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From Erasure to Restoration: Antisemitism and the Visual Reverberations of a Revolutionary Pedagogy

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All I am saying is that before the Code Noir and King Leopold's chicotte roused the outrage of the abolitionists and future anti-imperialists, the bodies and souls of their victims must have registered, quite viscerally, the radical transgression of their idea of the human. All I am saying is that the slaves' revulsion and recorded histories of revolt, from the slave ship and the middle passage to the plantation and Saint-Domingue in 1791, did not, *pace* Hegel's preposterous claim, originate in the circumstance that 'they have come in contact with European views about freedom'.

ato sekyi-otu, 20191

However intense the hostility between Israelis and Arabs, no Arab has the right to feel that his enemy's enemy is his friend, for Nazism is the enemy of all the world's peoples.

mahmoud darwish, 1973

When the revolution in Haiti changed the course of history, it also gave birth to a new paradigm that would, centuries later, still shape political strategies. C.L.R. James' seminal work *The Black Jacobins* narrates a key historical event in the struggle for emancipation and first successful mass rebellion of the modern world. This history of the Black Jacobins *must* be acknowledged as key to any liberation philosophy and analysis of colonialism and racism, as an incredible tale of an oppressed group transforming into a free people. Because of what this 'free' entails for theories related to self-emancipation and social change, the ideals of Toussaint L'Ouverture are not an afterthought but rather their core.² In his extraordinary *left universalism*, Ato Sekyi-Otu proposes 'a universalism that is neither unmodified, the stainless product of a-view-from-nowhere; nor one that is vitiated by the open avowal of its particular provenance, preoccupations, even its partisanship'.³ Exercising the recuperation of the universal against both a nationalist ('self-referential') particularism and a simplistic anti-universalism from part of the left, through an approach that is invested in emancipation for the poor and oppressed, Ato Sekyi-Otu not

only echoes the freed universal subject but also rejects the Eurocentric Enlightenment and its imperialistic colonial version of freedom. The claim to a universal morality is linked to the site of subjectivity. The Haitian revolution presented the freed person as a universal subject, regardless of colour, for, although the rebellion emerged from a race struggle, whether you were part of the slave revolt was

1 Sekyi-Otu 2019, p. 31.

2 James 1989.

3 Sekyi-Otu 2019, p. 12.

more important as the principal basis of a new freed identity. A similar link between morality and subjectivity is found with regard to who is enemy and who is friend in the midst of common liberation struggles. This spirit of a progressive universalism is present when Mahmoud Darwish spoke to the idea of a *world's enemy* that was based on the rejection of the opportunist adage 'the enemy of my enemy is my friend'. Born from the belief that our ethical constellations carry general significance and that our moral measures possess universal value, Darwish's dictum is a beautiful confluence of Sekyi-Otu and James. On the surface, there are plenty of disavowals of cultural chauvinism that, upon closer inspection, are found to be offering a pseudo-universalism through a global (i.e. mistaken for universal) capitalist subjectivity that is deeply ingrained in consumerism. But, if we seek a universalism that is entrenched in progressive moral values yet *also* expressed through the historical particularity of a people struggling for self-emancipation, this is found in the far more important affirmation of the double critique offered by Ato Sekyi-Otu.⁴

The form and praxis of antisemitism as racist oppression fluctuates across the course of time and is experienced differently along lines of class, and it also mutates as an instrument of other social dynamics. Contrary to *left universalism*, the charge of 'Left Anti-Semitism' (and 'Muslim Anti-Semitism') construed as the *only* evil narrows the discussion because the crime of antisemitism is relayed not as *the enemy of all* but as the ultimately separate crime with which nothing else can be compared. Any disagreement with this approach supposedly amounts to culpability with said crimes. The term *antisemitic* is attached to immoral qualities that index easy-to-remember formulae that characterise Muslim communities as inhabiting a deeply ingrained culture of Jew-hatred. Discourses on antisemitism often rely on Islamophobic *and* red-baiting tropes; offered through a pre-packaged and ready-to-use (Holocaust-denying, Arab-Muslim) protagonist who cultivates a vigorously anti-Jewish culture or the (suspiciously preoccupied with Israel) dodgy Marxist. There is a particular lexicon associated with the villain and racialised other ('the' Muslim,

Black, Arab, Maghrebi) or hegemonic state-subject nemesis ('the Leftist') that dares to be unapologetic in its anti-colonialism.

4 Sekyi-Otu 2019 exposes the hypocrisy of 'Afrocentrism' (and its variant, Afropessimism) and offers instead 'Africentrism', building on ideas of Frantz Fanon, Kwame Anthony Appiah, and others. He centres African thought over Western imperialism through a double critique: reject racial particularity when at the expense of universalism, which he regards to be mostly falsely identified as representing Western ownership and thought. One does not have to disregard the violent legacy of colonialism to come to this conclusion, as Sekyi-Otu demonstrates.

It would be a mistake to consider these prevailing framings merely as 'polemical': that would assume a certain exceptionality – as they have become common currency in the contemporary political public sphere. Thus, these tropes are about more than ignorance but are meant to depoliticise a political struggle, one positioned at the sharpest end of contemporary imperialism. That explains why these pre-packaged variants of antisemitism are frequently deployed by Israel in its public diplomacy,⁵ and by many of its allied states in Europe and North America by criminalising dissent through legislation. Although operating in the name of anti-antisemitism, such diplomacy is detached from any genuine concern for fighting anti-Jewish racism through a politics invested in grassroots activism. What matters is that these frameworks attack a wider critique of Israeli settler-colonialism and, by extension, Palestine solidarity. They are not motivated by a concern to fight antisemitism or Nazism, as Darwish put it above.

