

# **INSIDE THE ANTISEMITIC MIND**

THE  
LANGUAGE OF  
JEW-HATRED  
IN CONTEMPORARY  
GERMANY

Monika Schwarz-Friesel and Jehuda Reinharz

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# **INSIDE THE ANTISEMITIC MIND**

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## **PREFACE TO THE ENGLISH EDITION**

**(2016)**

The broad public and academic reaction to the German edition of this book, published early in 2013, was bewilderment, almost shock. In spite of people's knowledge of the Holocaust and what consequences a rhetoric of hate and hostility might have, Jews are frequently attacked verbally in contemporary discourse. The experience of the lethal worldview that led to Auschwitz did not bring the strategies of verbally dehumanizing and demonizing the Jews to an end. Such strategies prevail and are frequently used in modern discourse, even by highly educated people from mainstream society. Further, 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.

How is it possible that in the seventy years since the end of the Holocaust, years of coping with the past, years of remembrance and education, of making antisemitic utterances socially taboo and legally banned from public discourse, Judeophobic thought and feeling have not been driven from the heart of society? Why has the hatred of Jews not been erased from the collective and communicative memory?

The rich body of empirical data this book is based on shows that the old resentment is still very much alive, not only on the edges of society, but also in the mainstream of German and European society. In fact, antisemitism turns out to be a worldwide phenomenon on the rise, as recent years have shown: In Hungary, the Jobbik party is part of the government and openly antisemitic. In Sweden, the Jewish community is under pressure because of the growing hatred of Jews stemming mainly from the Muslim community. Jews have been attacked and killed in Belgium and in France, spit upon in Rome and in London, and more. In Berlin, a rabbi was knocked down on the street in front of his little daughter. Jewish cemeteries and synagogues have been desecrated. 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. 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.

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. In fact, there is an "Israelization" of modern Judeophobic discourse.

Here, once again, antisemitism proves to be a chameleon: it changes its colors according to the social and political situations, but stays the same at its cognitive and emotional core. 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 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, our data reveal the shocking truth about the continuity and persistence of the age-old hostility toward Jews, the stereotypes on which it rests, and its most current linguistic 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 and therefore should not be seen as one prejudice among others, not some kind of xenophobia, but as a way of explaining the world according to Western culture. 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.

Further, one has to acknowledge the persuasive and mind-manipulating power of verbal antisemitism. Judeophobic phrases and structures are kept alive in communicative memory and still influence the collective human mind,



sometimes quite subconsciously and unintentionally. This influence is often underestimated. But language is powerful; in fact, it is the most powerful tool with which to influence and manipulate the human mind. It can be used to offend, to hurt, and to threaten people, to keep alive grudges and hatred. Some words are like weapons: they wound like bullets; some are like poison: they slowly get into the mind and activate a lethal semantics. Using language as a tool in order to discriminate against and demonize Jews can lead to radical political and social consequences in a society. This was shown in the Nazi era, when Jewish citizens were first stigmatized and threatened verbally, then mistreated physically, and finally brutally murdered.

However, as we demonstrate here, the experience of the Holocaust and dealing with the past has not brought the strategies of verbally dehumanizing and demonizing Jews to an end. We still find them very much alive in modern discourse. And as observed, verbal antisemitism is on the rise. This book describes and explains the verbal manifestations of contemporary antisemitism in Germany and Europe on the basis of a longitudinal corpus-based study. Further, the approach we have developed here can be used as an analytical tool to distinguish between verbal antisemitism and mere political critique. Although the examples are predominantly from German discourse, the results are arguably representative of antisemitic discourse worldwide. Thus the classification presented in this book can help to identify Judeophobic utterances and might also serve as a means of evaluating contested language in an arbitrational or legal context.<sup>1</sup>

Verbal antisemitism can take many forms—from allusion and citation, jokes, mocking, or contemptuous ill-will to generically discriminating sentences, from condemnation and dehumanizing metaphors to death threats and the articulation of solution plans. The analysis of direct and indirect verbal threats reveals the power of language as a weapon with far-reaching emotional and cognitive consequences. As a contrastive analysis (work in progress) of data from the World Wide Web reveals—the same linguistic features and patterns of argument are found to be widely evident here, too.

In spite of overwhelming praise for the book from both the press and the academic world, the following question hung, stated or hinted, in the air: Is the anti-Jewish attitude in Germany and Europe really as serious a problem as the data would suggest? Could it not be that the texts we analyzed were exceptional and not representative?

