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## RESEARCH ARTICLE

### EUROPE AND ITS JEWS A Cosmopolitan Journey with Jürgen Habermas

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**ABSTRACT:** After the Holocaust European antisemitism did not simply vanish into thin air and critical theorists drew attention to the new or secondary forms of antisemitism that arose in the postwar period. Among them Jürgen Habermas, a leading figure in the younger generation of critical theorists, is remarkable for confronting the legacy of European antisemitism in his vision of a new Europe. His approach to the postnational constellation emphasised the importance of ongoing engagement with the history of European antisemitism and of reconstructing political community in ways that should make antisemitism less feasible in the future. While this paper endorses much of Habermas' analysis, it is critical of cracks in the edifice of his reconstruction which allow back in a certain form of European chauvinism and which make it possible to reach the premature judgement that the problem of antisemitism has been solved in Europe. The last part of the paper addresses the actual ways in which the cracks in the postnational edifice have provided footholds for the unwelcome return of the 'Jewish question' to Europe and have made it difficult for critical theory to understand new forms of antisemitism emerging on the European landscape. The signs of an inversion of the cosmopolitan project - from critical engagement with the legacy of European antisemitism to an idealized image of European success in overcoming antisemitism - points to a misappropriation of cosmopolitanism that needs to be challenged.

**KEYWORDS:** Antisemitism, cosmopolitanism, Europe, Habermas, Holocaust, Jewish question, postnationalism

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## 1. Introduction: antisemitism and Europe after the war

The question of what happened to antisemitism after the Holocaust was a key issue for German critical theorists returning to Germany in the 1950s and '60s. Their experience was mixed. Theodor Adorno deployed the term "secondary anti-Semitism" to conceptualise the opinion he found common in Germany that the Jewish people were culpable of exploiting German guilt over the Holocaust.<sup>1</sup> Hannah Arendt (1994) wrote in a similar vein of the resentment many ordinary Germans felt for being blamed for Auschwitz. They both reported on a certain residual attitude they found among some Germans: it was as if the real culprits were Jews who exploited the Holocaust for their own benefit, made money out of their suffering, denied the right of Germans to express their own suffering, and accused the Germans of being uniquely evil in their treatment of others. They both also reported on the experience of Jewish survivors who met with indifference and hostility in the now two Germanys. Some spoke of the reluctance of their fellow human beings to hear the story of their experiences;<sup>2</sup> some of the hostility they faced when they tried to return to their old homes; and some of the official restrictions imposed on them by Western governments. On the other side of the Iron Curtain the new regimes in Eastern Europe presented the nations they ruled as victims of National Socialism, not as perpetrators against Jews, and new antisemitic campaigns were planned and conducted both in the Soviet Union and in its satellite countries in the name of extirpating Zionism and cosmopolitanism.<sup>3</sup> Tony Judt summarised the issue rather well when he commented that "what is truly awful about the destruction of the Jews is not that it mattered so much but that it mattered so little".<sup>4</sup> Antisemitism had not gone away, it had mutated.

From a cosmopolitan point of view there were exceptions to the general rule. Notably, the invention of a new category in International Criminal Law, that of 'crimes against humanity', was not only an original attempt to come to terms with the destruction of European Jews but also the harbinger of the "new cosmopolitan dawn", accord-

<sup>1</sup> See Heni (2008).

<sup>2</sup> Primo Levi recounted this nightmare in his Auschwitz memoir, *If This is a Man*, and then encountered it in real life. When he took *Se questo è un uomo* to the Italian publisher Einaudi in 1946 it was rejected.

<sup>3</sup> Stalin's ideologues were perhaps the first to suggest a correspondence between what the Nazis did to Jews and what Zionists did to Palestinians.

<sup>4</sup> Tony Judt (2007, 804-807) writes: "The returning remnant was not much welcomed. After years of antisemitic propaganda, local populations everywhere were not only disposed to blame 'Jews' in the abstract for their suffering, but were distinctly sorry to see the return of men and women whose jobs, possessions and apartments they had purloined... The choice for most of Europe's Jews seemed stark: depart ... or else be silent and so far as possible invisible".

ing to Karl Jaspers (1961) at the time. Although the Nuremberg trials of 1945 focused on crimes against peace and war crimes that were not directly connected with the Holocaust, the charge of crimes against humanity was included in the indictment and did enter into the prosecution's agenda (Fine 2007, ch. 6). Two further founding documents of the postwar epoch, the Genocide Convention and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, passed within 24 hours of each other in 1948, were also informed by the experience of genocidal antisemitism and reflected a new cosmopolitan common sense that all human beings need protection from the extremities of state violence. These initiatives were driven by the experience of the 'final solution to the Jewish question' but with the onset of the Cold War they were marginalised. It soon became apparent that the antisemitism that had functioned as the ideological adjunct of the 'final solution' did not just vanish into smoke once the mass killing was over.