This was confirmed starkly in the spring of 2022 when a collection of revolutionary posters brought a group of people together with the curators of Documenta fifteen (an art exhibition held in Germany). Curated for the Lumbung Press, these posters were prepared as part of anti-colonial and progressive struggles in the 1960s and 1970s. We were intrigued and excited by the material before us, especially as the workshops took place amid a disturbing controversy over the alleged antisemitism surrounding Documenta fifteen.⁶

Solidarity for Palestine would be officially denounced, the critique of Israel effectively problematised by the adoption of ihra policy, and non-violent resistance in educational and art institutions criminalised by the banning of bds. In the light of what we have come to know, these incredible poster collections would undoubtedly, in retrospect, be interpreted in the now-hegemonic way as antisemitic because the terms according to which we ascribe meaning and symbols related to visuals have fundamentally changed. It seems beyond question that antisemitism, or 'anti-anti-antisemitism' (denying the reality of antisemitism or refusing to fight the Historical Materialism 32.2 (2024) 223–263

reality of antisemitism), functions as their negative metonyms. Antisemitism can prove a deadly signifier: it can create permanent scandals, obfuscate nuance, destroy reputations, and bring about the dismantling of organisations.

5 Aouragh 2016.

6 This collection was curated with Subversive Film for the Lumbung Press and was part of Documenta fifteen, the fifteenth iteration of the well-known art exhibition in Germany held between June and September 2022 in Kassel. See <<https://documenta-fifteen.de/en/about/>>.

The moment antisemitism is gestured towards, it is already too late: it is an adaptable and all-encompassing gesture that *says it all*. Complex matters do not have to be put in context, there is no need to consider the historic weight of imperialism, and we cannot ask how colonialism has a lasting impact that is mapped onto contemporary racist systems and sentiments. We are therefore asked to ignore the fact that, in the 1950s, antisemitism was not a cause but a product of conflict in the mena region; we are also not to be reminded that many Jewish progressives or Arab Jews do not fit within Zionist and (pro-) Israeli frameworks. We are taught to not expect an ethical contract, or at the very least some discursive accountability where ugly normative labels are employed. And it certainly does not matter that a similar definitional option with regards to racism (Islamophobia) is meanwhile denied to other victims of everyday and state racism. In the Global North, these are mostly second-class citizens that orbit outside the moral space reserved for deserving subjects.

There is much to unpack here. What do posters have to do with universalism or antisemitism? This article should be read as a reflection on antisemitism against the backdrop of Israeli state terror and regional conflicts. In *The Arabs and the Holocaust*, Gilbert Achcar develops a strong set of arguments against the notion ‘Arab antisemitism’.⁷ Though this book is rarely referred to at present, I engage with it now to push back against the orientalist representations of a single Arab/Muslim discourse regarding Palestine/Israel. Achcar mentions the (then hard to believe) still unfamiliar development of *ihra*; it would be untrue to claim that the major backlash that followed a decade later was acknowledged then for what it would become. This introspection is helpful because it provides historical understanding of important intellectual interventions between the 1970s and 1990s that pushed back against the broader regression in the analysis of Israel and regional politics. A decline of educational systems and the decline in press freedom signal a dynamic that started in the 1970s when

the left underwent repeated defeats.⁸ The political vacuum was compounded by a noticeable strengthening of reactionary forces,

7 Through a consideration of the main ideological currents (liberals, pan-Islamists, nationalists, communists), Achcar 2010 adds crucial context concerning the local, regional and global power relations that informed their political landscape, including how Arab nationalism emerged a decade later as a popular alternative to this political vacuum. This constitutes the background to the period when Israel invaded Lebanon in one of the bloodiest wars in recent memory.

8 Gilbert Achcar references Mahmoud Darwish, Edward Said, Elias Khoury, Azmi Bishara, Adonis, Samir Kasir, Joseph Samaha, Philip Matar, and Joseph Massad. That I have not come across any female intellectuals is surely a sign of the times, namely that during the 1970s and even until the early 2000s, public political discourse was completely dominated by men.

often backed by former colonial powers and, since the 1979 Iranian revolution, also very prominently by the USA. The fact that progressives challenged reactionary tendencies within Arab political discourse (e.g. those entertaining Holocaust denial) confirms that societies are not static but liable to ideological changes which themselves move along a political pendulum that always fluctuates in response to intellectual formations, militarisation, and social inequalities. Even when their parameters were declared irrelevant during the 1980s and '90s era of postmodernism and *end of history* paradigms, leftist intellectuals tirelessly debated and analysed the political-economic role of imperialism and capitalism. Achcar identifies two important historic and current dynamics that shifted towards Holocaust topics, and how social relations produce political subjectivities. Before I return to the relation between political posters and the reverberations of progressive approaches vis-à-vis antisemitism, it is important to pause and spell out the circumstances, for this is a fundamental part of the context that is still in play today.