Little more than a year after publication of the book, that query met with an unsettling response: the Gaza conflict in the summer of 2014 brought about an eruption of anti-Jewish and anti-Israeli utterances and manifestations in Germany and in other European countries, as well as on many U.S. campuses (mostly in the framework of the boycotts, divestment, and sanctions campaign [BDS]). On the streets of German cities one could read and hear utterances like “Stop the Jewish terror!”; “Supposedly former victims. Now themselves perpetrators”; “Hammas, Hammas, Jews to the gas chambers”; “Child-murderer Israel.” 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 that continues today. In the meantime, the Internet has become the main and most influential propagator of anti-Jewish utterances, especially in social media: “You ugly little Jews, mankind’s rats, one should gas all genetically declared Jewish criminals.” Or “The Jews are to be blamed for everything. Therefore we should eliminate the Jews, in whatever way we can.” These are two examples among thousands in online comments, in chat forums, on Twitter accounts, on Facebook, and so on.

“Across Europe and the whole world, the conflict in Gaza is breathing new life into some very old, and very ugly, demons,” wrote the *Guardian* on 7 August 2014. It went on: “This is not unusual; police and Jewish civil rights organizations have long observed a noticeable spike in anti-Semitic incidents each time the Israeli–Palestinian conflict flares. . . . But according to academics and Jewish leaders, this time it is different. More than simply a reaction to the conflict, they say, the threats, hate speech and violent attacks feel like the expression of a much deeper and more widespread anti-Semitism, fuelled by a wide range of factors, that has been growing now for more than a decade.”

Several European governments recognized and rebuked the anti-Jewish/anti-Israeli outbreaks. This was especially so in Germany. The highest political personages in the country, President Gauck and Chancellor Merkel, and many other important figures participated in a demonstration under the banner “Stand Up: Hatred of Jews—Never Again!” that took place at the Brandenburg Gate in Berlin on 14 September 2014, organized by the Central Council of the Jews in Germany.

At the same time, however, people wrote against this official attitude and articulated their hostile feelings toward Jews. It seems that there is a disparity

between the official position, which is highly supportive of Jews and Israel, and the views among the broader public. The deluge of critical and venomous e-mails against Jews and Israel sent to German-Jewish and Israeli institutions during the summer of 2014 indicates that mainstream social opinion is moving in a different direction.

Its vehemence aside, the outstanding characteristic of the current phenomenon, the combination of Judeophobia and anti-Israelism—the two have become practically indistinguishable—is not new. For people with a Judeophobic propensity, there is no difference between the ‘Jewish question’ and the ‘Israeli question,’ even if they deny it heatedly. Denial of antisemitism is in the meantime one of the most dominant strategies in modern antisemitic discourse: ‘I am not an antisemite’ is an almost classical beginning to many an e-mail sent to Jewish institutions by obviously educated people. ‘It is only Israel that I abhor’ is the usual continuation of such messages, with this or that anti-Israeli justification added. The by-now-well-known poem by Günther Grass, from April 2012, “Was gesagt werden muss” (“What must be said”), has many of the characteristics of such an attitude.

A certain attitude hovers over the academic debate in the form of denial among educated Europeans and Americans regarding actual anti-Judaism. Frequently, both informed citizens and respected scholars reject out of hand that a Judeophobic problem exists. ‘They are just extremists of some kind,’ or ‘merely some immigrants,’ or ‘People don’t really mean it’ are expressions one hears repeatedly. In a sense, such a mindset is understandable. For a thinking Western person, and especially a German one, the very possibility that, since the unique crime committed against European Jewry in the mid-twentieth century, no deeper change has occurred in the relationship between non-Jews and Jews is a notion hard to accept. This attitude of denial was severely shaken by the events of the summer of 2014, and yet it still surfaces. Researchers and commentators seem unwilling to recognize the immense resilience of historical Judeophobia. Therefore, the stance of denial should be recognized for what it ultimately is: a most serious factor in the present-day negative attitudes toward Jews.

Altogether, the upheavals of the summer of 2014 and the debates they caused strengthen and underline the conclusions of our book. What occurred was a reemergence of the historically known negative stereotype of Jews, deeply rooted in Western culture, now emerging in the attire of concepts

and events of our days. Its more dangerous spokespersons are not right-wing radicals, who enjoy no public support or legitimacy; rather, as in the past, the resentment is anchored in and carried by the educated mainstream, among them nowadays many liberals and leftists. Therefore, what is needed is a greater public awareness of the scope of everyday antisemitism. We have to overcome the illusion that Judeophobia is primarily a phenomenon among neo-Nazis. We find verbal antisemitism explicitly and implicitly, intentionally and unintentionally among “normal” people, our neighbors, our colleagues, our doctors, bankers, teachers, editors, journalists. Anti-Judaism proves to be both a persistent and a central way of thinking and feeling in the Western tradition—neither shaken nor destroyed by the experience of Auschwitz.

