl words as he opened the first Zionist Congress in 1897, "We are here to lay the foundation stone of the house which is to shelter the Jewish nation".<sup>2</sup> Shelter and protection were acutely needed and deeply justified after almost 2000 years of exile in which the Jewish people were subjected to special laws and taxes, restrictions on employment, religious persecution including blood libels and the Spanish Inquisition, and massacres in the form of pogroms.<sup>3</sup> The genocide committed against the Jewish people in the Holocaust later reaffirmed this need.

The Zionist view of Zionism is in fact a broad tent with many entrances. For some, the belief comes from religion, for others it is based on universal principles of human rights, others still see it as a way to protect Jewish culture, build a better society through labour, or to advance the case of the Jewish people on the international political stage. Zionism is all of these things and none of them. It is a modern political movement expressing the often conflicted and contradictory will of an ancient people. Ambassador Michael Oren describes the lived experience of Zionism as "Jewish responsibility" and as "reconciling our desire to be enlightened with our longing to remain alive".<sup>4</sup>

The other concept of Zionism is axiomatic; it sees Zionism being the ultimate evil as a self-evident and necessary truth. This is expressed most nakedly by Gilad Atzmon in 1996 when he wrote "To regard Hitler as the ultimate evil is nothing but surrendering to the Zio-centric discourse. To regard Hitler as the wickedest man and the Third Reich as the embodiment of evilness is to let Israel off the hook... It is about time we internalise the fact that Israel and Zionism are the ultimate Evil with no comparison".<sup>5</sup> This view was not new. It traces its origins to the Arab states and their war with the "Zionist Entity", the state of Israel they refused to acknowledge or name.<sup>6</sup> The British too played a part in this, describing Zionism in terms of a range of unpopular political ideologies in an effort to undermine it.<sup>7</sup>

The real push for Zionism to be considered the ultimate evil, however, came from the USSR. Through the Cold War which followed World War II Jews in the Soviet Union experienced increase

antisemitism as Stalin sought to create tension between “real Russians”, i.e. ethnic Russians, presented as patriots, and “non-Russians” such as Jews who were presented as anti-patriots.<sup>8</sup> A state crackdown on intellectuals seen as lacking Soviet patriotism and being pro-Western, which began in 1947, had by 1949 focused on “rootless cosmopolitans”, that is Soviet Jews.<sup>9</sup> Zionism, which promoted Jewish nationalism and identity, was directly opposed to Soviet ideals. By 1963, the plight of Soviet Jewry began attracting attention internationally. Unable to attack the Jews directly due to international opposition to antisemitism following the Holocaust, the USSR sought instead to attack Zionism, redefining it in the international arena, through state sponsored propaganda, as the ultimate evil.<sup>10</sup>

The culmination of the Soviet propaganda effort was the passage of the infamous Resolution 3379 of the United Nations General Assembly on the 10<sup>th</sup> of November 1975.<sup>11</sup> This resolution defined Zionism as a form of racism. It was repealed by the United Nations General Assembly on the 16 of December 1991 by 111 votes to 25.<sup>12</sup> The Zionism is Racism push, including an effort to reinstate resolution 3379, was renewed a decade later in 2001 at Non-Government Organisation (NGO) Forum of the World Conference Against Racism in Durban South Africa.<sup>13</sup> The Durban Conference set out a plan of action which led to today’s Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) movement.<sup>14</sup>

Approaching anti-Zionism from another angle were Neo-Nazi groups. These groups, like the Soviet Union, found outright antisemitism deeply unpopular after the Holocaust, but joined others in using “Zionism” as code for Jews. The Protocols of the Elders of Zion, an antisemitic forgery pretending to be the minutes of a secret meeting of Jewish leaders who were controlling the world, were required reading under the Nazis.<sup>15</sup> The neo-Nazis expanded this idea of conspiracy, speaking of the United States, and later other countries, as being run by “Zionist Occupied Governments”.<sup>16</sup>

A word should also be said of the tiny minority of legitimate anti-Zionists who are not antisemites. Zionism is an expression of self-determination for the Jewish people. There are other possible expressions of self-determination, though they are far less common today. Groups like the Satmar, a sect of Ultra-Orthodox Jews numbering around 120,000 people, who object to the idea of a Jewish state on religious grounds without employing antisemitic arguments, are anti-Zionist without being antisemitic. Those who object to the idea of nation states, without focusing on Israel as the first target to be dismantled, are likewise anti-Zionist by definition but not antisemitic. This chapter is not about these few but about the vast majority of anti-Zionists who are in fact anti-Jewish and find “anti-Zionism” to be a more acceptable way of clothing their antisemitism.

