

Anti-Zionism and Antisemitism: Cosmopolitan Reflections

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A Cossack is pointing a gun at a Jew. The Jew, waving his arms around frantically, says, ‘What’s the matter with you? Don’t you see this is a human being in front of you?’ The old joke suggests both some of the strengths and weaknesses of today’s ‘cosmopolitanism.’ The academic movement (set of concerns, themes and family resemblances, rather than a single unified theory) sailing under that flag (launched from various social science and humanities disciplines over the past few decades) appeals to those looking for a way forward – beyond both the fixations of the left, on anti-imperialism and identity politics, and the right, on nationalism and neoliberalism, to the exclusion of concern for our shared humanity in either case. But it could leave those still living outside the ‘Davos culture’ of jet-setting academics, world leaders and hustling entrepreneurs, wondering exactly who the cosmopolitan constituency is ‘on the ground.’ As Robert Fine summarizes,

Cosmopolitan categories of understanding and standards of judgment pose a challenge both to the *modernist* identification of the universal with some socially selected particular (for instance, the identification of the ‘universal class’ or the ‘universal nation’ with the interests and values of humanity as a whole), and to the *postmodern* identification of universalism as such with the suppression of difference and exclusion of the Other. [1]

The cosmopolitan wants to have it both ways. Desiring to be at once both dialogic, hermeneutically sensitive to difference, and at the same time staunchly anti-totalitarian, in support of human rights, political freedom and international law, the cosmopolitan bravely faces down tyranny; but with what? And from where? Can’t you see (s)he’s (post-)human(ist)?

As our bit of traditional Yiddish humour is meant to imply, the quest for consensus across cultural differences can be either noble or quixotic (or both), but not every disagreement is a misunderstanding. [2] Where ‘cosmopolitans’ stand when the chips are down, and how they know when to stand up and be counted, are questions

we cannot explore fully here. Suffice to say that the work under examination raised this problem for us by the nature of its subject matter: 'left' anti-Semitism and the stigmatization of Israel, particularly among so-called 'progressives.' Don't they see Israel is a legitimate, prosperous, pluralistic society that is dealing with some terrible difficulties, to be sure? Or is there more going on than oversight?

Cosmopolitanism & Islamism

On the one hand, contemporary cosmopolitanism's balanced normative agenda – seeking a middle path between quietistic (or even reactionary) adherence to blind particularism, at one extreme, and overconfident (or even ethnocentric) enthusiasm for an omniscient brand of enlightenment humanism, at the other – is well suited ethically to the present era of globalization. It would be nice to know better what we think we are doing as we try, willy-nilly, to avoid these extremes. In a time of both increased (awareness of) interdependence among nations *and* heightened sensitivity to cultural differences, a convincing formulation of the progressive project that does not fall into either crude relativism or arrogant imperialism is sorely needed. In the wake of the collapse of communism in 1989/90, and with it the advent of the so-called 'end of history,' the 'new cosmopolitanism' presents itself as purveyor of just such an alchemy (in a veritable deluge of works by a diverse set of thinkers in political science, sociology, history, philosophy, anthropology, literature and cultural studies, including: K. Anthony Appiah, Ulrich Beck, Pascal Bruckner, James Clifford, Mitchell Cohen, Robert Fine, Malachi Hacoen, David Held, Martha Nussbaum, Paul Rabinow, Amartya Sen and others). And so it stands as an early, if somewhat amorphous, leading-contender in the fight to reconstruct a humane and vigorous left vision for the 21st century. [3]

On the other hand, the laudable task of bridging the global and the local, in a bid to 'form sustaining communities while engaging problems that affect a human population larger than that embraced by those communities' (Hollinger 246), can sometimes be incredibly difficult to accomplish – particularly across lines of disagreement so sharp that they almost scream 'differend,' Jean-Francois Lyotard's neologism for a dispute with no rule of judgment fairly applicable to both sides. [4] That is a fortiori the case when communities with long memories, and competing narratives, are in conflict over the same small piece of land, in a part of the world of interest to most of the rest of it.