Firstly, political regression saw the destruction of institutional workers' and students' movements and their social infrastructures in the wake of postcolonial dictatorships (especially in combination with anti-left crackdowns) and this undermined emancipatory, progressive universal values in the service of humanistic advances. When Palestinian revolutionary forces had grown into a progressive political force over the course of those years, and when progressive Nasserism took a beating, a reactionary wave came along that saw the Fedayeen ousted from Jordan and the plo expelled from Lebanon. This mattered, because Palestinian politics was becoming a transgressive intellectual reference point for the entire Arab-speaking region of West Asia and North Africa. In other words, the political devastation of 1967 and 1982 brought about a general intellectual retreat. Due precisely to its disproportional importance as a

progressive bastion being weakened considerably, the intellectual decline radiated far beyond. The *second* dynamic that marks the Holocaust debate goes back further: the 1948 Nakba and a violent colonial occupation catalysed crucial political-cultural transformations that should not be underestimated. The creation of the State of Israel dealt a heavy blow to the main ideological currents. While certain Islamists had allied with imperial forces, (most) communist parties followed the political zigzags of Stalin. The fact that cp members hardly engaged with the matter of Zionism helps explain the gap in archival material from this period. The traumatic events led to a massive exodus that gave rise to the longest-lasting and largest refugee population to date. But the Nakba is either denied or ridiculed in Israel and largely excluded from most Euro-American curricula. Especially because it is unresolved, it is not a matter of the *past*. Like an open wound that does not heal, this liminality provides an important explanation of the political refusal to use the term 'Israel', for instance. Put differently, the denial of the Nakba provokes another denial. It is important to appreciate that for those in forced exile or refugee camps and still hoping to return, this Israel also implies acceptance of the loss of *their* (street, house, estate, farm) Palestine.

Taken together, the double standards regarding the right to self-determination and violent repression of progressive movements allowed the loss of an important progressive archive that engendered far more sceptical horizons.⁹ Taking this toward a lopsided logic: if recognising the Holocaust means accepting a settler-colonial racist state, then the Holocaust will inevitably be questioned. More importantly, this is part and parcel of the way Arab and Jewish left subjectivities have been relatively easy to deform and flatten. Going back and forth between the present and the early/mid-70s era of these posters, we can detect or are confronted with their choices, duties and intentions. To be clear, this article is not invested in cultural analysis or philosophical understandings of aesthetics, yet via the posters I will branch out to these broader questions. We revisited these posters collectively – each bringing up different historiographic aspects, while taking on serious culture or art in terms of understanding, interpreting and feeling the material artefacts that carry a profoundly emotional resonance which confounds the erasure of essential parts of our collective histories.

A focus on Palestinian solidarity at major events like Documenta fifteen also shows that indignation is racially codified. Riots, anger, and rage are designated as an inferior feature, in particular when they concern the wrong kinds of victims. This is not only a Palestinian issue. Every historical moment or political context has a deserving and non-deserving class. When mass protests and expressions of anger erupted in the USA in the 1950s and

'60s, they were reduced to 'race riots' on the part of a 'mindless mob'. Martin Luther King Jr. in 1967 retorted that riots are 'the language of the unheard'.¹⁰ This is important

9 The communist parties were already disgraced when Soviet forces violently occupied Afghanistan. The subsequent collapse of the USSR meant a double degradation of a Left alternative, one that proved beneficial for the crushing of the left in general and allowed a

leftist legacy to be partly erased. This counter-revolution dynamic permitted a deliberate reframing of anti-colonial Palestinian solidarity as antisemitic.

10 From his 1967 'The Other America' speech at Stanford University, explaining the cause of the Harlem (New York) and the Watts (California) riots. To him quote in full: 'It is not enough for me to stand before you tonight and condemn riots. It would be morally irresponsible for me to do that without, at the same time, condemning the contingent, intolerable conditions that exist in our society. These conditions are the things that cause individuals to feel that they have no other alternative than to engage in violent rebellions

because it reminds us that even if they are silenced and removed from view, those at the receiving end of the silencing know otherwise. Ordinary people across the world are intuitively on the side of the oppressed because they see right through the dehumanisation processes that they themselves also experience. This is why community (public) opinion stands opposed to its official counterpart when it comes to state alliances with Israel, and why these inversions can be mapped onto the schism between the position of most of the Global South and that of the Global North. That the ordinary people instinctively know better makes this manoeuvring even more necessary. In the words of Fanon: 'to wreck the colonial world is henceforward a mental picture of action which is very clear, very easy to understand and which may be assumed by each one of the individuals which constitute the colonized people.'¹¹

To follow Martin Luther King, Jr. here, what has the state failed *to hear*, what is the reality which the Lumbung community at Documenta fifteen conveyed that fell on deaf ears? Because the conditions in Palestine are enraging according to any objective or subjective measure, the Palestinian cause is evidently dehumanised. By removing a moral threshold through the antisemitism index, legitimate rage can be reduced to *violence*, and deemed irrational and uncivilised. This was made painfully clear in the *Letter from the Lumbung community* written in response to the report of the 'scientific advisory panel' of Documenta fifteen:

The report equates critique of the current violent actions of the Israeli State with hatred. ... We reject it categorically. We refuse the intentional political manoeuvre that aims at separating struggles and

dividing them from each other – dividing us from each other. We stand together, unconditionally and without hesitation.

to get attention. And I must say tonight that a riot is the language of the unheard. And what is it America has failed to hear? It has failed to hear that the plight of the negro poor has worsened over the last twelve or fifteen years. It has failed to hear that the promises of freedom and justice have not been met. And it has failed to hear that large segments of white society are more concerned about tranquillity and the status quo than about justice and humanity.’