Antisemitism in the guise of anti-Zionism is not a problem of the past, but one causing problems today from college campuses to the international arena. The Professor Robert Wistrich z”l warned of the danger as long ago as 1984, saying “it can be compared to the threat posed to Jews by Nazism in the period of its upsurge – before it assumed governmental power”.<sup>17</sup> That danger is increasing through the spread of misinformation via the Internet. To combat it, we need to know more than the history of anti-Zionism. We need to enter that perverse online looking-glass world, read what is said, and understanding that it has nothing whatsoever to do with a Zionist concept of Zionism. The two concepts of Zionism are homonyms, as different and unrelated as the bark of the dog and the bark of the tree.

To combat antisemitism in the guise of anti-Zionism, one needs knowledge of this form of antisemitism far more than one needs a detailed knowledge of Zionism. To that end, the next

section of this chapter steps through the looking-glass, presenting the antisemites' view of Zionism. Following the advice of a unicorn for managing things on the other side of a looking-glass, we'll 'hand it round first, and cut it afterwards'.<sup>18</sup> That is, we'll present the arguments complete with citations, then we'll take a vorpal blade and dissect it.<sup>19</sup> After this we discuss how these arguments appear in social media, and finally we consider what should be done in response to this growing problem.

## Through the looking glass

### Zionism should not be equated with Judaism

Our journey through the looking glass begins with the understanding that Judaism is not Zionism.<sup>20</sup> Confusing these terms is a "terrible mistake" explains NKUSA, the third site that appears in a Google search for Zionism.<sup>21</sup> The site warns how, "Zionists have deceived many well meaning Jewish people via terror, trickery and false propaganda. They have at their disposal the use of a nearly universally subservient media. Whoever attempts to criticize them puts his livelihood and, at times, his very life in danger."<sup>22</sup> True Torah Jews, ranked fourth, agrees. It provides a list of quotations which "alone are enough proof that almost all of the greatest sages and leaders of the Jewish people opposed the establishment of a Jewish state".<sup>23</sup>

So what is Zionism if it is something entirely unrelated to Judaism? The site Serendipity, ranked eighth in our Google search for Zionism, gives us our answer.<sup>24</sup> It explains that Zionism "seeks to dominate all of Palestine and the Middle East by means of violence and the threat of violence... and to maximize its influence in world affairs and in world history, principally by means of control of the government of the USA... at the expense of the social wellbeing not only of the Palestinians but of the peoples of all lands."<sup>25</sup> Serendipity explains that the Zionists want "this state [Israel] to be for-Jews-only, thus the desire and intention to expel from Israeli-controlled territory all the indigenous inhabitants" which it explains is "sometimes known as ethnic cleansing, a concept derived from the Nazi practice" with respect to the Jews.<sup>26</sup>

### Zionism is not categorically different from Nazism

Like NKUSA, Serendipity is also at pains to remind us that, "Zionism should not be equated with Judaism". It warns that the "contemptible treatment of the Palestinians by the Israeli government is supported and approved of by many Jews but not by all Jews", and gives examples of those who oppose such views. The first example is a link to JewsAgainstZionism.com which redirects to the True Torah Jews site. The second example is Not In My Name, the Chicago Chapter of Jewish Voices for Peace.<sup>27</sup> The third is the NKUSA site.

Serendipity goes on to explain just how bad Zionism is with a quote from Gilad Atzmon, "Zionism is ... racist, it is nationalist, and it is Biblically inspired (rather than spiritually inspired). Being a fundamentalist movement, Zionism is not categorically different from Nazism. Only when we understand Zionism in its nationalist and racist context will we begin to comprehend the depth of its atrocities."

The Nazi analogy is growing in popularity. The Palestinian Genocide website provides a list of quotes from political leaders and famous people who have described Gaza as a concentration camp.<sup>28</sup> It features British Prime Minister David Cameron, Professor Noam Chomsky, Lawrence Weschler as former staff writer at The New Yorker, American political commentator Pat Buchanan, former

British deputy Prime Minister Baron Prescott, Vatican diplomat Cardinal Renato Martino, Tony Blair's sister in-law Lauren Booth, British politician George Galloway and many others.