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As the example of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict tragically suggests, urbane and sophisticated good intentions can founder miserably when cosmopolitan consciousness is insufficiently robust and widespread beyond its adherents in the seminar and conference rooms. Some great terrorists graduated from LSE, for example, surely a 'cosmopolitan' place. But because an ethics of both reasoned *and* situated (principled *and* culturally sensitive) dialogue can only ever claim to hope to advance the cause of intercultural understanding, but not of itself solve conflicts rooted in interest and/or deep-seated differences, 'the question arises ... as to [its] *critical* purchase' (Fine 16). As the cosmo-philosopher Anthony Appiah writes, 'Cosmopolitans suppose that all cultures have enough overlap in their vocabulary of values to begin a conversation. But they don't suppose, like some universalists, that we could all come to agreement if only we had the same vocabulary.' [5] This salutary vision of justice without borders, 'rooted' only in conversation without limit or foundation, knows therefore that it must also confront, at some point, the problem of action – the need to be effective in moments of decision, when nation and tribe are set against nation and tribe, and power as well as competing notions of justice are at stake. Is today's cosmopolitanism up to the challenge?

It might be – at least if David Hirsh's excellent 'cosmopolitan reflections' on the pathologies of anti-Zionism are any indication. By situating his rigorous, lucid, detailed and penetrating new study within the broader parameters of the still-evolving debate over cosmopolitanism, Hirsh does a great service. He does more than meticulously address the troubling obstacle to the hopes of all true progressives everywhere, presented lately by the 'new anti-Semitism.' Thus, he attacks anti-Semitism in the context of a larger emancipatory project that opposes racist prejudice in all its forms. By doing so, Hirsh sets cosmopolitanism two of its greatest challenges: to help make sense of one of the most intractable disputes of recent memory (Israel-Palestine), and to help ameliorate, perhaps even alleviate, the terrifying 'failure to overlap' the vocabularies of radical Islamists with ours.

This is not easy. By generously appearing willing to equate (at least rhetorically, at one point) opposition to 'Islamophobia' with opposition to the much more serious – more virulent and more real – problem of anti-Semitism, Hirsh displays a little of the tragicomic (if noble) side of the principled quest for liberal consensus-in-difference we began by humorously chiding contemporary cosmopolitanism at the outset of this review. For let's face it, as Martin Amis lately suggests, there is a qualitative as well as quantitative distinction between condemning radical Islamism's violent attacks on civilians (being 'Islamismophobic,' as he calls it) and

being racist against Muslims ('Islamophobia'). When we go through weapons detectors at Jewish sites, not only in Israel but San Francisco and Berlin, we are not being Islamophobic. Likewise, among the few remaining synagogues in Turkey, for example, those that prefer to bear no identifying marks on the outside are just being prudent – a precaution also not unknown in such metropolitan centers of self-proclaimed European tolerance as Vienna, Berlin, Frankfurt, Paris, and London, not to speak of the hinterlands of the former East Germany. Turkish Jews are surrounded by their Muslim fellow citizens, with whom they live and work and go to school, and not at all afraid of them per se; just as their co-religionists need not typically fear their Christian neighbours in Europe today. They are merely afraid of being blown up while worshipping. But when Hamas cites the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion* in its founding charter – now that's 'judeophobia' (anti-Semitism).

In other words, we cosmopolitans must be frank about the moral asymmetry in the Middle East, Europe and elsewhere today – and the decidedly *uncosmopolitan* character of Israel's and America's opponents, as distinguished from the worldly celebration of diversity that is daily life in these multicultural societies – if we are to succeed in doing more than 'waving our arms around' before some deadly conflicts. As Charles Taylor has pointed out recently, in the pages of *Dissent*: Christian fundamentalism and Islamic fundamentalism are, at least politically speaking, not comparable phenomena. In short, the devotees of the former don't fly planes into buildings. [6] Does cosmopolitan social theory adequately account for such differences?

In practice, yes; we are pleased to see there is no doubt about Hirsh's position on any of this. As the theoretical framework for an empirically-based documentation-and-analysis of prejudice against 'the Jews' today, his learned embodiment of the cosmopolitan tradition is not in conflict with his purposeful rejection of this prejudice (a prejudice so widespread and thick in certain places that it can be difficult to locate any 'partner for peace' to whom the Jewish state can even talk). But it is, we observe, in *tension* with it – as Hirsh's own data suggest. Thus, if 'cosmopolitans' are perforce at home on the left, it is also within the ranks of this very (so-called) left that anti-Israel/anti-Jewish prejudice proliferates today. [7] In other words, at a time when exaggerated hostility toward the Jewish state characterizes the very milieu in which one would otherwise hope to see cooperation between communities across national lines, and in which one would also hope to encounter cosmopolitanism as a hegemonic discourse, we find instead, to our dismay, demonization of one nation in particular. Why is the soil so rocky in this one spot, here of all places? That Hirsh

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manages to hold these elements of his argument together – both the presumption of Israel's legitimacy and prosecution of a broader 'left' agenda – speaks well of him; that this can be hard to do these days speaks to our dilemma. After all, as former U.S. Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld might have put it: You go to the peace rally with the left you have, not the left you'd like to have.