Significant changes in the character of European responses to the experience of genocidal antisemitism began to take place in the 1960s, notably with the trial of Adolf Eichmann in Israel and the re-conceptualisation of the 'final solution' as the 'Holocaust' and 'Shoah'. A growing awareness of the enormity of the destruction of European Jewry and of European responsibility for it was subsequently expressed in the proliferation of narratives in books, films and television series, of official apologies, commemoration sites, museums and laws criminalising Holocaust denial, and not least of scholarly research. After 1989 the fall of the Berlin Wall and the Iron Curtain drew former satellite countries of the Soviet bloc into the orbit of Holocaust commemoration. The Holocaust, Shoah, Auschwitz – these names became universal references for radical evil. They highlighted what was done to the Jews, albeit at the cost of transferring attention from crimes against humanity to crimes against the Jewish people and from genocide to the incomparability of the Holocaust.

In the same period new forms of antisemitism emerged, especially around Holocaust denial on the Right and antizionism on the Left. The charge of 'Zionism' put forward by the Stalinist rulers in Eastern Europe rested on a selective nationalism that claimed to distinguish between 'progressive' and 'reactionary' forms, the nationalism of the oppressed and that of the oppressors. It was premised on the notion of Jews conspiring with other Jews to betray the host nations among whom they lived. The phrase 'rootless cosmopolitan Jew' echoed charges like 'enemy of the people' and 'enemy of the human species' levelled against those accused of betraying the Revolution.<sup>5</sup> The dual charges of Zionism and cosmopolitanism formed the basis of the distinctive contribution Stalinised Marxism made to the post-Holocaust repertoire of antisemitism, and in

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<sup>5</sup> Gilbert Achcar (2013) demonstrates that the antipathy to cosmopolitanism found within orthodox Marxist circles was not shared by Marx and Engels themselves.

the late 1940s and 1950s this contribution was heralded in a series of show trials throughout Eastern Europe, including that of Rudolf Slansky. Jews were treated as a transnational group with connections and loyalties that ran across national boundaries, and as a national group with connections and loyalties to a nation state of their own. In both cases they were seen as enemies of the internationalism supposedly embodied in the Soviet Empire.

Within Western Europe Left Marxism, which included the Trotskyist movement and libertarian sections of the New Left, was critical of Stalinism but generally unable to frame a coherent response to its antisemitism. In 1905 the young Leon Trotsky had seen for himself how effectively antisemitism could be whipped up by the state and how quickly it could mobilise the violence of the mob, and in 1938 the old Trotsky expressed his foreboding that “the next development of world reaction signifies with certainty the physical extermination of the Jews” (Trotsky 2007, 29). However, most of his followers were seemingly unable to follow in his footsteps. In the aftermath of the Holocaust, the young Ernest Mandel, who was to become one of the most influential postwar Trotskyists, acknowledged the challenge posed by the Holocaust before likening it to the post-war expulsion of Germans from Poland and Czechoslovakia and attributing responsibility for it to imperialism: “the death trains have again begun moving but this time in the opposite direction with a different human freight ... if Hitler constructed the trap for the Jews, it was the Anglo-Americans who sprang it ... the massacre of the Jews is borne equally with Nazism ...by all of imperialism” (Mandel 1946, 2-3). Similar neglect can be observed in versions of Maoism that offered an alternative to the Trotskyist tradition. The most influential Maoist group in France, *Gauche Prolétarienne* equated Israel’s treatment of the Palestinians to Nazism, an early instance of what has subsequently become a significant antizionist refrain, though they drew back from this posture once they recognised its antisemitic character. Sections of the German radical left also made an equation between Israel and Nazism, which led to the awful incident on the anniversary of *Kristallnacht* in 1969 when a bomb was planted in a Jewish community centre to draw attention to the ways in which victims had become perpetrators.

In this context the resistance to the legacy of antisemitism mounted under the shadow of the Holocaust by the earlier generation of critical theorists, among whom I include Adorno and Arendt, also shaped the political thinking of critical theory’s leading postwar representative, Jürgen Habermas. He faced up to the legacy of genocidal antisemitism in Germany and Europe as a whole and to the difficulties of understanding it created for later generations exposed to three distinct pressures: the growth of a new or secondary antisemitism; the Zionist belief that European antisemitism could be es-

caped but not overcome; and the attitudes of a Left that at best showed little interest in this little local conflict and at worst converted it into an indictment of Jews for their treatment of Palestinians. A pressing need to confront the extermination of European Jews and the effects it had in shaping postwar Europe played a vital role in Habermas' critique of nationalism and conception of postnational political community as the normative potential of our age. One of the great strengths of his critical theory has been to recognise that the antisemitism question is central to the critique of the modern age and to the project of European reconstruction.