- 11 As Fanon argued in the chapter ‘Concerning Violence’ in *The Wretched of the Earth*: ‘The violence which has ruled over the ordering of the colonial world, which has ceaselessly drummed the rhythm for the destruction of native social forms and broken up without reserve the systems of reference of the economy, the customs of dress and external life, that same violence will be claimed and taken over by the native at the moment when, deciding to embody history in his own person, he surges into the forbidden quarters.’ Fanon 1961.

Today’s manifestations of racism are not different from what Martin Luther King Jr. noted concerning riots in the USA or Fanon regarding the rage of the colonised. Consider Fanon reflecting on his *Concerning Violence*: ‘This book should have been written three years ago.... But these truths were a fire in me then. Now I can tell them without being burned.’ Wallerstein discussed this important side-note: ‘[H]e was an angry man and one who used angry language, but it was in fact a very controlled anger. [...] the very opposite of spontaneous and unreflecting anger.’ Through these historic threads we recognise a pattern of deflection. Bigotry and Islamophobia make it easier to project onto Muslims/Islam grave accusations (vengeance, enemies of freedom, paths to violence, rejection of modernity), to then render them unworthy of sympathy.¹² I was drawn to a set of posters that displayed the same kind of visual indices (Swastika, Star of David, Kalashnikov, the blue and white of the Israeli flag) as the attacks on the Lumbung community and the Reprint exhibition at Documenta fifteen was raging in the background. According to the racialised framework I have just outlined, this can only mean the *condoning* of Nazism, proof that Arabs, Muslims, or their leftist supporters, are Holocaust deniers, their historical timeframe suddenly having brought to light their relevance. And I engage with this tough conundrum through the poster collections, though without uncritical valorisation.

To unfold this very compressed objective, I continue to build on Achcar’s 2010 work *The Arabs and the Holocaust* in Section 1, for, albeit ignored in debates about the *New Anti-Semitism*, it provides the necessary grounding.¹³ Undoing dehumanisation is a crucial part of the undoing of the continuous violence that enables it. Concealing the violence and

injustice of settler colonialism also maintains the ideological paradigms and cultural frames underlying it. To understand this dynamic, we need also to recognise the construction of a Palestine-radical left-Muslim as the all-encompassing subject of what the liberal mainstream supposedly is not. This requires consideration of the influence of structural racism and Islamophobia (Section 2). It shows that the ‘anti-antisemitism’ signifier is an ideological construction that has little or nothing to contribute to the struggle against antisemitism. Anti-Jewish racism and Islamophobia are two sides of the same racist coin. Conversely, the

12 This context is crucial in any reading of Fanon, but his approach has been framed as *revenge* – short of a call for violence. See for an earlier contribution about this wider philosophical argument Wallerstein 1970, p. 223.

13 Through an examination of English, French and Arabic archives of Arab social movements and their main political journals, and examining religious sources he frames the region’s politics and religious positions.

revolutionary posters are not only very attractive, they convey a didactic message that strikes an important balance between pedagogy and aesthetics. We can appreciate them as both material and vernacular objects. Their style, colours, and slogans reflect the radical 1960s; some of the posters show how struggles evolve, develop, and elapse. Since the emergence of a New Arab Left and revolutionary guerrilla movements is a crucial transformation – the negation of the right-wing clichés of reactionary movements or intolerant individuals that are always emphasised in discussions concerning people from the region – I attempt to unwrap their temporal situatedness (Section 3 and 4). Rekindling this legacy is an antidote to historical amnesia and helps to push against the dominant frame of antisemitism. As we struggle to make sense of our very strange conjuncture, we need to come to terms with the erasure of a left epistemology that had emerged from the region in the 1970s. Serfaty offered an important class analysis of Jews and a perspective regarding local Judaism that are invisible in the debates surrounding antisemitism. It seems to me that the shifting notion of antisemitism involves expunging difference – that erasing the radical history of Arab and Jewish progressives is an important (missing) piece of the puzzle. Figures such as Serfaty would have helped make sense of the present political contestations. Reversing this erasure will help us understand that progressive Jewish interjections concerning liberation politics in general, and Palestine in particular, are belittled precisely because they puncture the hegemonic framework. The flattening of complex histories and (Arab, Left, Jewish) subjectivities through such an erasure is a practical precondition for the defence of Zionism. Antisemitism as a political instrument is an overshadowing force, *Historical Materialism* 32.2 (2024) 223–263

the moralistic paradigms it retains are so vociferous they muzzle all context and ambiguity (Section 5).

1 Arabs and the Holocaust

The current political contestation is often marked by a sense of hyper-urgency and sometimes shock-effect, and despite the click-bait motives underlying for-profit platforms, there is also an ideological benefit to ignoring history by explaining conflicts as pressures peculiar to the present time. The Arab–Israeli conflict is the product of more than a century of history-making. The region’s response to Israel has to be understood as one linked to military violence and land appropriation. But also that the protagonist is a state that always and primarily defines itself as a *Jewish* state, and that this in turn discursively shapes the counter-response. Achar contextualises religious/political positions about Jews and Judaism within a much more important history, that of European antisemitic racism which has a centuries-old, fantasy-based hatred of the Jews, and shows that this is different from the relatively more recent hatred concerning Israel felt among Arabs.¹⁴ The book at once exposes anti-Arab racism and develops strong arguments against the notion of a pervasive ‘Arab antisemitism’. He also untangles progressive Arab interventions and liberation politics from the reactionary forces that did in fact entertain antisemitic tropes.¹⁵ He shows how leftist politics shaped movements across key historical moments, from the opportunities they seized to the limitations they faced.¹⁶ He insists that what is referred to as the ‘new’ antisemitism discourse is not a timeless continuation of anti-Jewish opinions accredited to Islam, but – albeit fuelled by the Arab–Israeli conflict – is part of a deeply ingrained anti-Jewish tradition imported from Europe via Christian antisemitism.¹⁷ He quotes the pro-Israeli scholar Harkabi: *For Arabs and Muslims antisemitism is not a cause but a result*;¹⁸ and orientalist Bernard Lewis: ‘For [European] Christian anti-Semites the Palestinian problem is a pretext and outlet of their hatred’.¹⁹