### **Zionist Collaboration with the Nazi**

An article by Mark Weber in the Journal of Historical Review informs us of the "wide-ranging collaboration between Zionism and Hitler's Third Reich".<sup>29</sup> Taking a very different approach to Serendipity, the article argues that Jewish Zionists and German National Socialists (i.e. Nazis) agreed that "Jews and Germans were distinctly different nationalities" and that as a result Jews in the Third Reich were not "Germans of the Jewish faith" but foreigners with no claim to equal rights with (non Jewish) Germany citizens.<sup>30</sup>

The article notes how a Zionist publication welcomed the enactment of the Nuremberg laws,<sup>31</sup> and how German authorities cooperated with German Zionists helping them to run camps and agricultural centers to train for life in what would become Israel. Weber also writes of cooperation between the SS and the Haganah, the precursor of the Israeli Defence Force, noting that it "even included secret deliveries of German weapons to Jewish settlers for use in clashes with Palestinian Arabs". Weber also discusses the Transfer Agreement between the World Zionist Organisation and German officials in which German Jews, and their assets, would immigrate to the British mandate of Palestine with the support of Nazi Germany.<sup>32</sup>

In his PhD thesis Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas took it further, explaining how the "Zionist movement led a broad campaign of incitement against the Jews living under Nazi rule to arouse the government's hatred of them, to fuel vengeance against them and to expand the mass extermination".<sup>33</sup>

The Zionist-Nazi collaboration is proven on multiple sites with pictures of a medal bearing a Swastika on one side and a Jewish star and reference to Palestine on the other.<sup>34</sup> The website Rense takes it a step further with what purports to be a letter from a Rivka Cohen discussing the medal and stating that "in reality the Zionist leadership and the Nazis were the best of friends".

### **Cleaning the Glass**

#### **Neturei Karta in reality a most extreme fringe**

The idea that real Jews are not Zionists is mostly promoted by Neturei Karta, a small sect of Ultra Orthodox Jews created in 1935 to oppose Zionism and later the State of Israel.<sup>35</sup> Numbering only a few thousand by their own estimates,<sup>36</sup> Neturei Karta have been described as the "most extreme fringe of the Haredim movement".<sup>37</sup> Neturei Karta members attended the Iranian Holocaust denial conference in 2006,<sup>38</sup> have been pictured giving the inverted 'Heil Hitler' salute,<sup>39</sup> and marched in support of the far-right Hungarian political party Jobbik.<sup>40</sup>

While it is true that many Jewish leaders outside the Zionist movement were opposed, for various reasons, to the establishment of a Jewish State prior to the creation of the State of Israel, it is equally true to say that today the vast majority of Jewish people, Jewish leaders, and Jewish organisations would describe themselves as Zionists.

A major survey in Australia, for example, found 81% of the Jewish people surveyed in a sample of almost 5700 people would describe themselves as a Zionist.<sup>41</sup> Support was highest among those who describe themselves as Modern Orthodox (19% of the sample) where 93% describe themselves as

Zionists.<sup>42</sup> Organisations like the World Jewish Congress, which represent the peak national Jewish representative bodies from more than 100 countries, recognise the “centrality of the State of Israel to contemporary Jewish identity”.<sup>43</sup> Famous Jews who supported Zionism include Albert Einstein,<sup>44</sup> Rav Kook (one of the most celebrated 20<sup>th</sup> Century Rabbis),<sup>45</sup> and apparently Harry Houdini.<sup>46</sup> Sigmund Freud too was sympathetic to the Zionist ideal, though opposed to aspects of it.<sup>47</sup>

The idea of separating Zionism, self-determination for the Jewish people, from the Jewish people themselves, is illogical. It is no more than a rhetorical device to give antisemitism a veneer of legitimacy. As long as antisemites have engaged in this game of words, good people have stepped forward to call them out. The most famous is Martin Luther King who at a dinner on the 27<sup>th</sup> of October 1967 responded to a comment about Zionists saying, “Don't talk like that! When people criticize Zionists, they mean Jews. You're talking anti-Semitism!”<sup>48</sup> This quote continues to cause serious discomfort for those trying to attack Zionism as a form of racism. In response there have been efforts to discredit the quote, despite ample evidence of its veracity.<sup>49</sup>

### **Conspiracy sites continue an old tradition**

The Serendipity site is wide ranging. It seeks to prove 9/11 was a hoax,<sup>50</sup> that the Waco siege was a deliberate massacre organised by the US Government,<sup>51</sup> and that Princess Dianna's death was state ordered assassination.<sup>52</sup> It also campaigns for Holocaust denier Ernst Zündel,<sup>53</sup> and publishes AIDS conspiracy theorist Alan Cantwell Jr.<sup>54</sup> It is clearly a conspiracy theory site rather than a reputable source. Where people are led astray is that it often quotes from other sources, some of them legitimate, in between its own inventive additions.