As it happens, only recently has the spread of this everyday antisemitism in the United States been saliently summed up by J. J. Goldberg: “You don’t have to be paranoid to sense a new strain of anti-Semitism surfacing in American politics of late” (*The Forward*, 24 September 2015).



In the past two years, the authors of the present work have been frequently confronted by the question of how to react to the present wave of hatred of Jews. In fact, it is difficult to suggest what steps to take when there is so much disagreement about the very character of this hatred. Perhaps the recognition that the public has an entrenched and continuing problem regarding Jews would be a first and indispensable step toward a change in Western attitudes. What seems especially worrisome is that there are reasons to ask whether the current trends in Western public opinion do not point in the opposite direction, toward a Judeophobic radicalization.

Today, it’s impossible to distinguish between antisemitism and anti-Israelism. Bashing Israel by evoking traditional Judeophobic stereotypes has in the meantime become the most common strategy of contemporary antisemitism. Modern antisemites have turned ‘the Jewish problem’ into ‘the Israeli problem.’ They have redirected the ‘Final Solution’ from the Jews to the state of Israel, which they see as the embodiment of evil.

Lately, commentators have begun to look for the “roots” of the so-called Israel problem, and it hasn’t taken them long to “discover” that it started with the creation of a Jewish state, the usual corollary being that Israel should never have been established. This has set off an intellectual logic that is akin

to riding a downhill slope into the unthinkable. First comes a criticism of the characteristics of the Jewish state and all it stands for. "Israel is a European colony on Arab land," stated the German publicist and former parliamentarian Jürgen Todenhöfer in a television debate in July 2014. Or, as the British professor Brian Klug (he himself a Jew) put it, Israel is "a splintered state." The next typical step is: "In a free country it must be possible to question with impunity the right of Israel to exist" ("Es muss in einem freien Land möglich sein, straflos das Existenzrecht Israels infrage zu stellen"), this by Stefan Reinecke, a journalist at the well-known leftist *Tageszeitung* of Berlin (*TAZ*) in July 2014, in the name of freedom of expression (*Meinungsfreiheit*). Israel, the only really modern and functioning state in the Middle East, is the only nation among all the recognized countries of the world whose existence is constantly being called into question (or at least its "transformation" has been called for, as, for example, by the American-Jewish professor Judith Butler). In the meantime, this has become a discourse ritual that is no longer reflected on in its uniqueness, brutality, and potential radical consequences; indeed, it has become a habitus among intellectuals, something "normal." The next step has a sense of ominous inevitability about it. A German academic (name provided), who declared himself to be politically left-leaning and not antisemitic, wrote in an e-mail sent to the Israeli Embassy in Berlin in February 2013:

From a realpolitik German perspective à la Merkel, I must say that seven million dead [Israeli] Jews, as horrible as this might be, yet soberly considered, is still better than seven billion dead people caused by the Jews' brutal world domination. (Aus Sicht eines realpolitischen Deutschlands à la Merkel muss man sagen, dass sieben Millionen tote Juden, so schlimm das auch wäre, aber nüchtern betrachtet besser wären als sieben Milliarden tote Menschen wegen der jüdischen brutalen Weltherrschaft.)

This, seventy years after the Holocaust . . .



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*Monika Schwarz-Friesel and Jehuda Reinharz*

## **PREFACE TO THE GERMAN EDITION**

**(2013)**

This scholarly investigation looks at present-day hostility toward Jews in Germany as expressed through the medium of language. Anyone presenting such a study must anticipate the question "What, yet another book on antisemitism?" Recent years have certainly seen a spate of studies on this topic. But this book is different. For one thing, the data that constitute its empirical basis differ markedly, both in quantity and in authenticity, from the data used in any other analysis of antisemitic discourse known to us. For another, the focus on the crucial significance of linguistic manifestations of hostility toward Jews and on the reciprocal effects of cognitive stereotypes and emotional attitudes that can be discerned in verbal antisemitic formulations sets this study apart. The specific characteristics of linguistically coded antisemitic attitudes generally do not receive the attention they deserve. Lastly, this investigation has an unusual interdisciplinary dimension in that it combines historical reflection with linguistic and cognitive textual analysis.