Judaism and Islam share many similarities through the more than seven centuries of Islamo-Judaic civilisation stretching from West Africa and Southern (Iberian) Europe to West and East Asia. Conversely, Judaism has been artificially coopted into Christianity and employed as a paradigm by states that a mere seven decades ago hosted the systemic industrial destruction of their Jewish populations. This is not to deny anti-Jewish stereotypes or racism, past or present (and he names and shames Arab Holocaust deniers), but to contextualise why sentiments in the region that hardly existed as a concept before wwii stem from colonial projects.

Nonetheless, even if not dominant, we have to account for how (ethnic, religious, cultural) minorities are subjectified, racialised, and politicised in any given social relation. Yet, strangely, despite the insignificant role of Nazi politics among Arabs, thousands of pages have been written about Arab collaboration with Nazism. For instance, the entry on al-Hussaini – the Grand Mufti of Jerusalem from 1921 to 1937 – in the *Encyclopedia of the Holocaust* is much longer than that for Goebbels, Himmler or Eichmann. If we pause for a moment to process this, it is actually quite shocking, for the cruel reality is that al-Hussaini’s propaganda – however irresponsible – had no real impact before, during or after the Nazis were in

14 Achcar 2010, p. 243.

15 The most important examples he engages with are: Harkabi, Bernard Lewis and Huntington.

16 I discuss *The Arabs and the Holocaust: The Arab–Israeli War of Narratives* by Gilbert Achcar in more detail in a review article: Aouragh 2010. 17 Achcar 2010, p. 261.

18 Referenced in Achcar as: Harkabi 1976, p. 298.

19 Achcar 2010, p. 242.

power. Achcar distinguishes between opportunists, ideological apologists, and those acting deliberately. Achcar engages the important study by Philip Mattar who tackled the recurring claim that Amin al-Hussaini wholeheartedly identified with the Nazis. Al-Hussaini is sometimes described as a proponent or supporter of the mass murder of Jews. And even if there was ‘fascination from a distance’, al-Hussaini’s tactics were the exact same (but in reverse)²⁰ as those of Churchill who said: *I would ally with the devil himself against Hitler*. The point is that these are not ‘Arab’ or ‘Muslim’ positions, but *reactionary* views or conservative coalitions.

This is strikingly clear from the Palestinian poster collection too, as they show a much more complex picture and thereby help rescue a part of history from erasure. It is essential to pause, look back and reclaim history when the distortion is so blatant. The act of reclaiming history teaches us about a collective and progressive heritage that weaved valid criticism of Israel and Zionism with progressive anti-racism from the 1960s to the 1970s. The Tokyo and Brussels collections survived from one of the richest intellectual episodes of our regions; the posters are cutting-edge in terms of the progressive politics that still radiates through them. The openness was created both by the very fresh experience of anti-colonial resistance, and inspiration by ongoing liberation struggles (Palestine, Vietnam, Cuba, Angola, Guinea-Bissau and Mozambique). The emerging Left movements – with their critical position within trade-union and student movements – would put them in stark opposition to many of the conservative

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(postcolonial) states. Many transgressors – feminists, trade unionists, students, and artists – questioned the social order and debated the strategies and tactics for a truly emancipatory project, including questions about identity and minority communities. Those same intellectuals also discussed the difference between Judaism, Zionism, and Israel, and while these historic episodes should not be romanticised, the impacts of those debates were far more transgressive precisely because they were part of actual political mobilisations and thinking about both the *means* and *ends* of revolutions. This is why the *subjective* flattening and the purging of progressive histories from public memory are crucial with regards to contemporary recollections of earlier eras. The waning of transgressive paradigms and fading of revolutionary horizons were a crucial precursor to the shift in the 1990s, during which the relation of political forces and ideological dynamics worsened, with the restructuring dubbed the ‘new world order’; the acceleration of the second Intifada was the consequence of this contradictory period imbued with protest. And this temporal site of analysis also explains how the Holocaust

20 The British treated the Arabs in the most brutal colonial manner, most notably through the Balfour Declaration and the Peel Commission.

discourse transformed in the 1990s into a stable political ecology. A new imperial context (First Gulf War, September 11, Second Gulf War) evolved into the disparaging of Muslims as the *real*, and the *only true* perpetrators of antisemitism in the Global North. But this ‘enemy within’ does more and reminds us why it is unsurprising that the controversy of Documenta fifteen should happen in Germany: for it helped mask European antisemitism.

