

MIRROR ON THE PAST..REFLECTIONS ON OUR FUTURE
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Introduction

I was in Nazi Hungary between the ages of 4 and 7. Nine tenths of my peers were murdered. My parents and I had skirted with death, but unusually, we survived by living among the general population pretending to be Christian. We did this for three years until liberation. I had much time to think while hiding in our apartment. At the age of 9 I started a book about antisemitism and war in order for them to not happen again. Almost 8 decades later, and especially in the current environment, I am still grappling with this what has been called the longest hatred.

Serge Klarsfeld who documented the Shoah in his film by the same name, warned against asking ‘Why?’ He said such a question would make the perpetrators appear human.

But victims, no matter how well documented their suffering, do not provide the answers to perpetrator hood. We must take the risk that perpetrators are human, and ask them ‘Why?’

Outline of what I’ll cover

We may crave understanding that will immediately dissolve the unprecedented antisemitism we are currently experiencing. This talk will not provide such magic. But I hope that it will enhance understanding of antisemitism.

After defining antisemitism I’ll describe how its different forms have been identified. I will describe my forays into understanding violence and show how fear underlies three types of violence. I will suggest that the same three fears are the foundations for three types of antisemitism. Lastly, I’ll ask whether understanding fears behind antisemitism may direct attention to real and away from imaginary problems displaced on to Jews.

Definition of antisemitism

The term Antisemitism was introduced by the German journalist [Wilhelm Marr](#) in 1879. He wanted to replace the crude term Juden-hass (Jew-hatred) with scientific respectability. So he claimed that Jews were a

Semitic race inferior to European Aryans. However, his change of words did not change his underlying Juden-hass.

He wrote in *The Victory of Judaism Over Germandom* that no matter how civilised Jews appeared, they were, for the last 1,800 years, racially and irreconcilably, on a path to take over the world, and currently were on the brink of doing so.

Resonating with Marr, in 1905 the Russian mystic Sergei Nilus wrote *The Great in the Small: The Coming of the Anti-Christ and the Rule of Satan on Earth*. The appendix contained the well-known *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*. In it he claimed that the first Zionist Congress in 1897 consisted of a secret cabal of Jews who planned to take over the world. The Protocols myth is still central in Arab anti-Semitism and has been taught in Islamic schools such as those of Hamas.

Different Forms of Antisemitism

Religious antisemitism

Antagonism to Jews was present already *in antiquity*. It was based on the exclusive nature of the monotheistic Jewish faith, the haughty sense of Jews being a chosen people, a refusal to intermarry and to accept converts, strange customs such as head covering, mysterious diets, Sabbath observance, and circumcision - they all marked out Jews as an exasperating, even an odious foreign body.

Christian antisemitism cohered in the 400-500s. It held that the Christian Church had replaced the Jews as the [people of God](#).

Jews were accused of cohorting with, or actually being the devil. In their rituals they ate the blood of killed Christian children. That Jews killed God/Jesus was Catholic dogma till the 1960s.

There were many instances of Christian antisemitic persecution. Examples are during the Black Death epidemic 1348-1351, massacre of Spanish Jews 1391, Inquisition and expulsion of Jews from Spain 1492, [Cossack massacres in Ukraine](#) between 1648 and 1657; various [anti-Jewish pogroms in the Russian Empire](#), between 1821 and 1906, culminating in the Holocaust in 1939-1945.

Muslims too could not forgive Jews for not accepting Mohammed and Islam. They were punished by being *dhimmis* throughout the Muslim world, meaning the lowest rung of society.

Economic antisemitism

Excluded from farming and trades, Jews resorted to banking and money lending. Then they were accused of being incapable of honest labour, and of forming a financial cabal seeking world domination.

In reality aristocracies diverted blame from economic and national turmoils they had themselves caused. They initiated pogroms and exclusions as ways to avoid paying debts and seizing Jewish property.

Political Antisemitism

In the past Jews were accused of capitalism communism, and other fashionable -isms. In the current world

Right-wing antisemitism reverberates with neo-Nazi views of Jews as faux-white foreign interlopers who want to take over the world. “Jews will not replace us” is their catchcry.

Left-wing antisemitism accuses Jews and Israel to be capitalist, oppressive and colonialist. It sympathises with the Palestinian underdog.