## **2. Habermas: antisemitism and the postnational project**

Habermas conceived of the postnational constellation as a multi-layered global order consisting of a reformed basis of solidarity within the nation state, the development of transnational forms of political community such as the European Union between nation states, and the enhancement of international laws and institutions regulating inter-state relations and guaranteeing human rights at the global level. As Habermas envisaged it, the postnational constellation entails a differentiated architectonic of legal and political forms as well as a complex re-invigoration of political ways of thinking and acting in the world. Habermas presented this multi-layered order not only as a desirable idea for the future of Europe but also as a tangible social reality in the present, albeit one contested from without and within. It may also be understood as a response both to top-down bureaucratic state socialism and to the bottom up populism of the New Left that based itself on the notion that *all political life must derive exclusively from below*. The struggle to come to terms with the phenomena of antisemitism was a vital element of this project. Habermas' guiding concept was that antisemitism was the product of emphatically nationalist forms of political community and that postnationalism could introduce a new political order in which the conditions that once gave rise to antisemitism would finally be overcome.

The ties that bind nationalism and antisemitism have been frequent thematics in Habermas' writings. He maintained that the *Volksnation*, the nation of the people, was a modern democratic invention that nonetheless crystallised into

an efficient mechanism for repudiating everything regarded as foreign, for devaluing other nations, and for excluding national, ethnic, and religious minorities, especially the Jews. In Europe nationalism became allied with antisemitism, with disastrous consequences (Habermas 1998, 111).

He argued that the historical strength of nationalism was due to its capacity to act as a binding power enabling individuals to coalesce around commonly shared symbols and that the formation of the modern nation state was dependent on the development of national consciousness to provide it with the cultural substrate for civil solidarity. Habermas' concessions to nationalism may be illustrated by his comment that

only a national consciousness crystallised around the notion of a common ancestry, language and history, only the consciousness of belonging to "the same" people, makes subjects into citizens of a single political community – into members who can feel responsible for one another (*ibidem*, 112-113).

For Habermas (2001, 64), the nation state is a Janus-faced phenomenon characterised above all by normative ambiguity: whilst it can and indeed did become the bearer of a regressive credo that unreflectively celebrates the history, destiny, culture or blood of a nation, it could also be converted into the bearer of a progressive and inclusive form of political consciousness which he called "constitutional patriotism" and saw as capable of inspiring *rational* loyalty on the part of citizens to modern nation-states.<sup>6</sup> Habermas maintained that some kind of national consciousness is needed to inculcate willingness on the part of citizens to do what is required of them for the common good, such as maintain public services through taxation or accept democratic decisions as legitimate, and that the specific virtue of constitutional patriotism is to perform these integrative functions in ways that do not exclude categories of people deemed not to belong to the nation in question. Constitutional patriotism seemed to bridge the gap between shared attachments towards *universalistic* principles *and* the actualisation of these principles through *particular* national institutions. The national aspect was not to be extirpated but rendered benign through this harmonisation of the universal and the particular.

The appeal to a benign nationalism suggested by Habermas' conceptual approach to constitutional patriotism became more pronounced when the concept was applied in practice to Germany. Habermas adopted constitutional patriotism in the German context as an antidote to ethnic nationalism and as a device to re-integrate the Federal Republic of Germany and later a united Germany as a pluralistic, multicultural community. He deployed the idea as a critical resource against the resurgence of ethnic nationalism exemplified through the 'Historians' Debate' in the 1980s. Habermas (1991, 215-224) criticized one historian (Michael Stürmer) for celebrating the "higher source of meaning" that only nationalism could provide, another (Andreas Hillgruber) for iden-

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<sup>6</sup> For a discussion of the normative ambiguity of the nation state see Chernilo (2007, 156).

tifying with “the desperate and costly struggle of the German army in the East ... who were trying to save the population of the German East from the Red Army’s orgies of revenge”, and a third (Ernst Nolte) for normalising Auschwitz as a response to a “more original Asiatic deed”, that of the Soviet Gulag. Habermas maintained that German national identity could only be rebuilt on the basis of a joint responsibility for the past, carried over into next generations, so that the dead would not be cheated out of the “memory of the sufferings of those who were murdered by German hands”. It was not resurgent nationalism but the liberating power of ‘reflective remembrance’ that could rebuild German identity (Habermas 1992, 240).