Again, this is why it is important that Documenta fifteen is held in Germany where the stakes seem so much higher. According to legal and Islamophobia scholars Anna-Esther Younes and Nahed Samour, the question of *who* is considered a threat to society is extremely racialised in Germany, and triggers exceptional legal measures reserved for those considered ‘potentially’ dangerous.²¹ In Europe, the issue of antisemitism is unswervingly linked to Israel via the history of WWII, but it has actually grown in particularly close company with Islamophobia. Lean shows in *The Islamophobia Industry* the many overlapping characteristics across campaigns, blogs, and pressure groups between Islamophobia, right-wing Zionism and evangelical Christians, the latter ardent supporters of Israel and not only for Old Testament/Biblical reasons.²² This double-layered racism – cultural dehumanisation and historical erasure – merged with counterterrorism at the centre of this argument.

2 Anti-antisemitism: Sacramental Stage for Islamophobia

The merging of Israeli colonial objectives with the ‘War on Terror’ meant that the Palestinian liberation struggle was reduced to a matter of anti-terrorism. Indeed, ‘counter-insurgency’ became code for the horrific practices behind house demolitions, detention of *all* men of a certain age, and the targeting of civilian spaces and populations.²³ This context encouraged a deepening of anti-Arab sentiments that itself could feed off anti-Muslim racism. Because extreme militarism is always also followed by vociferous anti-war protests, the construction of a totemic *pro-Palestine-Left-Muslim* (read: everything the liberal mainstream is not) becomes even more instrumental. The ‘War on Terror’ allowed Israel to push forward to efface all possible international policy frameworks as they applied to the Second Intifada. Equating Palestine with terrorism eases the rationalisation of Israeli colonial occupation. From this it follows that the life of a Palestinian or Muslim should not be represented as morally equivalent, since that of a ‘militant’ appears less valuable – just the wrong

21 Samour 2020 and Younes 2024.

22 Lean 2017, p. 11.

23 Khalili 2010.

kinds of victim, who deserve neither factual nor moral honesty. And, when they prove dispensable, the bombing of cities, the assassination of journalists, detaining children, entertaining fascists, inviting far-right leaders, and tolerating Holocaust deniers cease to be red lines. ²⁴

Lean notes via Khaled Hroub that Hamas’ views of Jews and Zionism have changed much since its 1988 Charter; viz. adopting more explicit inclusion of the Holocaust narrative, and supporting the proposition to include the history of the Holocaust in school curricula.²⁵ Typically, none of this is mentioned by the Western media. Besides a denial of a colonial context, the reason for this absence relates to the familiar pattern of projecting the *other* as a party that is against change. When the enemy is *static* it allows for the continuation of racist articulations of the (uncivil) ‘other’. This biased dynamic produces reactionary societal norms such as are found in the demand that ethnic and religious minority communities condemn what society at large fears; in fact, this has become the key ritual that governs national security. This post- 9/11 realpolitik is mapped onto preexisting systemic racism and is continuous with, for instance, the treatment of young Black men under Stop-and-Search police tactics. Framing Muslims as a security liability has produced a tacit acceptance across society: that the state must keep *us* (read: White public) safe from harm by policing *them*, prospective terrorists (read: Muslims). These ideas

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are determined along moral measures that also delineate shared (communal) culpability. This is why *calls to condemn haunt us; follow us; threaten to overwhelm us; silence us*, as Qureshi put it.²⁶ As part of the broader *hostile environment*, suspicion of (what are assumed to be) Arabs and Muslims has deepened. The policing of especially Black and Brown subjects took a disturbing form with the ‘duty to report’ and has engendered a culture of ‘snitching’ and bullying.

As the authors of the letter from the Lumbung Community collective stated, ‘This [newly crossed] line marks a racist drift in a pernicious structure of censorship. [...] For months we have continuously faced smearing attacks,

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- 24 Cf. Shanes 2019. There is no lack of examples – see: <<https://foreignpolicy.com/2019/02/24/why-benjamin-netanyahu-loves-the-european-far-right-orban-kaczynski-pis-fidesz-vicegrad-likud-antisemitism-hungary-poland-illiberalism>>; <<https://www.timesofisrael.com/senior-hungarian-official-netanyahu-and-orban-belong-to-same-political-family>>; <<https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/2018-07-18/ty-article/.premium/the-netanyahu-orban-bromance-that-is-shaking-up-europe-and-d-c/0000017f-db69-db5a-a57f-db6b405b0000>>; <<https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2018/07/20/netanyahu-and-orban-meet-in-summit-of-illiberal-nationalists/>>; <<https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2019/04/22/the-trump-netanyahu-alliance>>.
- 25 Lean 2017. The leader of Hamas, Sheikh Jamal Mansour, was in support of the Palestinian Call on the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of the Nakba.
- 26 Qureshi (ed.) 2020.

humiliations, vandalism, and threats in major media outlets, as well as in the streets and in our spaces. [...] What is even scarier is the normalized dismissal of these actions.’²⁷ The racism feeding such debates fully legitimates the refusal to assume responsibility for acts by individuals and apologies on command. Moreover, it is a set-up because *we cannot speak without first verifying our humanity*.²⁸ But if it is already someone coded as a terrorist, radical, antisemite, etc. what remains of this humanity? In the UK, whence I partly write this, the focus on deradicalisation and surveillance transpired clearest with the government’s Prevent programme (in 2016), and this opened the door to the ihra in 2020, and together these permitted a climate in which we saw the political co-optation of the National Union of Students (nus) in the UK via the Tuck Report that came out in 2023.²⁹ Such policies were (forcefully) imposed upon institutions of higher education as an ideological tool.³⁰ This worked by threatening the withdrawal of funding to universities, as legislated by Tory education secretary Gavin Williamson under Boris Johnson and, unfortunately, docilely acquiesced to by many vcs. The same Islamophobic stigma that

operates here also encourages what Swastikas are decoded as *condoning*, as I show below. But what if instead it is a *condemnation* of the violence of settler colonialism? What if the Star of David on the posters is intended to reference a state rather than a religious community? These possibilities are precluded from the outset, as we will see later.