Cosmopolitanism & the Post-Left

With the above in mind, we thus proceed by saying – mega-kudos to David Hirsh! For three reasons: First and foremost, for having written a substantial monograph really (rather than 'merely' a paper), on arguably *the* central topic of concern for progressive politics in the advanced industrial world today. Second, for having done so with immense erudition, displaying both an impressive grasp of political theory and European history, and clear mastery of a (lamentably) vast sea (swamp?) of empirical data, representative of the unpleasant phenomena he analyzes. And third, for having had the patience to digest reams of stuff, much of it not only vile, mean-spirited, mendacious and offensive, but plainly risible, were it not so potent. While focusing almost exclusively on the British situation – arguably the most troubling among the democracies of the advanced industrial world – Hirsh presents an analysis that will also be relevant for understanding comparable situations in other countries on the European continent, and to a growing discourse among the Australian, Canadian and American lefts.

In his introduction, he cogently delineates the main components of his argument, focusing on the proposition that anti-Zionism is less motivated by anti-Semitism at the moment – at least in the world of what he labels the 'antiracist anti-Zionists,' meaning folks that identify with the political left rather than the conventional right – than it is a motivator of it. Instead of old-fashioned Jew-hatred leading to disdain for the Jewish state, a virulent, shameless and in-your-face anti-Zionism – one that has become a commonplace of left discourse, and even *de rigueur* in many places for those wishing to claim a 'left' identity – normalizes an exceptional degree of hostility toward Israel, which then almost inevitably spills over to Jews. Hirsh correctly points out that, for much of the contemporary liberal left in Britain (and we would add, beyond), Israel and Zionism have attained a degree of salience, even primacy, that renders opposition to Israel unique – in two very important dimensions.

For starters, all the other values so dear to the left (indeed, once definitive of 'being on the left'), such as political democracy, economic and social equality, sexual and gender liberation, anti-totalitarianism and personal autonomy – all this takes a back seat now to views of Israel and Zionism. For example, as Markovits has pointed out before – in his book *Uncouth Nation: Why Europe Dislikes America* (Princeton University Press, 2007), and elsewhere – he personally fits squarely into the American left on all categories that define this political entity, bar one: Israel. The result is that, by dint of deviating from the views espoused by the American left on this single issue, a mutual exclusion and distancing has come to characterize his own relationship to that left. Hirsh correctly attributes the unique force of this one issue to the power of 'anti-imperialism,' taken increasingly as an absolute and an *a priori*: 'Thou shalt have no enemies in the Third World.' [8] Here's another one of those sticking points, in other words, where left cosmopolitanism comes smack up against...the actually existing left. Here's another:

In the eyes of those for whom no greater sin than Western imperialism can be imagined, no greater sinner than Israel ever lived. Israel, quite simply, is unlike any other country on earth. Absurd comparisons are raised, to be sure; but only to be transcended instantly, in an escalating rhetoric of denunciation. The state founded by refugees from the Holocaust is not 'like' Nazi Germany; the tiny republic thrown up in the wake of Ottoman and then European domination of the Middle East is not 'like' imperialist Britain and France; most certainly it is not 'like' any repressive and murderous developing country, be it Rwanda or Sudan, China or Serbia – nay, for it is worse than all of these, on axes that are really all its own, without precedent or rival. Otherwise, we say, following Hirsh, why not pay anything like proportional attention to these other tragedies?