Habermas was not prepared to dissolve the murder of *Jews* into some general reference to the victims of Nazism, as Soviet Marxism tended to do. For example, in a discussion of the Berlin Holocaust memorial in *Die Zeit* in 1999 he criticised the argument that “exclusive reference to the murdered Jews now reflects a particularism that ignores the victims of other groups” and represents “an injustice to the Sinti and Roma, the political prisoners, the mentally handicapped, the homosexuals, the Jehovah’s Witnesses and the deserters which demands some redress” (Habermas 2006a, 48-9). He acknowledged that the moral intuition to which this universalism appealed was powerful and that the special “significance of the Jews for us Germans must not neutralise the unconditional obligation to show equal respect in commemorating all victims”, but he could not accept a line of argument that was universalistic but also abstract. He wrote: “Were we to ignore the special relevance of the Jews for the social and cultural life of Germany, the historically fraught, quite specific proximity and distances of both these unequal poles, wouldn’t we once again be guilty of a false abstraction?” (Habermas 2006a, 48-49). The intuition behind Habermas’ argument was that there is no contradiction between attending to the particular genocide of Jews and drawing universalistic ethical conclusions. To focus on the genocide of any particular people is not to sign up to *particularism*. We learn to generalise from single cases and, where required, to allow new cases to modify our generalisations (Stake 1995, 85).

Where I disagree with Habermas is over the role played by what we might call ‘the German question’ in his approach. He presented Germany as a model for Europe as a whole on the grounds that the trend toward postnational self-understanding was more pronounced there than in other European state. Germany appeared in this account as the nation that, by virtue of learning from its past excesses, now most fully acknowledged that ethnic nationalism was a horrific regression. It was as if Germany above all had the reflective resources required for a genuinely ‘critical appropriation of ambiguous traditions’. On the grounds that in Germany nationalism was no longer normatively defensible, Habermas (2006a, 47) treated Germany as a normative model for the post-

national political community to come. Habermas articulated very well the normative content of the postnational ideal – rejection of nationalism, loyalty to constitutional principles, cultivation of a reflective consciousness, ability to relativise one’s own way of life, granting strangers the same rights as ourselves, recognition of the heterogeneity of populations, inclusiveness of all citizens regardless of origin, colour, creed, or language, etc. In my judgment, however, the temptation to represent Germany as a privileged site of this constitutional patriotic ideal re-introduced a note of German chauvinism through the back door (Fine 1994). It traded on an ambiguity between two distinct propositions: that constitutional patriotism is a desirable goal for German reconstruction and that Germany is the standard bearer *par excellence* of constitutional patriotism.

Habermas’ attempted resolution of this opposition has been to say that constitutional patriotism operates in a space “between facts and norms”, that it walks a tight-rope between what is and what it might be, but in my view it works only at the cost of creating a crack in the postnational political edifice. It creates an opening for those who want to transmute Habermas’ ongoing commitment to learning lessons from catastrophe into the fixed credo that Germany has learnt the lessons of the catastrophe it caused. While this is not a conclusion Habermas himself drew, it has made it possible to represent the new postnational Europe as having put the problem of antisemitism firmly in the past (Habermas 1997).

Since the German rendition of constitutional patriotism leaves it hovering uncomfortably close to a new German chauvinism, this is reason to turn to the wider European stage. Habermas’ turn to Europe addressed the fear that the doctrine of constitutional patriotism was smuggling in a new German patriotism and the fact that genocidal antisemitism existed throughout occupied Europe and not just in Germany. Thomas Mann’s comment that there ‘are not two Germanys, an evil and a good, but only one that through devil’s cunning transformed its best into evil’ applies to Europe as a whole.<sup>7</sup> Habermas (2006b, 41) placed an ongoing responsibility on Europeans to commemorate the victims of organised European violence primarily for the sake of the victims but additionally as a means of “reassuring ourselves of our own political identity”. His commitment has been to keep in mind “the gruesome features of a century that ‘invented’ the gas chambers, total war, state-sponsored genocide, and extermination camps”, and at the same time not to become “transfixed by the gruesomeness of the century” but to return again and again to “a conscious assessment of the horror that finally culminated in ... the annihilation of the Jews of Europe” (Habermas 2001, 45).

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<sup>7</sup> This quotation from Mann’s *Germany and the Germans* 1945 is cited in Habermas (1991, vii).



An active stance toward learning from the past has profoundly shaped Habermas' work.