Antisemitic discourse contains many conspiracy theories and the “Protocols of the Elders of Zion” is a Rosetta Stone that brings them all together. The Anti-Defamation League noted how the Protocols have “been heralded by antisemites as proof that Jews are plotting to take over the world”.<sup>55</sup> The protocols are, however, a well-documented fake debunked in courts of law,<sup>56</sup> the press,<sup>57</sup> and books dedicated to the topic.<sup>58</sup>

### **Holocaust denial and inversion**

Holocaust denial is a particular flavour of conspiracy theory. It is typically strongly rejected by the public. In a survey of American librarians, for example, all who expressed an opinion found Holocaust denial material at least as offensive, and almost half of them found it more offensive, than other forms of material which might provoke protest from library clients.<sup>59</sup> Despite this Holocaust denial, and particular inversion, is often mixed in with antisemitic anti-Zionism.

The Journal of Historical Review is published by the Institute of Historical Review, the “central institution” for a “loosely-organized international network of Holocaust deniers”.<sup>60</sup> At its first convention in 1979 the Institute of Historical Review passed a resolution claiming that ‘the facts surrounding the allegations that gas chambers existed in occupied Europe during World War II are demonstrably false’ and that ‘the whole theory of “the holocaust” has been created by and promulgated by political Zionism for the attainment of political and economic ends, specifically the continued and perpetual support of the military aggression of Israel by the people of Germany and the US’.<sup>61</sup>

Prof. Richard Evans, an expert on German History at Oxford University, notes that none of the board members of the Institute of Historical Review holds a degree in history, nor are they established

professional historians.<sup>62</sup> He added that, "Journal and its parent institute have a political rather than an academic background".<sup>63</sup> A study by the Organization of American Historians into the material published by the Institute for Historical Review found that the Journal of Historical Review was "nothing but a masquerade of scholarship".<sup>64</sup>

Unlike much of the content discussed in the looking glass section, the Transfer Agreement of 1933, also known as the Haavara Agreement, was real. In the early months of the Hitler regime a controversial pact was agreed between the Third Reich and Zionist organisations. Around 60,000 Jews and \$100 million, over \$1.8 billion in today's money, was transferred to the Jewish community in the British Mandate of Palestine. The agreement lasted until the start of World War II in 1939, at which point its implementation became impractical. It predated the mass confiscation, expulsion and extermination policies of the Third Reich. For a full treatment of the subject, see Edwin Black's excellent book, "The Transfer Agreement".<sup>65</sup>

Professor Robert Wistrich z"l noted how Arabs leaders, particular Palestinians, failed to absorbed the horror and inhumanity of the Holocaust and repressed the real collaboration of certain Arab leaders, such as the Grand Mufti of Jerusalem, with the Nazis.<sup>66</sup> Wistrich explained that as a result, the Holocaust was perceived by Arab and Palestinian leaders as a political tool of the Zionists, and to counter it the believed "the Palestinian tragedy had to be inflated into a new and even more horrific Holocaust instigated by Israel itself".<sup>67</sup> Wistrich notes that this can be seen as far back as 4 December 1961 when Ahmed Shukeiry, the first leader of the PLO, told the UN that, "Zionism was nastier than Fascism, uglier than Nazism, more hateful than imperialism, more dangerous than imperialism. Zionism was a combination of all these traits."

It is against this background that we see Mahmoud Abbas's PhD thesis which suggests the number of Jews who died in the Holocaust was greatly exaggerated, something he has since retracted.<sup>68</sup> His assertions about Zionist responsibility for the Holocaust are a different form of Holocaust conspiracy theory, and one which he has not retracted.<sup>69</sup> This claim is a reflection of Soviet propaganda following the Arab defeat in Six Day War in 1967. The propaganda claimed there were secret agreements condemning European Jews to the gas in return for Nazi support for Zionism, and specifically that the Zionists: sought to create a "pro-Nazi" Middle East state in the 1930s, facilitated the Holocaust, sabotaged Jewish resistance in the ghettos, and served as a fifth column for the Nazis in Europe.<sup>70</sup> Wistrich notes how these "grotesque Soviet blood-liebs" were late "taken up by a part of the radical Left – especially the Trotskyists – in Western Europe and America".<sup>71</sup>