No, Israel is imagined as *sui generis* in its existence and its essence ('essentialism' and 'orientalism' being among the elementary methodological mistakes Hirsh attributes to its impassioned critics). It is evil incarnate. Indeed, it is in view of the significance of these thought-clusters, or the 'ideologemes' Hirsh postulates – the irrational associations so central to rendering Israel an *idée-fixe* within the left 'imaginary,' or identity-producing symbolic structure, in Britain, Europe and America – that Alan Johnson has come to use the term 'reactionary left,' and Gabriel Brahm the equally telling 'post-left.' As Brahm has suggested elsewhere, a propos of the American academic 'cultural studies' scene in particular, 'the post-Cold War, post-9/11, postmodern, post-Marxist, postcolonial left is no longer meaningfully left' at all, but 'post-left.' For where bashing Israel (and the U.S.) is concerned, it has

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departed from all respectable left-liberal canons of judgment, to find itself in bed with far-right, totalitarian, and even terrorist movements. [9]

For example, Judith Butler (famed professor of Rhetoric at UC Berkeley, and noted 'post-Zionist') defended *Hamas* and *Hezbollah* as 'part of the global left' at a teach-in on campus. [10] Her Berkeley colleague in Anthropology, Saba Mahmood, went further, defending al-Qaeda, or at least its 'message.' As Mahmood informs us, 'Even Osama Bin Laden was clear in his message at the time of the World Trade Center attacks.' This worthy bit of communication, which one would presumably have had to have been deaf not to hear in the rumble of collapsing steel, was that 'he wanted U.S. troops out of Saudi Arabia, a just solution to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, and an end to Euro-American domination of Muslim lands and resources.' Forestalling the obvious objection that mass murder is a barbaric way of communicating (could he maybe send a card next time?), and does not either indicate or facilitate any of these supposed goals, she goes on to add, judiciously, if ambiguously, 'His ends, if not his means, speak to a wide range of Arabs and Muslims.' [11] However, as we unfortunately know, the 'means' of 9/11 were celebrated in some Arab streets as ends-in-themselves. And the only 'just solution' to the problem of the suffering of the Palestinians and Israelis ever seriously proposed by Bin Laden is massacre of the Israelis. For that matter, why not add that Iranian President Mahmood Ahmadinejad's proposal for justice is equally clear? Imagine someone saying in 1941, 'Even Adolf Hitler was clear in his message at the time of the *Anschluss*: Germans wanted a rectification of their humiliation at Versailles, a just solution to the Jewish question, and an end to Austrian and Polish domination of German lands.' As Michael Walzer argues, 'terrorism as a political strategy [has] to be condemned and opposed without regard to the causes that the terrorists [claim] to serve. In fact, terrorism [serves] no decent cause.' [12]

But while the post-left gleans large nuggets of wisdom from al-Qaeda's murderous rant, it finds Walzer is well-nigh incomprehensible on this point, even as it goes out of its way to express a seething contempt for liberal feminists like Azar Nafisi and Irshad Manji – two able critics of Islamist repression, especially as it pertains to women. Nafisi gets trashed by Mahmood, for supposedly telling the neocons what they want to hear, and Manji for, of all things, 'exploiting' her lesbian identity. Along with Andrew Sullivan, Manji is accused of something having to do with being gay. In strains of intolerance surely more suited to the kind of speech one expects from the far *right* than any decent left-liberal discourse (be it duly noted, Mahmood is a staunch *critic* of 'liberal' political philosophy), [13] Mahmood diagnoses the root

cause of Sullivan's support for Manji, in their shared stake in manipulating their sexual identities to their advantage. 'Andrew Sullivan's uncritical support for Manji is not entirely surprising,' in Mahmood's eyes, since, after all, 'both have made their name by playing on their gay identity while at the same time embracing conservative political positions' (155).

Despite this egregious (and not untypical) example from the American academy, Hirsh's catalogue suggests that things are worse still in Britain. To be sure, more work needs to be done on the 'post-left' before we can make definitive comparisons. But for now, we pause to note once again that it appears to be segments of a well-educated and well-travelled 'global' academic elite that discovers its own 'cosmopolitanism' in the good old-fashioned sport of despising the original 'rootless cosmopolitans' (Jews) as well as gays, lesbians and women whose politics don't match their presumed 'essences' as 'subordinated others' (and who dare to think for themselves about Islamism and U.S. foreign policy). Mahmood, unsurprisingly, has nothing but praise for Steven Walt and John Mearsheimer, however, whose work she describes as a 'shrewd analysis of the impact of the coordinated efforts of the Israel lobby on American foreign policy and domestic political culture' (154-5). Enough said: Britain may be the canary in the coalmine, but this stuff is spreading. The old mores that distinguished left tolerance from right-wing intolerance are breaking down.