The German problem was sublated but not resolved. The turn to Europe brought with it the spectre of a new nationalism writ large, expressed in the idea of Europe as a civilisation whose particular values, civic traditions and forms of life made it especially "capable of learning" and of "consciously shaping itself through its political will" (Habermas 1998, 124). Habermas painted an anti-*gemeinschaftlich* image of Europe in that he avoided construing European identity along essentialist lines, but on the edges of his work lay the temptation not so much to advance a postnational project for Europe as to represent Europe as the privileged site of postnationalism. Again, the equivocations of postnationalism between a critical and celebratory approach to European civilisation opened the same fault-line in relation to antisemitism as that which we saw in relation to Germany – one that makes possible the historicisation of antisemitism as a phenomenon only of the past.

Consciousness of European antisemitism provided for Habermas the normative substrate for the third stage of his political journey – the cosmopolitan reconstruction of world society, global institutions, international law and human rights. Habermas (2008, 444) maintained that the normative consequence of the "monstrous mass crimes of the twentieth century" should be to acknowledge that "states as the subjects of international law forfeited the presumption of innocence that underlies the prohibition on intervention and immunity against criminal prosecution under international law". He did not reject the principles of *classical* international law – self-determination of peoples, respect for treaties, non-intervention in the internal affairs of other peoples, agreed norms regulating the conduct of war – but emphasised the need to elaborate classical international law in accordance with cosmopolitan principles: that states are bound to honour human rights, that the norm of non-intervention may be suspended in the case of major atrocities, and that the authority of international organisations such as the United Nations must be upheld. In defending the principle that the international community has a legal as well as moral duty to intervene where and when states commit atrocities against their own or other people and that atrocity-committing states should not be allowed to hide behind the fig leaf of national self-determination, Habermas laid the ground for a constitutionalised global order to come incompatible with the forms of domination that once made the 'final solution' possible.

Habermas has always acknowledged that this cosmopolitan vision is far from an accomplished fact. Human rights interventions are notoriously fraught with difficulties and particular interests can be dressed up in the universalistic rhetoric of international

law.<sup>8</sup> According to his postnational vision, however once a fully fledged legal framework is established to protect people from the violence of states – e.g., by extending the reach of global remedies, granting the International Court of Justice compulsory jurisdiction, sharpening definitions of genocide and crimes against humanity, reforming the Security Council, constructing a UN army, etc. – and once a developed culture of human rights is established that would permit actors to judge and act on political matters from the perspective of ‘citizens of the world’, then current difficulties could be properly addressed if not resolved.

Habermas has tended to formulate this vision in ideal terms as a transition from a world in which law is in the service of power to a world in which power is in the service of law, but the obvious difficulty here is that law itself is a social form of power; witness the struggles for power in the institutional framework through which human rights are enacted on the world stage, such as the UN Human Rights Council (UNHRC). The legitimacy of human rights lies in supplementing the functional capacities of nation-states and tempering their temptation to imagine themselves as all-powerful, god-like entities, but human rights are exposed to their own legitimacy problems. They are visible in the difficulties human rights encounter in addressing social inequalities, regulating the aggression of global and regional powers, matching the democratic validity possible at the national level, resisting political appropriation by particular interests, etc. Habermas has argued that the democratic legitimacy of international institutions is nonetheless justified by the limited functions they perform and by the fact that the normative substance of human rights, while not directly resting on democratic procedures, rests on legal principles tried and tested within democratic constitutions. He has also argued that human rights receive supplementary legitimacy through the activism of global civil society. And yet there remains an obvious chasm between the abstract idea of universal human rights and concrete norms of social and political exclusion and inequality that creates vast legitimacy problems for global institutions as well (Brunkhorst 2014).

It has proved possible, for example, to exploit cracks in this conceptual architecture in order to reconstruct a hierarchy of states based on human rights principles. To use the language of the philosopher, John Rawls (2001), one such strategy is to elevate to the top of this hierarchy those states deemed ‘liberal’ in that they uphold human rights, to place below them states deemed ‘decent’ in that they respect *some* human rights, and to place at the bottom of the hierarchy states deemed ‘outlaw’ or ‘pariah’ in that they fail altogether to meet human rights standards. Again, this threefold classification of states according to human rights criteria has not been part of Habermas’ own

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<sup>8</sup> See Cohen (2004, 10).

postnational project, but it makes it capable of introducing a fundamentalist outlook into international law. This outlook becomes all the more pronounced when the category of 'peoples' is substituted for that of 'states', as it was for Rawls, inasmuch as the category of 'people' obscures the politically crucial distinction between state and society. In the case of states labelled 'outlaw' or its many synonyms, the substitution of 'people' for 'state' invites slippage from condemning a *state* for its human rights abuses to condemning a *people* on account of the human rights abuses committed by the state to which they belong. This inversion, which is to my mind explicit in the work of Rawls but not in that of Habermas himself, expresses a crack in the global architecture of human rights that allows for the re-emergence of highly moralised forms of judgmentalism. The labelling of a particular people as a pariah people is not inherent in the postnational project, but it is a potentiality and, as we shall see, it is one that has allowed the Jewish nation to be ascribed the pariah role.