The letter from "Rivka Cohen" is easily debunked. She refers to "the famous ZIONAZI MEDAL which was struck by the Nazis (Goebbels) to commemorate our friendship". The medal is actually a promotional token from the Berlin Nazi party newspaper "Der Angriff" which was headed by Joseph Goebbels. The text on the medal reads "EIN NAZI FÄHRT NACH PALÄSTINA" ("A Nazi Travels to Palestine") the title of the series of articles by SS member Leopold Edler von Mildenstein send to the paper when he travelled to Palestine.<sup>72</sup> Mildenstein become the first head of the "Jewish Desk" in the SS and was following in that position by Adolf Eichman.<sup>73</sup> At the time of the token the official Nazi policy was still to push Jews to leave Germany, and the positive articles, in a newspaper otherwise filled with antisemitism, were designed to encourage emigration not to signify friendship.

## The Gaza concentration camp

One specific form of Holocaust inversion is the comparison of Gaza to a concentration camp. This analogy draws a comparison between Israel and the Nazis. This was seen in the looking glass at the Palestinian Genocide website. It also appears regularly in social media. The concentration camp analogy spiked in 2014 as a result of the Gaza war and a social media strategy by Hamas which told supporters to “Avoid entering into a political argument with a Westerner aimed at convincing him that the Holocaust is a lie and deceit; instead, equate it with Israel’s crimes against Palestinian civilians”.<sup>74</sup>

The Palestinian Genocide website includes a range of real quotes, however, not all of them seek to make an analogy with the Holocaust. British Prime Minister David Cameron called Gaza a “prison camp” while Professor Noam Chomsky called it “basically a prison, huge prison”. These quotes are included to make the page and its comparison between Israel and the Nazis appear better supported, even though the quotes themselves do not in any way support the comparison.

The quotes that do call Gaza a concentration camp are mostly from pro-Palestinian activists, or related to incidents which attracted heavy criticism. Vatican diplomat Cardinal Renato Martino’s comparison of Gaza to a concentration camp, for example, was described by Vatican spokesman Rev. Federico Lombardi as “inopportune” and creating “irritation and confusion” rather than illumination.<sup>75</sup> The comments by Lord Prescott caused the Board of Deputies of British Jews to call for misconduct proceedings to be initiated against him for what they described as “deeply offensive” comments which “trivialised the Holocaust”.<sup>76</sup>

## The impact in social media

The narratives of antisemitic anti-Zionism can be traced back to Soviet propaganda, Arab and Palestinian propaganda, Holocaust deniers, and religious fringe movements like Neturei Karta. The impact, however, does not come from these sites but from the spread of memes through social media and the comment sections of online newspapers.

A meme is often thought of as an image with a picture and some overlaid text, often made using online tools such as Meme Generator and Quick Meme.<sup>77</sup> Most memes are harmless fun but some are used to spread antisemitism,<sup>78</sup> racism,<sup>79</sup> religious vilification,<sup>80</sup> or other forms of hate. The idea of a meme, however, is far broader. The term was coined by Richard Dawkins in his 1976 book “The Selfish Gene”. He explained a meme as “a name for the new replicator, a noun that conveys the idea of a unit of cultural transmission, or a unit of imitation” and that these units “propagate themselves in the meme pool by leaping from brain to brain via a process which, in the broad sense, can be called imitation”.<sup>81</sup> Dawkins gives as examples, “tunes, ideas, catch-phrases, clothes fashions, ways of making pots or of building arches”,<sup>82</sup> however, others have pointed out that antisemitism too is a meme.<sup>83</sup>

The core messages of antisemitic anti-Zionism, that is, Zionism as seen through the looking glass, appears regularly as memes in social media. These memes appear both as the typical internet image meme, and in the broader context of an idea that appears and reappears in online conversation. Unfortunately, the memes gain traction and are impossible to dislodge. Few people who see them in social media investigate. At best the ideas behind the memes are quickly googled so they can be

used to support existing positions in online arguments. The situation is the same as online hoaxes which despite the best efforts of websites like Snoops to debunk them, just continue to circulate.

Graphical images representing Israel as a Nazi state, claiming Mossad was responsible for 9/11, or claiming that antisemitism is no more than a way to silence criticism of Israel, spread rapidly and survive online for years as they are reposted over and over.