(Di)spelling Antisemitism

In his introduction, too, Hirsh usefully explains why we ought to write the word 'anti-Semitism' without the once-usual hyphen (something that still bothers the spellcheckers of our respective software, which insist on writing this word as 'anti-Semitism'). To Hirsh, *anti-Semitism* denotes racism against Jews and does not mean racism against 'Semites' or people who speak Semitic languages. This comes as a blow to those who insist, perversely, that no Arab can ever be anti-Semitic since 'Arabs are Semites.' 'There is no "Semitism" which anti-Semitism is against,' writes Hirsh (16). Why the need for this clarification? That it must be made is telling. To be sure, the very concept of 'racism against Jews' has become anathema and an oxymoron for much of the contemporary self-proclaimed left that comprises the object of Hirsh's fine study. Jews – as purportedly strong, dominant, powerful, the quintessential image of oppressors – can, in the post-left's view, *ipso facto* 'never again' themselves be victims of racism. To our credit, we live in an era of unprecedented concern for victims, yet only the 'right sort' of victim will do. [14]

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In the case of Israel and the post-left, it is the 'powerless victims' of the former – even when these same 'victims' commit suicide bombings against its civilians – that allow members of the latter to savour a satisfying sense of outrage at 'Western capitalist imperialism,' symbolized vividly by Israel. As Hirsh speculates – correctly, we believe – it is no coincidence that the latest upsurge in anti-Semitism follows in the wake of the disorientation and long crisis of the left associated with the demise of alternatives to capitalism. Instead of a left with a hopeful view of the future, Hirsh notes, we now have a left with a tragic view of the past and a resentful view of the present. The underlying illness – defined by a 'shift on the part of a significant section of the radical left from a social programme of working class self-liberation to a 'campist' view of the world, in which the central divide is between oppressed and oppressor nations' – presents symptoms of antisemitic anti-Zionism as part of an even darker malignancy (9). The singling out of Israel should be seen as 'a result of a particular kind of rupture in anti-hegemonic movements, a shift from a positive politics of social transformation to a negative politics of resistance' (7). Sour grapes and sweet lemons make a poor diet for those once nourished on radical hope.

In these overripe conditions, the post-left's binary world of Israel/Zionists (inherently and permanently bad) vs. Palestinians/Arabs/Muslims (inherently and permanently good), has expanded from the erstwhile Israelis-and-Zionists to encompass within its horizon Jews writ large. Thus, it should come as no surprise that – as Hirsh demonstrates in his paper – even Holocaust denial has become a legitimate anti-Zionist and 'anti-imperialist' tool, for parts of today's European and North American post-left. All Jews, *qua* Jews – and not only Zionists and Israelis – can henceforth never be viewed as weak or vulnerable in the 'global victim sweepstakes.' It is on this particular dimension that the anti-Semitism of the post-left has come full circle and merged with the traditional tropes of the old – and new – right. For example, hailing from the extreme left of the 1970s and 1980s, Horst Mahler furnishes a particularly striking figure in this milieu of red-brown overlap, as current Germany's most pronounced, vocal and articulate neo-Nazi, who has openly called for a new 'final solution of the Jewish question.' [15] And Mahler, though an exceptionally egregious example of this phenomenon, surely constitutes a well-observed and fully documented trend that is particularly loathsome in Germany, given that country's recent past, though far from confined to it. Indeed, as one of the key analysts of this trend of new-left-bleeding-into-old-and-new-right, Wolfgang Kraushaar, has convincingly demonstrated, this development can be dated to the late 1960s, and is thus far from new. [16]

Following in the footsteps of giants such as George Orwell, Hal Draper, Hannah Arendt, Robert Fine, and Isaac Deutscher, Hirsh concludes his introduction by pointing to his own normative assessments – and thus implicit shortcomings – in the conceptualization of the aforementioned cosmopolitanism. Since cosmopolitanism is no one thing, it is well to note his take on it. In contrast to universalism – which Hirsh views as potentially dangerous and empty, by dint of its ‘breaking human aspiration away from existing human conditions’ and opening up ‘a world where anything is thinkable and a world where it is easy to undervalue that which exists in favour of that which is in one’s mind’ – his cosmopolitanism comprises an argument and a strategy ‘for a way of fighting against totalitarianism that does not replicate that which it is fighting against’ (10). In other words, democratic socialism and socialism with a human face are welcomed and encouraged, Stalinism and its ilk are disdained. Multiculturalism is respected up to a point, stopping short of cultural relativism. A sensitive treatment of linkages between past and future, local patriotism and global solidarity, is among his brand of cosmopolitanism’s most compelling features.