Jürgen Habermas has not only endorsed a formal ethical commitment to 'Never Again' but has explored the categories of understanding and standards of judgment required to turn European responsibility for genocidal antisemitism into something practical and enduring. As he frequently reminds us, however, all the modern forms of social life are capable of distortion and inversion; even postnationalism can be used to demonise the nationalist 'other'. What I have argued is that cracks in the postnational edifice make it possible to distort and invert the postnational vision of Europe in the service of idealising European civilisation and projecting its hidden flaws onto some barbaric other. Notwithstanding the centrality of confronting and overcoming antisemitism to the postnational vision of a new Europe, and Habermas' own personal commitment in this regard, I shall argue in the second half of this paper that the return of antisemitism to the European continent can be internal to the distorted and inverted form of the postnational vision itself.

### **3. Deformations of postnationalism and the return of the Jewish question**

There is nothing remotely 'Eurocentric' about the project of reconstructing Europe along universalistic lines, and yet the project has the capacity 'through the devil's cunning' to turn itself upside down. It is nothing new to find that prejudice perpetuates itself in the name of the sublime, for this is how potential victims are kept in line, and it is to the formation of a deformed universalism that I now turn. I begin by considering two mechanisms: the temporal and the spatial.

The temporal mechanism I wish to draw our attention to is that of emphatically situating antisemitism in the past. When we look back with horror to the period of European history in which genocidal antisemitism and other barbarities were written into the very texture of social life, we may console ourselves with the thought that at least antisemitism has been empirically marginalized and normatively discredited since the Holocaust. Few people in mainstream society continue to claim positive adherence to antisemitic ideologies and even the Far Right of the European political spectrum does not necessarily spout antisemitic ideologies. We may be tempted to conclude that the Holocaust has served Europe as a learning experience, that barbarism has been put to rest or that it no longer takes the form of genocidal antisemitism. The key move, which I think was taken around the turn of the millennium, is to relegate antisemitism emphatically to Europe's past. This is done in a liberal mode by paying tribute to the success of the new Europe in transcending ethnic nationalism and recognising rights of difference among its citizens, and in a more radical mode by excluding antisemitism from the forms of racism that continue to circulate in contemporary Europe. In historicising antisemitism as a phenomenon of the past, we close our eyes to its new forms. We see antisemitism as a product of a nationalistic period of European history now superseded by postnationalism. The very idea of a 'new antisemitism' is rejected.

The spatial mechanism I wish to draw attention to is that of claiming postnationalism for ourselves and accusing 'others' of not respecting its principles. We might make reference to an indeterminate category of 'others' who, we say, treat the Holocaust *only* as an event in Jewish history and not as an index of more general propensities, who exaggerate the scale of antisemitism at the expense of neglecting other forms of racism, who stigmatise whole categories of people as antisemitic (be they 'Muslims', 'Arabs', 'the French' or 'the Left'), whom is appropriate collective memory of the Holocaust for their own ends and who cry 'antisemitism' as a covert means of defending Israel from political criticism. Speaking in the name of universalism we accuse others of being the enemy of the universal without specifying precisely who these others are. We construct an imaginary 'other' whose recognition of antisemitism precludes empathy for others, whose collective memory of the Holocaust privileges the suffering of Jews at the expense of all other sufferings, whose concern over new antisemitism rules out concern over other racisms, whose cry 'Never Again' means never again only to Jews, whose outrage over the particulars of Jewish suffering belies a *particularism* unconcerned with the sufferings of all others.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>9</sup> A cursory review of the Holocaust Memorial Day Trust website reveals many connections being drawn between the Holocaust and genocides in Cambodia, Rwanda, Bosnia, Darfur, etc. <http://hmd.org.uk/page/about-hmd-and-hmdt#sthash.Xnl1eqCu.dpuf>. Ed Vulliamy (2012) recounts a

Who then are these others who view the Holocaust through a particularistic lens, who cannot see that what was done to the Jews was of no greater significance than what has been meted out by European imperialism to generations of subjected 'races', who in their Eurocentrism erase the larger realm of European racism? Well, they are of course the Jews or, since we no longer believe in 'race', those who invoke the sign of 'the Jews'. So on the one hand antisemitism is declared obsolete; on the other, 'the Jews' are labelled enemies of postnational Europe. *Le plus ça change, le plus c'est le même chose*. How easy it is for the old 'Jewish question' to return to the mainstreams of European thought!