Is this really all about fighting racism and battling antisemitism anyway? This supposed calling-out of ‘anti-antisemitism’ depends on a particular definition as the crux of what came to be a new ‘truth’ about the fight against antisemitism. This imaginary perception does not conform to reality and is about Israel rather than the Jewish people. That is why, deep down, the discourse demonstrates a kind of apathy. Lapidot demonstrates³¹ that it focuses on a *certain* perception of Jews, and, even in its official focus on hatred toward Jews, it

27 The collective response was titled ‘We are angry, we are sad, we are tired, we are united’. For the statement in full, see Lumbung Community Collective 2022. 28 Qureshi (ed.) 2020, p. 3.

29 On the Tuck report see bricup 2023 and brismes’ response: brismes 2023. The *Prevent duty* is a government requirement imposed on all education providers ‘to have due regard to the need to prevent people from being drawn into terrorism’ and became heavily criticised for targeting Muslim students of colour in particular; see also the nus’s previous response, ‘Prevent Prevent’: nus Connect n.d. For brilliant reflections on Prevent, see Mir 2020 and Ali 2020. On ihra and jda, see Lena Salaymeh’s seminal deconstruction, Salaymeh (forthcoming 2024), as well as Gould 2020.

30 Cf. Mir 2020, Ali 2020, Salaymeh forthcoming 2024, Gould 2020.

31 Lapidot 2020, p. 7.

does not stand in any real relation to actual Jews.³² His extensive engagement with the scholarship on antisemitism clarifies the division between antisemitism and Islamophobia – between Arab and Jew – and what has generated the notion ‘anti-antisemitism’. Moreover:

[S]omething inessential, beyond love and hate, beyond anti- and philo-. The anti-anti- is in this sense, beyond binary logics, where negation of negation means affirmation, a double negation that means stronger negation, anti-anti- that is more negative – not to say more exterminatory – than anti-.³³

So, there is a clear disconnection ‘between the history of anti-Semitism and the current struggle against it’³⁴ and this make sense when the objective becomes clear, namely: ‘to uphold the division between Jew and Arab, between Jew and Muslim is to reproduce the origins of racism and at

once'.³⁵ Citing Judaken, Lapidot here argues that anti-antisemitism reverses the 'dictums of antisemitism without problematizing the axiology and doxology that underpin antisemitism'.³⁶

Yet, the fact that a lot of 'anti-antisemitism' critique mimics what it seeks to resist is not fortuitous, since whitewashing of the past clearly serves to close off any critical debate.³⁷ As Qureshi testifies, our efforts to place political events within a wider historic context, as ways to understand what could provoke the actions of someone like 'Jihadi John' (Mohammed Emwazi, a British Muslim who joined isis in Syria in 2014) are not only legitimate but also quite necessary. The irrationality of racism is such that contextualisation of events is construed as agreement. However bizarre this may be, it is important not to regard it haphazardly because these framings are extremely functional. They engender policies that have the power to invalidate organisations and indict individuals, as seen in the case of the organisation CAGE International (of which Qureshi

32 Ibid. I would like to thank Lena Salaymeh for recommending this very helpful piece of scholarship to me.

33 Lapidot 2020, p. 17. 34 Lapidot 2020, p. 8.

35 Lapidot 2020, p. 19.

36 Lapidot 2020, p. 20.

37 Interestingly, in seeking to deconstruct the rise of 'New Anti-Semitism' and the basic categories that underlie it, Lapidot disagrees with the alternative formulation 'antisemitism' (such as was promulgated by Hannah Arendt) over 'anti-Semitism' for the reason that antisemites do not oppose any 'Semitism', which constructs a Jewish enemy but has nothing to do with any opposition to 'Semitic' ethnic origins or language communities (Lapidot 2020, p. 6).

was a part), as well as with the scandals over Documenta fifteen. That this ideology serves especially to silence those who are standing in solidarity with Palestine is not irrelevant. *Organising the politics of silencing* is a simple way to describe the outcomes of policies like Prevent and ihra. Overextending the category of antisemitism to include anti-Zionism complements official Israeli state strategy. The ideological workings take particular root with a concept like 'new antisemitism'. It obfuscates empirical evidence as part of a longstanding *coloniality trinity*.³⁸ Put differently, caricaturing opposition to colonialism as 'new antisemitism' is not *essentially* colonial but *becomes* colonial when it is universalised and forced upon colonised peoples. It is crucial to understand Israel as a settler-colonial state that is in turn a part of an imperial power relation (via Europe and North America as key allies), such as when Salaymeh asserts³⁹ that *coloniality asserts both its applicability and its superiority over colonised*

epistemologies and continues to demonstrate that this universalising mechanism emerges where the distinctions between antisemitism (prejudice or discrimination against Jews), anti-Zionism (opposition to the ideology of Zionism), and criticism of Israel are deliberately muddled. To understand the depth of its precept she focuses not on the more self-evident failings of the ihra definition, but on the Jerusalem Declaration on Antisemitism (jda) which arose as an *alternative* definition that included those with anti-Zionist views. But, despite its oppositional stance with respect to ihra, the effort failed because jda in essence *shares a similar colonial political-theology*, taking the secular ideology underlining this approach further: it essentially generates both Judeophobia and Islamophobia.⁴⁰ This concept of Judeophobia may go beyond historical and cultural specificity, and relate to values that only Jews should be in a position to define. However, the notion of ‘Judeophobia’ as something natural or static is false, because it relates to local framings, experience and histories; it is crucial that knowledge and intention should contribute to situating Judeophobia.