The body of the paper consists of three interlocked sections. Part I offers us conceptual considerations about anti-Semitism. Part II highlights the actual language used by some influential people and media outlets to deny the existence of anti-Semitism. This denial includes the discourse used to go on the offensive, and depict accusations of anti-Semitism as a ‘Zionist plot’ to stigmatize and impede any legitimate criticism of Israel. It also includes antisemitic themes mirrored by anti-Zionist texts, and a gradual de-sensitization, a diminishing caution and a general reduction of the threshold of shame related to expressions of anti-Semitism. Part III features a detailed account of the trade union campaign for a boycott of Israel, culminating in a well-informed description of the debate over an academic boycott of Israel. Each of the three parts is chock-full of interesting data that we will not summarize here. Instead, while leaving out a discussion of Part III, the boycott section, which we find the most matter-of-fact and least conducive to additional interpretation, we will focus on some key aspects of Parts I and II in the remainder of our review.

In Part I, Hirsh – correctly in our opinion – summarily dispenses with the futile debate over what constitutes ‘new’ and ‘old’ anti-Semitism. Instead, he keys in very quickly on the topic at hand – that of anti-Zionism and its relation to anti-Semitism. In a fine footnote, he differentiates early in this section between the anti-Zionism of Bundists and other – mainly Jewish – anti-Zionists of the late 19th century,

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whom he sees as expressing 'opposition to a political movement,' and virtually all expressions of contemporary anti-Zionism, which constitute 'opposition to a nation state.' He then compiles a rather comprehensive list of political orientations and epistemological approaches to which espousing anti-Zionism constitutes a core: 'the left discourses of "anti-imperialism" and post-colonial theory; the totalitarian discourses inspired by Nazism, Jihadi-fundamentalism and Stalinist communism, the nationalist discourses of Arab and Palestinian anti-colonialism, the Christian and Muslim religious discourses of anti-Semitism and Jewish communalist minority anti-Zionist movements' (24). This is a motley crew indeed, with very few common denominators save for solely – and quite tellingly – anti-Zionism. After delineating Israel's uniqueness in the eyes of these groups, Hirsh offers a bevy of examples of how Israel and Zionism (and by extension Jews and anybody who comes to their defense in any way) are simply beyond the pale and unredeemable.

The terrible upshot is that, since it is Zionism that is seen as the primary cause of anti-Semitism, anti-Semites, regardless of the vicious nature of their remarks and deeds, deserve exculpation, because they are merely reacting to evil incarnate! The Holocaust can blithely be denied or minimized since to these groups it is merely invoked by Jews and Zionists to divert legitimate criticism of Israeli policies and of Israel as a country. Hirsh correctly notes that for anti-Zionists, anti-Jewish racism is either directly oxymoronic or most certainly profoundly different from all other racisms. 'Other racisms are not normally analyzed by antiracists in terms of what it is that the victims of those racisms are doing to make people hate them' (44). No reputable antiracist – thank God – would ever dream of asking African-Americans, Native Americans or Latinos what they might have done to 'deserve' their mistreatment. The presence of Israel changes everything, however, in the case of Jews.

The Livingstone Formulation, we presume?

In Part II of his paper, Hirsh proceeds from the general to the specific. Here, he analyzes the utterances and publications of some key intellectuals, journalists, and politicians, mainly in Britain. We found Hirsh's discussion of what he calls the *Livingstone formulation* especially valuable – because now we have a ready term for a phenomenon that reaches way past the immediate confines of Ken Livingstone, Mayor of London.