To be sure, it is no longer justifiable to classify a group or category of people racially as 'Jews' but symbolically we speak of those who invoke the sign of 'the Jews' as the marker of their own subjectivity. Doubtless there may be found in the actual behaviour of some Jews supporting evidence for the images projected onto this indeterminate set of 'others'. There are some who adopt a nationalistic point of view in combating antisemitism, in imagining antisemitism where it does not exist, in commemorating the mass murder of their own people, or indeed in instrumentalising antisemitism for extraneous political ends, but this does not in any way distinguish Jews who confront antisemitism from other minorities who confront racism against their own particular people. As Hannah Arendt once pointed out, nothing may appear more natural than that if you are attacked as a Jew, you fight back as a Jew. Indeed, within European Marxism the 'nationalism of the oppressed' is regularly rationalised as the ideal way of combating the racism of the oppressors. In relation to the Holocaust, as in other genocides, there are also those who treat it as an occasion to raise universal issues concerning what it is to be human in the modern age, who see it as a crime against humanity and not only as a crime against the Jewish people, and who seek answers to how our humanity in all its diversity can best be protected (Spencer and di Palma 2013). What we encounter, however, in this new rehearsal of the old Jewish question is the abstraction of the particularistic, self-interested, self-regarding and fundamentally dishonest 'other' now being reconstituted either by distorting bits and pieces of empirical evidence concerning the behaviour of certain Jews or by projecting onto 'the Jews' fic-

speech he heard at a Holocaust conference in Washington 1998 organised to mark the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the UN adoption of the Genocide Convention. It was by a survivor, Thomas Buergenthal, of the ghetto liquidation at Kielce, the death camp at Auschwitz and death marches from Auschwitz and Sachsenhausen: "How do we explain to our children and grandchildren that in the world in which we live ... we diddle and daddle when it comes to mounting a rapid response to save people from destruction from a murderous regime? Oh, I know all the answers we give. They justify our inaction, and the lies we have conditioned ourselves into believing. But the children will see them for what they are, at least as long as they remain children, and retain their empathy for the suffering of others" (*ibidem*, 72).

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tional properties of our own imagination. This inversion of the postnational paradigm may be the product more of slippage than of reflection, but it remains no less damaging.

Various progressive intellectuals in the name of universalism have made the criticism that collective memory of the Holocaust and collective struggles against antisemitism are too exclusive to meet the universalistic aspirations of the new Europe. Tony Judt wrote that Holocaust memory crowds out all other injustices by treating the Holocaust not as one evil among many but as radical evil, and identified the accusation of antisemitism with political instrumentalisation: "Today, when Israel is exposed to international criticism for its mistreatment of Palestinians and its occupation of territory conquered in 1967, its defenders prefer to emphasise the memory of the Holocaust. If you criticise Israel too forcefully, they warn, you will awaken the demons of antisemitism. Indeed, they suggest, robust criticism of Israel doesn't just arouse antisemitism. It is antisemitism" (Judt 2008). The philosopher Judith Butler pursued a similar line of argument when she expressed her view that 'the charge of anti-Semitism' was exercising a 'chilling effect on political discourse'. She maintained that 'certain actions of the Israeli state - /acts of violence and murder against children and civilians - /must not be objected to...for fear that any protest against them would be tantamount to anti-Semitism', and that the charge of antisemitism was used to "translate what one is actually hearing, a protest against the killing of children and civilians by the Israeli army, into nothing more than a cloak for hatred of Jews" (Butler 2004, 101). The cultural historian Matti Bunzl has maintained that the focus on antisemitism deflected attention from the real racisms affecting postnational Europe, Islamophobia, which has been fuelled by social forces that brought millions of Muslims to Europe, and no longer turns on questions of race or nation but on that of civilization: "the notion that Islam engenders a world view that is fundamentally incompatible with and inferior to Western culture" (Bunzl 2007, 13). The sociologist Goran Therborn has written of the "complete delegitimation of anti-Semitism in mainstream discourse after the discovery of the horrors of Auschwitz and the complete defeat of Nazi Germany", and argued that the charge 'anti-Semite' became a *Totschlagwort*, a killing word, used as a "lethal weapon in public polemics", especially to dismiss "fundamental critical questions about the state of Israel". He contrasted the old "European time" in which Israel exists, supposedly rooted in "ethnic nationalism", "divine right of Jews" and "European atonement for the Holocaust", with "world time" supposedly rooted in "de-colonization, universal rights, and the assertion and recognition of indigenous peoples and of non-European religions and cultures" (Therborn 2012, 161-163).