Holocaust denial by both right and left is especially painful as this major Jewish hurt is minimised, ignored, denied, and turned on its head by accusations that Jews are the new Nazis.

Muslim antisemitism. Israel and Jews are often conflated, for instance Israel is said to be part of Jewish world domination. The so-called Jewish state is construed to be an evil apartheid state ethnically cleansed of Muslims in the 1948 Nakba (catastrophe), and currently inhabited by settler colonialists committing genocide. Therefore genocide of Jews/Israelis is desirable.

Post-modernism, deconstructionism, identity politics, social media

The moral calculus is crude: Israelis and Jews are powerful and successful so they are bad; Hamas is weak and people of colour, so they are good. No, it doesn't matter that most Israelis are “people of colour.” Who you are (identity politics) has replaced ideas; denunciation has replaced debate; public shaming has replaced persuasion; disadvantage and suffering of your group replaced hard work and accomplishments; accomplishments and wealth is unearned privilege.

The different types of antisemitisms are like interchangeable ideologies.

Exceptionalism

It is starting to feel that Jews and Israel are universal scapegoats. Jews and Israelis concede imperfections (see major demonstrations in Israel recently), but, they ask, why are other peoples, with greater sins not chastised? Among

many examples, why not blame Jordan, also a new state, for killing 20,000 Palestinians during Black September in 1970? What about the constant internecine wars?

We are at a cross-roads. We can declare that we have been destined to be special; yes, specially destined to suffer while being the conscience of the world. Or we may consider antisemitism to demonstrate human qualities whose origins we do not fully understand, but understanding it could shed a light on many hatreds including antisemitism. I favour the second view.

You will find a kind of change of tone in what follows. If it sounds rather cold and logical, believe me that I am, like we all are, also overwhelmed by emotions: fear, anger, and outrage. But to win, we must understand the enemy and ourselves. Understanding requires a different, somewhat cold and analytic thinking. So, bear with me.

First of all, we are not the only victims. There have been the American Indian, Armenian, Cambodian, Rwandan and arguably the Australian Aborigine genocides.

Prejudice and oppression are even more universal. Emancipation of slaves is recent and of women is still ongoing. Children were killed in Roman times if the father decreed, and have been dominated and abused till current times. So, antisemitism is one example of widespread and different persecutions. Like gypsies, we have been everywhere, always a small defenceless minority. To the masses of Muslims around Israel, that is how Israel was perceived too.

Let us take a deep breath and recall that people are as capable of love as of hate. People love their children. People can be generous to each other to the point of sacrifice. They can cooperate and form melting pots of cultures and ideas. So, there must be reasons why sometimes people kill and abuse each other and at other times nurture and sacrifice themselves for others. Let's remember that while we look at the dark side.

Let us for the moment leave macroscopic genocides and antisemitism. I would like to share with you my clinical experiences of microscopic, or individual violence that I have had the privilege and opportunity to dissect and understand. Perhaps microscopic perspectives may provide hints to macroscopic violence.

I will pass by individuals like Hitler and Stalin, severely traumatised individuals as they were in their early lives. You can read about them in my *Heart of Violence*. Here I want to tell you about perpetrators from my own professional experience of 30 years, working in emergency departments and

in private practice. Bear with me. Understanding microscopic irrational violence may help us with our special interest in anti-Semitic violence.

One of my first experiences in hospital psychiatry was being asked to deal with violent psychiatric patients locked in an isolation ward. The nurses were very disturbed by patients' screams, bangings, and threats. To cut a long story short I found that the agitated and violent patients were distressed because of lack of toilet facilities. Allowing them relief pacified their violence.

Similarly, many patients in the emergency department were aggressive when they believed that their or their relatives' life-threatening symptoms were ignored. When harassed nurses retorted with 'wait their turn' the aggression increased. When attended to and reassured, aggression turned to gratitude.

I saw a man who had thrown his second child against a wall. He was enraged because his father had loaned his elder brother a sum of money, which a similar sum the father had denied my patient. The man's father acknowledged that he favoured his older son, and had never wanted another child, my patient. My patient had to adjust to this fact as an adult, not as a child. He did. And he came to love his second child.