Late in the evening of 8 February 2005, Livingstone insulted Oliver Finegold, a journalist for the *Evening Standard*, who approached the mayor for some quotes. Livingstone asked Mr. Finegold whether he was ‘a German war criminal’ and upon being informed by Finegold that he was not a German war criminal and that he was Jewish and quite offended by Livingstone’s remarks, Livingstone, far from apologizing, continued to liken Finegold to a ‘concentration camp guard’ who was working for a paper that was, according to Livingstone, ‘a load of scumbags and reactionary bigots.’ After being criticized for these outrageous utterances – would Livingstone have asked a black reporter whether he was a plantation owner and, once informed by his target that this was offensive, respond that the journalist might be black but he still behaved like a plantation owner? – Livingstone shot back with a piece in *The Guardian* under the title ‘This is about Israel, not anti-Semitism’ (57). Thus, Livingstone *reversed* the standard anti-Zionist trope, namely that Jews ‘cry anti-Semitism’ in order to stigmatize and impeded any legitimate criticism of Israel, by ‘crying Israel’ himself, in a bid to stigmatize those who were upset by his antisemitic remarks.

This ‘Livingstone Formulation’ reappears in the context of other cases that Hirsh discusses in Part II of his study. Suffice it to reiterate that we find the term helpful to characterize parallel syndromes in the United States and continental Europe. Moreover, The Formulation provides *prima facie* evidence that there does indeed exist an overlap between anti-Semitism and anti-Zionism, if not necessarily conceptually and theoretically then most definitely in current empirical usage. Indeed, as the excellent article by Edward Kaplan and Charles Small amply demonstrates, [17] anti-Israel sentiments have a strong positive correlation with antisemitic attitudes in Europe. Wilhelm Heitmeyer’s work corroborates these findings for Germany. [18]

Wickedness with No Comparison – IDF Soldiers Guilty of Not Raping!

After discussing how various tropes of traditional anti-Semitism, hitherto largely confined to the far right (such as the blood libel and conspiracy theories of Jewish world domination) have now entered the quotidian discourse of the British left, and how some of this rhetoric has been bleeding over into the respected mainstream left-liberal media, such as *The Guardian*, *The Observer* and *The Independent*, Hirsh ends this section of the paper with a presentation of the writings and utterances of one Gilad Atzmon, a former Israeli paratrooper, a well-known saxophonist, and a fixture at the far-left Socialist Workers Party’s annual ‘Marxism’ event in

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London. Atzmon's views are so outlandish that the shocking thing is they are taken seriously by anyone. Alas! Such is the terrain Hirsh's map sets before us. Here is just one sample sentence of this musician's prose, as quoted in the paper: 'The Israeli behaviour should be realized as the ultimate vulgar biblical barbarism on the verge of cannibalism. Israel is nothing but evilness for the sake of evilness. It is wickedness with no comparison' (100).

The reason that statements like these matter is twofold: First, because they can cause ripple effects that – in a mutated and mitigated manner to be sure – can reach all the way up to respectable publications and voices and thus become part of acceptable 'commonsense' opinion. But they also matter for a second reason, which is to indicate that, when it comes to Israel, all thresholds have been massively lowered within the left-liberal discourse of the West, including inside Israel itself – thresholds of shame, for sure, but also those of decency and intelligence. *Any craziness, any insanity* can be uttered blithely when it comes to Israel, with the full knowledge that a considerable number of people will accord such statements at least sufficient legitimacy to keep repeating them, or to keep silent.

To wit: Nothing tops the award-winning paper of a Hebrew University graduate student in this context. The gist of this episode is that Tal Nitzan, working toward an MA in social science, recently received a prize for a paper that attempted to account, in a sophisticated manner, for the fact that, unlike many occupying armies, Israeli troops do not rape. Eschewing the obvious and far-too-commonsensual 'nice Jewish boys thesis' (to which we ourselves adhere in this case, and which holds roughly that civilized people do not condone rape), Nitzan goes fishing in the waters of cultural studies fantasyland to come up with the following: 'In the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, it can be seen that the lack of military rape merely strengthens the ethnic boundaries and clarifies the inter-ethnic differences – just as organized military rape would have done.' Awarded a prize for this clever bit of logic by the Hebrew University's 'Shaine Center,' at the enthusiastic recommendation of a Hebrew University professors' committee headed by Dr. Zali Gurevitch, Nitzan's neat contention was that although IDF soldiers are too racist to rape Arab women, whom they have learned to consider subhuman, the results are exactly the same as if they had not dehumanized them quite so much, but instead practiced organized rape as a weapon against the Palestinian population. We refrain from further comment.