### The graphical memes

The report "Recognizing Hate Speech: Antisemitism On Facebook" gave an overview of some of these memes.<sup>84</sup> One included a blue and white image reminiscent of the Israeli flag, but featuring a rat in its center with a Jewish star on the rat and the words "The real plague" above it. The meme linked Nazi dehumanization, which in turn built on antisemitic ideas from the middle ages, with the idea of Zionism and the state of Israel.



Another example showed a banner of an Israeli flag being ripped down, exposing a Nazi flag behind it. A small label on the banner reads "NAZIONISMO" a combination of Nazi and Zionismo, the Italian for Zionism.

The English equivalent "Zionazi" is also popular online with 56,700 search results on the term returned by Google. An image search on the term shows the way this idea has spread. Many of the image integrate a Nazi Swastika into the design of the Israeli flag. Others show the Jewish star integrated into Nazi symbolism.

Also shown in the search results as images of Neturei Karta members holding signs declaring "Zionism is State Organized Terror", imagines juxtaposing Israeli's Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu with Hitler, one images shows a many carrying two signs one reading "Target all Zionist Businesses" and the other reading "every Zionazi is a legitimate military target".



Images like these can be easily found through search engines and shared through social media time and time again. This normalises the message of anti-Zionist antisemitism and is a form of Antisemitism 2.0.<sup>85</sup> Once normalised these messages become conceptual memes, that is memes in the more general sense, as they morph and reappear in conversations.



## The conceptual memes

The memes representing antisemitic anti-Zionism are becoming more common in social media. Some provide short comments and links to external sources, others repeat or hint at antisemitic narratives. The most concerning expression of the antisemitic anti-Zionist meme I've encountered was a Facebook post during the Gaza conflict in 2014. The post by a human rights activist argued that the situation in Gaza was so bad that antisemitic propaganda was justified. On Twitter we have seen comments that start by accusing Israel of war crimes, and end with "kill the Jews". One Facebook post inverted the situation so completely it argued that calling comparisons between Israel and the Nazis antisemitic was itself a form of racism and Holocaust denial.



The conceptual memes appear whenever a discussion about antisemitism takes place, even with the discussion is entirely unrelated to Zionism, Israel or the Middle East. Any expression of concern about antisemitism seems to compel to some people to share memes that seek to undermine concern about racism against Jews.

A post on Facebook about Holocaust Memorial Day in 2016, for example, attracted not only the traditional Holocaust denial, but comments such as "True: Denying the Holocaust of the Palestinians is current" and a reply from another users saying, "Yeah but for some reason its globally accepted. And when you mention anything about Israel's actions you are labelled antisemitic. Which I'm not."<sup>86</sup> This promotes the narrative of Palestinian suffering being greater than the Holocaust and therefore justifying ignoring or downplaying the Holocaust even on Holocaust memorial day. The report supports this, but adds another meme, the idea that claims of antisemitism can be ignored. This is a significant problem on the political left who are often only willing to recognise antisemitism if it comes dressed in a Nazi uniform.

A post on Holocaust memorial day in 2015 also attracted antisemitic comments. One of them read "Israel is the new Nazi Apartheid state" then goes on to mix a number of legitimate criticisms of Israeli policy with comments seeking to trivialise and question the reality of the Holocaust.<sup>87</sup> Other memes include the cry that "anti-Zionism does not mean antisemitism", a statement which in itself is true, but is instead used to mean "anti-Zionism cannot also be antisemitic", a plainly false statement. It's like a person arguing that "killing does not mean murder", some killing may be lawful but this statement is no defence when someone has committed a murder.

The 2015 post also attracted comments promoting the meme of Zionist-Nazi collaboration. "This was a Zionist plot to get Israel back. Research Zionist Agenda" one commenter replies.<sup>88</sup> Another responds, "I believe you have failed because you have focused on ONE atrocity, on one group of humanity only, in our human history and thereby unwittingly joined the Zionist strategy to hide Israel's crimes".<sup>89</sup>

The idea that it is unacceptable to focus on antisemitism, even when speaking about the Holocaust, and even on the designated United Nations International Holocaust Memorial Day, is itself a growing meme. Another post highlights this more directly, “Jews were not the only religion that were persecuted. They need to ‘let it go’ and stop being the victim. Only then will there be peace in Palestine.”<sup>90</sup> It’s hard to see how forgetting the Holocaust would advance either peace or human rights, unless the idea was to make these advances at the expense of the Jewish people. If harm to the Jewish people is not regarded as a barrier, forgetting Jewish suffering certainly would make it easier to ignore the Zionist concern for a safety and security for the Jewish people. This is of course the meme promoted by the Arabs and Palestinians all along, even if it is now expressed by well-meaning people who regard themselves as peace activists and anti-racism activists.