These examples convey to my mind the slippage of radical intellectuals from the inclusive universalism Habermas put forward in his theory of postnationalism to the stigmatisation of others as the other of universalism. The Marxist philosopher, Alain Badiou (2013), has the virtue of articulating what is more muted and inchoate in others, as befits one who continues to profess his loyalties to Maoism and Pol Pot. He condemns what he describes as an exceedingly powerful and reactionary current in contemporary political life, which speaks in the name of 'the Jew' and claims to see 'antisemitism everywhere' (*antisémitisme partout* is the French title of a book he co-authored with Eric Hazan). According to Badiou, this powerful and reactionary current constructs a 'victim ideology' around the Jews, which renders other forms of victimisation invisible, demands that Israel's crimes be tolerated and accuses those who do not tolerate them of antisemitism. Badiou declares that these 'purveyors of antisemitism', as he calls them, are not only on the side of Israel against the Palestinians but also on the side of all repressive power against popular resistance. Badiou himself writes in the name of a tradition of universalism he traces back to St Paul's disconnection of Christianity from established Judaism. He sets the idea of Christian and then secular universalism against the Jewish nation by presenting the latter as placeholder for all that is hostile to the universalistic vision. He imposes the matrix of the struggle between universalism and particularism onto the national conflict between Israel and Palestine, thus compressing the actual rights and wrongs of the conflict beneath the weight of his ideological mystifications. The whole business is justified philosophically through a self-contradictory account of a metaphysical battle between the Universal and the Particular: self-contradictory because the universal that 'otherises' the particular can no longer be universal. Badiou re-instates the Jewish question through an explicit symbolic turn: not through the abstraction of 'the Jew' as a race apart but through the signifier 'Jew' as the sign of those who imagine themselves as a race apart. His rendition of the cosmopolitan project is not to supersede nationalism but to heap upon *Jewish* nationalism all the defects of nationalism in general. It is of course possible for the champions of any antiracism to instrumentalise the charge of racism for their own purposes, and antisemitism is no exception, but here instrumentalising the charge of antisemitism is treated as its very essence.

#### **4. Conclusion**

My argument is that there has arisen a disturbing tendency to convert the cosmopolitan and postnational spirit from their commitment to deep reflection on Europe's

relation to its Jews into a means by which the sign of 'the Jew' is cast as the other of the cosmopolitan and the postnational - be it in the shape of the Jewish state, the Jewish nation, Jewish memory or even Jewish opposition to antisemitism. In reconstructing a moral division of the world between 'us' (Europeans) and 'them' (those who invoke the sign of 'the Jews'), cosmopolitanism and postnationalism risk losing their emancipatory purpose. The return of the 'Jewish question' to the European political landscape is a dangerous development. It is a marker of the current crisis of emancipatory politics that Israel is turned into the abstraction of 'Israel' just as in the past Jews were turned into the abstraction of 'the Jews'. Today abstract images of Israel are formed sometimes by distorting and magnifying actual aspects of the conduct of Israel - occupation of Palestinian land, human rights abuses, anti-Arab racism, Jewish fundamentalism, exclusionary policies toward migrants, etc. - and sometimes by constructing fictitious images remote from anything to do with Israel's history.

It should go without saying that criticism of Israel is no less and no more problematic than criticism of any other country. Under the register of the Jewish question, however, criticism becomes more like the labelling of a criminal than 'criticism' in the normal political and intellectual sense of the term. We *select* only those actions that indicate criminality, we *interpret* actions only from the point of view of their guilt, we *abstract* actions altogether from the meaning they have for the actors themselves, we *isolate* meanings from the intersubjective relations of which they are part, we *project* onto actors defects we will not recognise in ourselves, we *objectify* actors as essentially defined by the label we attach to them. The mechanisms of labelling criminality are practical as well as epistemic: they involve forcible procedures of isolation, individuation, record keeping, sanctions, boycotts and the like (Fine 1977a; 1977b). Criticism of Israel turns into criminalisation by erasing the heterogeneity of Israeli society, imposing a law of exception on individuals who do not fit our image of the whole, translating the most heinous of government policies into the essence of Israel and dissolving all distinction between the state and civil society. In *Antisemite and Jew* Jean Paul Sartre observed that there is a sense in which the antisemite can never lose the empirical argument: if we point out that most Jews are not powerful financiers or that most powerful financiers are not Jews, the antisemitic imagination remains no less fixed on the powerful Jewish financier. Today if we point out that most Israelis are not ethnic cleansers or child killers and that most ethnic cleansers and child killers are not Israeli, an imagination crafted by the Jewish question remains no less fixed on the Israeli ethnic cleanser and child killer.



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