Worst of British

We most emphatically do *not* refrain, however, from applauding David Hirsh, or from calling for further research into the questions his first-rate path-breaking study opens up. We remain struck by how acute and widespread the antisemitic/anti-Zionist discourse has become in Britain in particular. Why did only British academics bother to organize a boycott of Israeli universities and academics, one that almost succeeded and, even in its narrow failure, caused immense hurt, division and anger? By choosing in this meticulous study to focus solely on Britain, Hirsh covers his subject thoroughly. Yet by the same token he is so far unable to do more than hint at the answers to these questions for now. Albeit his preliminary speculations are suggestive: Is the 'threshold of guilt' lower in Britain, which stood so bravely against Hitler? As the author concludes, 'more comparative studies and more historical studies are necessary to shed more light on the question, "Why Britain?"' (149).

Equally compelling is the continued search for why it is exactly that this particular complex of Zionism / Israel / Jews / Palestinians / Arabs / Muslims has become *the* axial principle, the foremost nodal point that defines what we have come to call the 'post-Left?' After all, viewed against many other ills in the world, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is a relatively minor one involving a small stretch of land comprising – all told – roughly the same number of people that inhabit the Greater London area. One can surmise all kinds of hypotheses – some of which Hirsh mentions at the outset of his study – ranging all the way from the collapse of real existing socialism in Europe, to the genuine dangers of globalization; from the problems caused by neo-liberal triumphalism of the 1990s, to the realization that no overall ism of any sort will assure us improvement, let alone liberation. Though all valid points in and of themselves, their tenuous sum does not come close to furnishing a serious explanatory whole. Thus, at the end of our review, we are left with yet another parable. A caller asks Radio Yerevan: 'I saw a billboard that said, "Beat up all the Jews and the bicyclists." Tell me, please: Why the bicyclists?'

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Notes

- [1] Fine 2007, p. 135. Subsequent citations of this work appear in the text. David Hirsh's paper can be read at: <http://www.yale.edu/yiisa/workingpaper/hirsh/index.htm>.
- [2] The authors wish to thank Forrest Robinson for not getting the joke or its purpose here as it was first written, and for his perceptive, helpful, discerning and detailed response to an earlier draft of this review.
- [3] Hollinger 2001. Subsequent reference to this work is cited in the text. The literature on/of cosmopolitanism has already grown enormously since Hollinger's relatively early overview, and we do not attempt to do it justice here. Hollinger's remains nonetheless one of the most thoughtful, discerning and helpful assessments, particularly regarding what cosmopolitanism means in the U.S. context.
- [4] Lyotard 1988.

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- [5] Appiah 2006, p. 57.
- [6] Taylor 2007.
- [7] For an overview of how this comes to be, see Markovits 2005.
- [8] We wish to thank our friend, Bruce Thompson, for this telling formulation.
- [9] Brahm Jr. 2007.
- [10] Kishkushim 2006.
- [11] Mahmood 2008, p. 149. Subsequent reference to this work appears cited in the text.
- [12] Walzer 2005.
- [13] See her interview in Shaikh (ed.) 2007.
- [14] Girard 2001.
- [15] Mahler 2002.
- [16] See Kraushaar's immensely important, but alas, still untranslated, *Die Bombe im juedischen Gemeindehaus* (Hamburg: Hamburger Edition, 2005), which is a frightening read not only of the German New Left's brutally racist anti-Semitic language, but its attempt (years before Palestinian suicide bombing) to blow up West Berlin's Jewish community center on November 9, 1969, on the 31st anniversary of Kristallnacht, thus calculatedly maximizing casualties, since hundreds were gathered for a memorial service. Only a technical glitch prevented what would have been a massacre unprecedented in the history of the Federal Republic. One year later, a group operating in this milieu was much more successful, fire-bombing the Jewish old age home in Munich and this time killing and maiming people. Just like the massacre of Israeli Olympic athletes two years later, Mahler's underground buddies (as well as legal clients), welcomed this event as part of a revolutionary struggle against imperialist oppressors. Ulrike Meinhof's rejoicing in the killing of the Israeli athletes at the Munich Olympics in September of 1972 is too well known to warrant discussion here.
- [17] Kaplan and Small 2006.
- [18] Heitmeyer 2005.

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