

The Rise of Anti-Semitism Inquiry

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- Increases in anti-Jewish conduct appear correlated with increasing violence or tensions in Israel/Palestine;
- The dividing line between criticisms of Israel and anti-Semitic comments is often unclear;
- Jewish communities can be especially sensitive to criticisms about Israel because of this lack of clarity;
- Jewish-Muslim relations can come under strain because of events in Israel/Palestine but Jewish/Muslims relations are often positive;
- Avoid targeting Jews as proxies for Israel and framing Jews and Muslims as adversaries.

KEY MESSAGES:

- 1) Rises in anti-Semitic incidents are increasingly linked with events in the Middle East. As the Community Security Trust noted in their 2015 report, the record high numbers of anti-Semitic incidents in 2014 was “due to ... reactions to the conflict in Israel and Gaza that summer.”² This link between anti-Semitism and the Israeli/Palestinian conflict is problematic on multiple fronts. To the extent that there is a link, it is a correlation between anti—Semitic incidents and the conflict in Israel Palestine so that Jews are attacked as assumed supporters of Israel. This correlation, however, oversimplifies the relationship between Diaspora Jews and Israel.
- 2) Viewing Jews in this way falsely presumes a direct correlation between Jewish identity and unmitigated support of the Israeli government. There are three concerns that emerge out of this problematic framework that we will focus on. **First**, it feeds into the idea that Jews are

¹ More detailed biographical information is provided at the end of the document.

² Community Security Trust, *Annual Review 2015*. London 2016.

responsible for events in Israel. **Second**, it ignores the diversity of ways in which diaspora Jews relate with Israel. **Third**, it encourages division in Jewish/Muslim relations. We will address these in turn.

- 3) **First**, targeting Jews as proxies for events taken by the Israeli government needs to be understood as anti-Semitic for at least three reasons. One, not all Jews support the actions of the Israeli government, and even if some Diaspora Jews are complete supporters with strong connections to Israel, that should still not expose them to attack. Two, only Jews are targets in this correlation, not Christians or others who may support specific Israeli policies. 'Dual loyalty' is a label used about minorities that views them as a threat to the nation. Three, it somehow assumes that Jews are responsible for the affairs of another state, and this kind of assumption has historically been linked to deep seated prejudices about double or dual loyalty.³
- 4) To view the Jews as responsible for Israeli policies is problematic for an additional reason than that which concerns dual loyalty. It is no longer possible to explore anti-Semitism without also addressing the relationship that exists between Diaspora Jews and Israel. Public pronouncements over the years from individuals across the political spectrum, such as Ken Livingstone, David Ward, and Seumas Milne who has claimed that peace with the Palestinians would benefit the Jews in Europe,⁴ have repeatedly linked in the public imagination Israeli security and military policy with the Jewish people. It is in this context that Jews become viewed as having some responsibility for Israeli policy and Jews become targeted as representatives of the Israeli state.
- 5) This correlation is a product of multiple historical, political and sociological forces. The idea that Israel is the nation-state of the Jewish people easily feeds the idea that all Jews are tied to Israel as though it were their state. Israel is a nation-state based on a Jewish majority, but that does not mean that Jews are tied to Israel as though it were their state, just like Catholics are not tied to the Vatican. Treating Jews as representatives of Israel places an unreasonable burden on Diaspora Jews to justify their commitment to the state in which they reside. Today dual loyalty is less about commitment to the nation as it is about which moral values you subscribe to. If Jews are viewed as representatives of Israel, when Israel is primarily understood via condemnations for violating international law, Jews are viewed as guilty by association. This in turn contributes to viewing the Jews as immoral, and of not caring for anybody else.
- 6) **Second**, regardless of what Israeli politicians say, they do not always represent the views of Jews in the Diaspora and while some Israeli politicians do consider themselves to be

³ Baron, Ilan Zvi. "The Problem of Dual Loyalty." *The Canadian Journal of Political Science* 42, no. 4 (2009): 1025-44.