### **Online antisemitism is more than a virtual danger**

The impact of antisemitic memes being spreading through social media is not limited to the online world. These ideas spill over into conversations in work places, between elected officials, and within media organisations. They are picked up by politicians and broadcast to the world.

Antisemitic memes have a particular impact on college campuses given that students are more engaged with online content and likely to take what they learn online into campus life.<sup>91</sup> In February 2016 Alex Chalmers, co-Chair of the Oxford University Labour Club, resigned his position saying a large portion of the club and the student left in general at Oxford “have some kind of problem with Jews”.<sup>92</sup> The Union of Jewish Students, the peak body representing Jewish students in the United Kingdom, alarm given that alumni of the student club often go on to an involvement in national politics.<sup>93</sup>

The incidents described by Chalmers include casual references to Jews as “Zio” by members of the club executive, a former co-chair of the club declaring that “most accusations of antisemitism are just the Zionists crying wolf”, poorly expressed criticism of Israeli policy “unwittingly rehash age-old sinister tropes about sinister Jewish control” and the fact those who were called out failed to see the problem.<sup>94</sup> Chalmers also noted that it wasn’t that “everyone on the Left is an old-fashioned anti-Semite, but more that people are prepared to turn a blind eye” and that “it’s very difficult to make people actually pay attention.”<sup>95</sup>

The change in cultural values, building an immunity against criticism for being antisemitic, is one of the key features of Antisemitism 2.0 also one of the reasons the combination of antisemitism and social media is so dangerous.<sup>96</sup> The Oxford University Labour Club is not the only victim the spreading memes of anti-Zionist antisemitism which are being embedded in society through social media.

### **Countering the hate**

One response to online hate speech is to seek its removal. When it comes to websites, removal is not a permanent solution as the sites will readily move to a new domain or a new host. Closing a hate site is still valuable, however, as it disrupts the spread of hate. The site may be down for a time, and if the domain names change, the content may lose visibility in search results and links spreading the antisemitic poison may be broken. This reduces the impact of the antisemitic content.

On social media removals can be far more effective. This is due to the virtual monopoly of the major companies. If content is forced off Facebook, its potential audience immediately drops. More

importantly, it is less likely to normalise its antisemitic message into mainstream discussion. Social media platforms provide mechanisms for reporting online hate speech such as antisemitism. Unfortunately, the platforms are not particularly good at responding to these reports.

In a sample of over 2,000 antisemitic items reported to Facebook, YouTube and Twitter, only 20% were removed within ten months.<sup>97</sup> The effectiveness of removal varies by social media platform, Facebook removed 37% of the reported content, Twitter 22% and YouTube just 8%.<sup>98</sup> The results, however, become even worse when the content is New Antisemitism, that is antisemitism related to Israel, which includes most varieties of anti-Zionist Antisemitism. For New Antisemitism Facebook removed 27%, Twitter 20% and YouTube just 4%.<sup>99</sup> More needs to be done to push the social media companies to take their responsibility to prevent the spread of antisemitism more seriously.

Another approach is reply to the antisemitic content, debunking their myths and calling them out. This isn't, however, always possible. On a Facebook page dedicated to spreading anti-Zionist Antisemitism, posts that seek to call the page out for antisemitism are likely to be removed, and those who post them are likely to be both banned and targeted for online harassment. In other cases, for example of the pages of media organisations, responses may be possible and should be encouraged. This should occur concurrently with a push to remove the antisemitic content.

Antisemitic content is defamation against the Jewish people and while a rigorous defence to defamation is always encouraged, it has long been recognised that this is not enough as the discussion itself is damaging to the person being defamed. The approach to defamatory speech has always been removal and penalties for republication. In the case of hate speech there is the additional argument that the content undermines what US legal scholar Jeremy Waldron called the "public good of inclusiveness" in society which gives people the "assurance that there will be no need to face hostility, violence, discrimination, or exclusion by others" as they go about their daily lives.<sup>100</sup> Telling target groups they have the obligation to continually reply creates the sort of hostile environment which forced Alex Chalmers to resign from the executive of the Oxford University Labour Club. Such an environment is not good for those being targeted, or for the social media platforms which targeted groups will be pushed to eventually leave.