So, anger can be displaced on others. The abused second child was a scapegoat. The weak can be scapegoated when the original abusers are seen to be too powerful.

The more I examined angry and violent patients, from those just irritated for having to wait, to murderers, the more I realised that they all saw themselves as victims, and in danger of their lives, or what made their lives meaningful. The danger to their lives may be current, but it may be imagined as a past traumatic event recurring currently. The current event may trigger the past event lodged somewhere in the person's mind. The person may then react currently as if reliving the past; for instance, kill someone who merged into a past threatening person.

For instance, a man killed his manager when the manager's actions drove the business toward bankruptcy. The destructive actions of the manager triggered in the owner memories of his step-father (who had taken all the family's money) felling his mother when he was a child, and whom as a child the man had wanted to kill.

In each case of objectively unwarranted violence lurked fear. Fear of having to wet and soil oneself, fear of one's existential crisis being ignored; and/or a previous life-threatening event being repeated.

Staff awareness of these dynamics of fear and dealing with the fears, prevented serious violence in the emergency department over more than two decades.

For Jews, who have lived in fear for centuries, it is difficult to conceive that those in power, whom we have feared, have fear of us. But the different types of antisemitism I described are fuelled by one or more of 3 ubiquitous survival fears: 1. Fear of annihilation; 2. Fear of being overtaken; 3. Fear of losing essential resources.

As with patients, these fears may be immediate and possibly misinterpreted, or they may be triggered by cues reminiscent of past traumatic events. For instance, current Palestinian demonstrations may trigger Holocaust fears, or for Palestinians, Israeli soldiers may trigger return of centuries of colonialism.

Let me now elaborate on the fears of annihilation, being overtaken, and losing essential resources, fears that spur antisemitism.

Different Survival Fears that spur Anti-Semitism

1. Fear of annihilation.

Jews are hated because they are seen as killers, murderous infiltrators, who sacrifice Christian babies for Passover, poison the wells of Europe, and as Hitler enunciated, they are germs and parasites who infect the world with diseases like syphilis.

They genocide Palestinians, and they want to genocide whites in Europe by flooding them with aliens. "They will not replace us", they chant.

Jews of course have long been known as Christ killers, in league with the devil, therefore one can torture and kill them with pure hearts.

Jews are also seen as an existential threat to the Arab world. Therefore, they must be killed. Article 7 of the [Hamas] Covenant: 'The Day of Judgement will not come about until Moslems fight the Jews (killing the Jews), when the Jew will hide behind stones and trees. The stones and trees will say O Moslems, O Abdulla, there is a Jew behind me, come and kill him.'

It's a matter of kill or be killed. Jews should be killed.

2. Fear of being overtaken, squeezed out; Jews rule the world

Of the recent massacre- Why kill babies? He is a colonizer first and a baby second. That woman raped to death? Shame it had to come to that, but she is a white oppressor.

This modern trope reflects the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion* where Jews rule or are about to rule the world, at the cost of the Aryan race or currently, the Muslim world.

The hierarchy of oppression has to be reversed.

Leon Trotsky 1905 described this reversal during a pogrom in Russia: The doss-house tramp is king. A trembling slave an hour ago, hounded by police and starvation, he now feels himself an unlimited despot. Everything is allowed to him, he is capable of anything, he is the master of property and honour, of life and death. If he wants to, he can throw an old woman out of a third-floor window together with a grand piano, he can smash a chair against a baby's head, rape a little girl while the entire crowd looks on, God save the Tsar! Or Allah hu Akbar on Oct 7th.

But wait, there is another part to this story. In *The Arab Spring* a decade ago practically every Arab nation rose up against its corrupt, exploitative, dictators. These have been put down by heavy military actions, though [multiple uprisings and protest movements](#) continued.

Was the Palestinian problem a welcome diversion for Arab oppressors? Were Jews and Israel scapegoats?

But no,

Jews rule the world. They (not Muslim leaders) should be put back in their place.

3. Fear that Jews own the world

Wealth consists of land, money, and ability to make money.

Historically, land was the source of food and security. Conquest of land increased that wealth. Conquest of the people who inhabited that land, increased wealth further.

Dispossessed of land, conquest and professions, Jews came to rely on money and what enhanced money: commerce, education, and mutual help.