⁴ Livingstone's most recent comments on this matter are from a recent BBC radio interview, the transcript of which can be read here: Stone, Jon, "Labour antisemitism row: Read the Ken Livingstone interview transcripts in full", *The Independent*. Thursday 28 April, 2016; In a since removed blog post in 2013 the Liberal Democrat MP David Ward wrote that he was "saddened that the Jews, who suffered unbelievable levels of persecution during the Holocaust, could within a few years of liberation from the death camps be inflicting atrocities on Palestinians in the new State of Israel and continue to do so on a daily basis in the West Bank and Gaza" <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-21216801>; Milne's claim that ending Israel's military occupation would benefit the Jews in Europe associates Diaspora Jews with Israeli security policy. See, Milne, Seumas, "This slur of anti-Semitism is used to defend repression", *The Guardian*. Thursday 9 May 2002.

representatives of the Jewish people, most of the time they act in the interests of the Israeli state. In fact, as has recently been recognized by the influential research arm of the Jewish Agency, the Jewish People Policy Institute (JPPI), Israeli policy can be a source of division among Jewish communities.⁵ Dr. Baron's work on Diaspora Jews' relationship with Israel – which was cited in the above-mentioned JPPI report – confirms that Israel can be a source of division, not unity, among Jewish communities in the Diaspora.⁶ Dr. Kahn-Harris has identified 14 main 'positions' take by British Jews on Israel.⁷ These range from support for the Israeli religious right, through left-of-centre Zionism, to Jewish anti-Zionism. These political differences do not simply concern what Jews believe Israel should do or be, they also concern whether Diaspora Jews should publicly criticize Israel. Part of the intensity and difficulty of intra-Jewish Diaspora conflict over Israel derives from the feeling that other Diaspora Jews are undermining, variously, the security of Israel, the security of Diaspora communities and the very nature of what it means to be Jewish. Debate about Israel within Jewish communities is not necessarily even about Israel, but about Jewish identity.

- 7) As intra-Jewish community debate about Israel has come to inform the construction of contemporary Jewish identity, it has become increasingly difficult to differentiate criticism of Israel from anti-Semitism. This is because if how views about Israel are a reflection of how one understands what it means to be Jewish, critiques of Israel will inevitably impact on this sense of identity. The dividing line between Israel and Jewish identity is blurred. This point is easily missed and when it is recognized is easily misunderstood. What is missed is that Israel does matter for many Jews and that for most Jews at multiple points in their lives they will need to take a stand about Israel. To explore Israel as a Jew is not necessarily a question about ideology but about identity. Public sound bites denouncing Israeli policy miss this complexity and feed into dichotomous thinking about Jews and Israel that helps create a defensive environment where Jews feel targeted for the affairs of another state. However, none of this means that there is no room for critiquing Israel, only that critiquing Israel should involve thought as to how it can be done to avoid marginalizing and pathologising Diaspora Jews.
- 8) Criticism about Israel needs to be distinguished, however, from criticism about Zionism. Prior to-1948 (the year of Israel's independence) and certainly pre-World War Two, Zionism was one of a range of political ideologies that contended for influence in the Diaspora. Post-independence, however, and in particularly post-1967 (the year of the Six Day War), support for and the belief in the legitimacy of Israel as the Jewish state, largely became the consensus across Diaspora Jewish communities. Further, Israel became the focus of educational programming, fund-raising and cross-communal celebration. This consensus was, however, never total. Significant sections of the secular Jewish left and the ultra-orthodox right continued to oppose Zionism. Further, since the early 1980s and particularly since 2000, significant differences have emerged within the Zionist camp, leading to considerable intra-Jewish conflict even amongst those who support the principle of a Jewish state. Being a Zionist does not mean that unmitigated support for Israeli policy. Indeed, some sections of the Jewish left can be critical of some Israeli policies, but still identify as Zionists very strongly.

⁵ Rosner, Shmuel, Michael Herzog. *Jewish Values and Israel's Use of Force in Armed Conflict: Perspectives from World Jewry*. Jerusalem: Jewish People Policy Institute, 2015.

⁶ Baron, Ilan Zvi. *Obligation in Exile: The Jewish Diaspora and a Theory of International Political Obligation*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2015.

⁷ Kahn-Harris, Keith. *Uncivil War: The Israel Conflict in the Jewish Community*. London: David Paul Books, 2015