When we set out in 2002 to collect, classify, and analyze the thousands of e-mails, letters, postcards, and faxes sent from all regions of Germany by all sorts of individuals to the Central Council of Jews in Germany and the Israeli Embassy in Berlin, we did not know what to expect. In the intervening years, these linguistic manifestations have given us remarkable insights into the cognitive and emotional conceptualizations manifested by antisemitically oriented contemporary Germans. We encountered thousands of messages that verbalized irrational hatred and obsessive rage directed at Jews, in combination with ancient stereotypes that one might have expected to have been thoroughly exposed and discredited after the experience of the Holocaust. What came to light were forms of rejection, hostility, and defensiveness that all the decades devoted to memory work and education seem to have done remarkably little to dispel. As depressing as the crude and violent antisemitic ravings of right-wing extremists were to all of us who

worked on the project, we were far more appalled to encounter the hostile utterances by members of mainstream society. Scholars, lawyers, doctors, bank employees, clergymen, and students used language that revealed age-old Judeophobic resentments apparently impervious to education or reflection on the experience of Auschwitz; the language in which these resentments found expression revealed naked intolerance and delusion. To make things worse, when we spoke of our undertaking to colleagues, our findings elicited astonishment and disbelief, sometimes paired with rather ineffectual attempts to minimize our results or to pooh-pooh them with the assertion that the authors of such utterances must be “fossils,” “nut cases,” or members of the “lunatic fringe.” The conclusion forced itself on us that most Germans find it extremely difficult to acknowledge that for many of their countrymen the Holocaust and study of its origins and impact did not bring about a clean break in mindset when it came to hostile attitudes toward Jews.

Our data, together with analyses of thousands of views expressed in public venues, as well as on social media and in Internet chat rooms, show that the verbal expressions of antisemitism we describe cannot be passed off as marginal phenomena; indeed, they form part of largely habitual and widely accepted patterns. Hostility toward Jews was not, and is not, encountered only on the margins of society; it could not, and cannot, be classified exclusively as a form of psychopathology. It occupies a solid position in the very middle of society and can be observed among intelligent, highly educated, sensitive persons. Verbal expressions of this hostility have manifested themselves in Germans’ communicative and cultural memory for centuries. The linguistic patterns we analyzed are used widely—sometimes consciously, sometimes unconsciously—in everyday discourse. Their unreflexive (re)production transmits Judeophobic thinking to the entire realm of social communication. Linguistic utterances that convey anti-Jewish stereotypes have the potential to influence—decisively yet subliminally—content of consciousness, attitudes, and feelings. Language must thus be recognized as a dangerous tool of manipulation. Habitualized patterns of language usage can have a powerful effect on individual and collective thought and valuation processes.

On the one hand this book presents many variants of verbal hostility toward Jews that are remarkably homogeneous as far as their semantic content is concerned, while on the other it appeals for critical awareness of, and reflection on, the potential of language to exert power and promote violence. If verbal



expressions of hostility toward Jews have transmitted resentment and dislike from one generation to the next for centuries, showing how this mechanism works represents the only hope for defeating these patterns.

We would like to thank all our collaborators, who, despite the immense emotional burden imposed by working with this material, accepted the challenge and with unwavering dedication labored side by side with us for years to classify and analyze the texts. Although the devastating content of those texts often pushed us to the limits of our professional perspective as scholars, what sustained us was the conviction that it was crucially important to make our results available to the public.

We owe thanks to Robert Beyer, who for more than three years participated as a scholarly expert in the project “Conceptualization and Verbalization of Contemporary Antisemitism in Germany,” cataloging and classifying thousands of texts. We would also like to thank the members of the project team—Dirk Hertrampf, Judith Malicke, Eva Leuschner, John Reichel, Franziska Schmidtke, and Patrick Schneider. In the final phase, Matthias Becker, Konstanze Marx, Gerrit Kotzur, Jan-Henning Kromminga, Jonas Nölle, Stephan Peters, and Sabine Reichelt helped with meticulous proofreading. Marie-Luise and Wolfgang Höbelt served as patient test-readers, offering useful suggestions for making the text more readable. In stimulating conversations in Jerusalem, Joseph Shatzmiller and Moshe David Herr provided valuable sources on historical manifestations of hostility toward Jews. We thank Laura Sturm and Matthias Becker for translating e-mails written in Spanish, and Annick Trelle for translating the French texts. Helge Skirl read and commented on all the chapters with great thoroughness, also performing yeoman service as an editor.

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