Online marketers have suggested another approach is to find online opinion leaders who are active in related spaces, such as Middle East politics, and engage with them. This type of marketing approach is often used for product placement, or to create positive discussion about a product or negative discussion about a competitor. These approaches work in a sparse marketplace where the aim is to get exposure, but are likely to be far less effective when it comes to countering memes which are embedded in online society. Additional voices who can recognise and speak out against anti-Zionist antisemitism can, however, only help in creating awareness of the problem. Unfortunately in the stream of discussion flowing past anyone with a significant online influence, the chance of a comment being seen or having an impact is small.

Some online marketers have suggested finding the most influential antisemites and engaging with them. This idea is based on the assumption that there are "leaders" of antisemitism, like there are leaders of political movements. It also assumes these leaders set the messaging for their followers. This idea may well apply to some flavours of antisemites like neo-Nazis, professional Holocaust deniers, and Islamists, but that is only a small part of the problem when it comes to the sharing and promotion of antisemitic memes. Antisemitism is not a unified political movement; it is better

compared to a broad field like music where some songs are heavily promoted by known labels, but others just appear and spread. In many cases new antisemitic memes do not emerge through a defined channel. They spread from person to person like bootlegged music, and without quite knowing how, the message and idea become mainstream. Going viral is an aggregate effect which may involve a number of people promoting content, or many people telling a few friends who in turn pass it on. An approach for tackling antisemitic memes cannot assume there is an organised structure for their production and promotion.

We can't always stop the original producers of antisemitic content, and we can't always identify who is spreading them, especially when many people are each involved in a small way. We also need to recognise that what is spreading is a meme, not an exact duplicate like pirated song or film. It is the idea, the story, the quote, which is told and retold. Many of those promoting antisemitic ideas are not looking for depth, instead they dip shallowly into many sources, seeing, absorbing, quoting and reframed the arguments. This constant production of fresh antisemitic content, originating from many different accounts, means each expression of the same underlying antisemitic ideas must be separately evaluated.

This brings us back to the platforms which allow the content to go viral. Through the right policies, training and attitudes social media companies like Facebook, YouTube and Twitter can prevent the hate going viral. It will be a constant battler, and one requiring resources, but that is simply the cost of doing business in the social media space. If we can encourage the companies to improve the rate at which antisemitic content is removed, this would not only prevent it spreading, but would send a clear signal that antisemitism is not accepted by society.

## Conclusion

The aim in writing this chapter has not been to give credence to racist libels, but to show how embedded they are in the fabric of the online world. Both the old web accessed through search engines and the new web of social media contain their share of anti-Zionist antisemitism. The narratives which emerge from different sources twist and weave together increasing their strength, and are then repeated, reworded and redrawn by many hands. Absurdities, like anti-racists citing Holocaust deniers, become the norm. This needs a response both online and in the resulting public discourse.

The online response must both expose the antisemitic nature of much of the anti-Zionist content, and strengthen the narrative of Zionism itself for a general audience. Links to positive material can help to change the fabric of the online world, as seen by the campaign undertaken by Ami Isseroff z"l and myself starting in 2004 with sites like [ZionismOnTheWeb.org](http://ZionismOnTheWeb.org) and [ZionismIsrael.com](http://ZionismIsrael.com), and appeals for cooperation between Zionist websites.<sup>101</sup>

In debate, we must start by recognising that the antisemites "Zionism" is something entirely unrelated to Zionism itself. We must highlight that the thing they are speaking about is a daemon constructed by racist propaganda and used to justify the killing of Jews. We must support rigorous debate on Israeli policies, but be unafraid to speak up when the line into antisemitism is crossed. When others turn around, agreeing the line was crossed, but fail to see why it needs a response, that itself must be treated as a pressing issue.

When it comes to social media, the strongest solution is an effective response by social media companies each time antisemitic content is reported to them. Unfortunately, their current level of response leaves much to be desired. We need to invest our resources in continually measuring their response rates and pushing them to improve. We need to work with the companies to better educate their staff, and to close the gap between what the public believe is antisemitic and ought to be removed, and what the platforms actually remove. The gap won't close entirely as some cases are debatable, but from where we stand right now, there is significant room for improvement before that point is reached. Outside of the United States, governments with laws against hate speech need to consider how those laws are applied to social media and what minimum expectations should exist for the social media platforms themselves.

Over 30 years ago Prof. Robert Wistrich z"l warned that "through anti-Zionism, a revival of all the latent murderous potential of antisemitism is in fact already taking place".<sup>102</sup> We must call out that anti-Zionism when we see it, and expose its antisemitic roots.

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