- 9) Nonetheless, the majority of the British Jewish community remains committed and attached to Israel. According to a 2010 survey by the Institute for Jewish Policy Research (JPR), for 82% of British Jews Israel plays a ‘central’ or ‘important but not central’ role in their Jewish identities. A 2015 survey by City University⁸ found 93% agreeing to a similar question and 90% supported Israel’s right to exist as a Jewish state. Interestingly, while a sizeable majority of British Jews clearly agree with the Zionist principle that there should be a Jewish state of Israel, a smaller majority – 72% in the JPR study and 59% in the City University one – explicitly define themselves as Zionist. The reasons for this disparity are not clear, but it is nonetheless apparent that even Jews who don’t identify as Zionists do not, in the main, demand the end of the state of Israel.
- 10) Criticism about Israel that seek to undermine the right of Israel to exist as a Jewish state (as opposed to critiques of Israel’s actions as a sovereign state) is the most obvious point in which criticisms about Israel can become viewed by some Jews as anti-Semitic. While it is not possible to expect Jews not to care about Israel, it is important to appreciate the nuances of how Jews negotiate their relationship with Israel. It is when Jews are told how they should negotiate this relationship that Jews feel personally threatened and when criticisms of Israel are felt to be anti-Semitic. While Zionism, as a political ideology, should not be treated as beyond criticism, the fact that most Jews are Zionists to some degree, means that anti-Zionism will be viewed as threatening to a significant number of Diaspora Jews. Again, this means that critiques of Zionism are made carefully.
- 11) **Third**, the conflict with the Palestinians also provides an added dichotomy in the sense that it becomes easy to see Jews and Muslims in the UKs as proxies or as representatives of Israel and Palestine. There is a long history of migrant or diaspora communities holding powerful ties to their homeland or to kin abroad. However, such ties do not define these communities, but are only one part of their identities.
- 12) The relationship between the Jewish and Muslim communities within the UK (and indeed Europe more widely) is often constructed by public discourse as polarized due to the Israel-Palestine conflict. Where there are tensions in these relations, they often appear to revolve around the conflict in the Middle East. In fact, they are mediated by the local context and historical experiences of discrimination of the two groups, which go beyond the context of Jewish- Muslim relations. More specifically, the mutual perceptions of the two groups are affected by 1) the general negative rhetoric directed at Jews and Muslims that circulates in the public discourse; 2) the mass media constructing the two communities in opposition to each other; 3) personal experiences of discrimination; 4) historical memories of persecution.
- 13) However, many positive initiatives in Jewish-Muslim dialogue are happening in the UK, but they are underreported in the mass media. This includes, for example, the work of the Joseph Interfaith Foundation (<http://www.josephinterfaithfoundation.org>) and the Muslim-Jewish Forum of Greater Manchester (<http://www.muslimjewish.org.uk>), as well as numerous local initiatives at mosques, schools and synagogues. The social fears that different communities have about the way they will be treated by others are an important indicator of the overall state of inter-communal relations in the country and the level of socio-political comfort that they experience not just in relation to each other, but also in relation to society at large.

⁸ Miller, Stephen, Margaret Harris, and Colin Shindler. *The Attitudes of British Jews Towards Israel*. London: Department of Sociology School of Arts and Social Sciences City University London. 2015.

Key recommendations for policy

Because at issue is not institutional racism but individual actions, our policy recommendations are suitably focused.

In regard to public rhetoric:

- Care needs to be taken to clearly focus critiques on policy choices of the Israeli government;
- Jews are not to be treated as proxies for Israel;
- Rhetoric that suggests all problems are the fault of one party is to be avoided;
- Claiming righteousness by emphasizing who is the greater victim should be avoided.

In regard to Jewish-Muslim relations

- Empower local government to support interreligious and intercultural dialogue initiatives within their communities;
- Avoid negative rhetoric directed at Jews and Muslims that circulates in the public discourse;
- Constructively challenge media representations that place the two communities in opposition to each other;
- Find shared experiences via food diplomacy (such as collectively exploring Middle Eastern foods) or through historical memories of persecution to build bridges between groups.

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Dr Yulia Egorova: Yulia Egorova is Reader in Anthropology and the Director of the Centre for the Study of Jewish Culture, Society and Politics at Durham University. She has published widely on the topic of Jewish identity and Jewish Diaspora in Asia and Africa (see, for instance, Egorova 2006, Parfitt and Egorova 2006, Egorova and Perwez 2013). In 2013-2015 she led a project on Jewish-Muslim relations in the UK. She has also published on the Jewish-Muslim relations in the global context. Her relevant publications include: forthcoming (with S. Lyon) *Anthropological Perspectives on Jewish-Muslim Relations: a View from South Asia* (New York: Oxford University Press); forthcoming (with F. Ahmed) 'The Impact of Antisemitism and Islamophobia on Jewish-Muslim relations in the UK: memory, history, context', in J. Renton and B. Gidley, eds., *Antisemitism and Islamophobia: A Shared Story?*

Palgrave Macmillan; 2013 (with S. Perwez) *The Jews of Andhra Pradesh: Contesting Caste and Religion in South India*, New York: Oxford University Press; *Jews and India: Perceptions and Image*, London: Routledge, 2006; (with T. Parfitt) *Genetics, Mass Media and Identity: A Case Study of the Genetic Research on the Lemba and the Bene-Israel*, London: Routledge, 2006; and (with T. Parfitt) *Jews, Muslims and Mass Media: Mediating the 'Other'*, London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2004.

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