Sometimes their capacities were utilised by the land owners, at other times their capacities were envied and stifled. Sometimes there were cycles of allowing the Jews to prosper, only to later rob and evict them.

Since the Holocaust there is a return of relative Jewish prosperity. The proportion of Jewish billionaires and Nobel prize winners is out of proportion to their numbers. The same applies to doctors, businessmen, writers, artists, and politicians. And the same applies to Israel which has worked itself up to a relative degree of prosperity.

When times are tough, the have-nots of wealth, education or satisfying lives turn on Jews who have them.

Of course, they say, Jews and Israel are not victims. They are wealthy. They must have colonised and appropriated their wealth.

Jews have it all. They must have stolen it. Take it back.

Behind these fears, behind anti-Semitic tropes, there is, we feel, a structural irrationality. Whether we are confronted by spouting imams, blood-thirsty Hamas, by the far-right or the far-left, the Trump phenomenon, the post-

truthniks at universities, there is a kind of madness that rules anti-Semitic fears and tropes.

I want to say a few words about recent discoveries that can help explain irrationalities such as ‘You killed Jesus.’ It has to do with a part of the brain that does not recognise time and other ‘rational’ aspects of the world.

I am talking about the right side of the brain, which, it has been recently found, deals with emotional survival views of the world.

The right hemisphere of the brain.

Let me introduce you to split worlds.

One split world is the part of our nervous system that is split between voluntary and involuntary activities. The voluntary nervous system controls our external muscles which we move according to our conscious will. The involuntary nervous system controls our hidden vital organs, over which we have little *a priori* knowledge or control.

Our brains are similarly divided. The left hemisphere is like our voluntary nervous system. It is verbal, aware, can orientate, think and reason and move accordingly.

The right hemisphere of the brain is like the involuntary nervous system of the body. It regulates our vital, hidden, unaware mentality according to instinctive animal-like survival needs.

These survival needs are like instincts that we share with animals. They are fast and timeless, and we may become aware of our survival actions through our left hemisphere only after we have enacted them. Like the involuntary nervous system, the right half of our brains is hidden, bar emotions and sensations.

The right hemisphere is nonverbal, has no sense of time, and can confuse place and person. It can integrate many inputs at once without noticing contradictions. The right hemisphere is dominant up to the age of 7 and when a person is reliving traumas. If you want to know how the right hemisphere works, think of dreams, hypnosis, and children’s fairy tales. Think of Hitler and Trump and current Arabian fairy tales. Think also of PTSD and traumatic nightmares, where trauma lodged in the right hemisphere, often triggered by cues similar to the original trauma, invades our minds unthinkingly and timelessly in its original form.

So, the Hamas massacre triggers traumas from the Holocaust. Israeli responses trigger Arab traumas from the Nakba and from their own tyrants.

It is said that antisemitism is but a canary in the mine. Behind it lie real problems, like behind the pogroms were the Tsar's oppression; behind French antisemitism the aristocracy's lavishness while people starved.

Today's increasing antisemitism may similarly hide increasing Arab dissatisfactions (remember the recent Arab Spring), and in the West increasing individual and social insecurity while a coterie of billionaires who pay no taxes parade their private planes and rocket ships.

Solutions

Luckily most of the real problems are soluble. If many prior European enemies can coexist, if US and Japan, even Germany and Israel can coexist, if Saudi Arabia and Israel have suddenly discovered that they are Abrahamic brothers, then it is not inconceivable that Israelis and Palestinians can coexist.

The resources are there for both Israelis and Palestinians to survive and thrive better than when they first entered their conflicts. It may be possible for the two sides to become aware of their own and each other's traumas, each one's histories of oppression, being despised and unwanted, and each having risen above the status allotted to them.

They nearly agreed on a two-state solution in the past. They could carve out similar or other creative agreements, replacing wanting to be rid of each other with sharing humanity, resources, and respect.

This of course may sound Utopian, but after Gaza, what is the alternative?

Summary

Antisemitism is a stress and trauma situation for Jews, but is also manifestation of stress and trauma among the perpetrators. Resolution by old means that involved ever more persecution has not worked. There are better solutions if we can divest images from past traumas projected on each other, and under new leaders and ways of thought acknowledge each other's humanity.

Is there another solution?