38 Salaymeh forthcoming 2024. For Salaymeh this logic converts traditions into religions, law into positive law, and states (as forms of governance) into modern nation-states, and she defines colonial political theology as an epistemology that relies on dualisms such as ‘hate speech’ and ‘free speech’, as well as the notions of ‘New Anti-Semitism’ and ‘Abrahamic religions’.

39 Salaymeh forthcoming 2024, p. 4.

40 Important here is her disagreement with other critiques of jda that pointed to how Palestinians were not included in determining its definition. For Salaymeh, Palestinians *as such* are not experts on either antisemitism or anti-Zionism, but, more importantly, jda in fact itself portrays Jews as essentially Zionists through a false pairing of antisemitism and anti-Zionism. jda ignores the antisemitism (including philosemitism) of Zionists or supporters of Israel because this form of antisemitism serves Zionist colonisation.

Likewise, if it is the case that Jews should not be asked to criticise an Israel that justifies these claims, then they should also not be asked to support Israel, and, if it follows from this that it is wrong to regard Zionism as a Jewish conspiracy, then it equally follows that it is wrong to allege that anti-Zionism is an antisemitic conspiracy. This argument around *authorship* and *representation* is familiar in the UK with the Macpherson principle as a classifier of oppression. Originally arising in relation to the trial of the racist murderers of Stephen Lawrence, and challenged from the progressive class-analysis axiom that not all members of a group share the same approach or principles, it has nevertheless been exploited in the debate about (who gets to define) antisemitism.⁴¹ What one individual identity-group considers prejudicial may be itself prejudicial against

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another group, for, as Salaymeh argues, there are dissenting opinions within the same community such as when *members of identity groups cannot create a consensus on what that group considers offensive*. The circumstances surrounding the classification of bds as *antisemitic* clearly demonstrate this. This is not only an example of racist reductionism directed towards (pro-) Palestinians, but also one directed against anti-Zionist Jews. In this paradigm, the settler-colonial occupation of Palestine can be normalised, and, instead of being identified as an urgent problem is relegated to the mundane.⁴² Social fears and the desire for security are heightened to empower the broader dynamics of colonial states, and normalise the violent oppression of colonised peoples. The broadly shared fear of new varieties of antisemitism or censorship of anti-Zionism must be situated within wider ‘national security’ fears. While, in Global North states such fears worsen, this mainly benefits ruling elites and the military-industrial complex, among others, through increasing justification for security measures.⁴³ Salaymeh adds that this is a consequence of the combined effect of exaggerated fear in the Global North and normalised colonial violence in the Global South. The link between 9/11 and antisemitism discourses is an important part of these objective conditions. The War on Terror and the military repression of the Palestinian Intifadas must be reassessed through earlier experiences because the shutdown resonates with the fear during the decolonisation eras of the 1960s and ’70s. And what is interesting is that the recent rise in protests (especially after the 2011 Arab uprisings) meant a new generation of activists rediscovering those earlier revolts.

41 The Macpherson principle concerned the duty of authorities to believe and act on victims’ perceptions and to investigate racist attacks; latterly, this has been interpreted as the alleged victim having an exclusive prerogative over determining whether something is racially discriminatory or not.

42 Salaymeh forthcoming 2024, p. 11.

43 Salaymeh forthcoming 2024, p. 10.

3 Anticolonial Constellations

The history of the radical left of that earlier era corresponds to leaps in progressive intellectual traditions – and this had social implications, as argued above. One of the most influential ideological strands in the region’s politics has been (secular) Arab nationalism. This had important consequences for the political theories that structure the political strategies. Nasserists mostly rejected the explanation that an international Zionist movement controlled the US; Israel was considered the ‘imperialist base in the heart of our Arab homeland’. This anti-imperialism was appealing and

gained popularity, and that is why the ‘Nasser = Hitler’ dictum began to be deployed. It should not come as a surprise that in Western hegemonic historiography (if at all) Nasser is most likely to be mentioned slanderously with numerous cases taken out of context. Nasser had publicly repudiated the ‘throwing Jews into the sea’ mantra and consistently identified imperialism as the key enemy. One such case is the major outcry when Nasser authorised the death sentences against two Egyptian Jews in 1955. Achcar puts the conviction in the context of a large-scale terrorist operation prepared by Israel that included spies.⁴⁴ The critique of capital punishment is legitimate, but it must be remembered that Egyptian Muslims convicted of espionage were also executed, oppositional communists would eventually suffer the same fate, and the judicial killing of the Rosenbergs, two American Jews, for communist conspiracy in the United States, saw a different uproar. The different frames of reference employ ethical baselines that are lopsided and insincere.

Placing anti-colonial demands front and centre, and prioritising material rights above cultural claims, meant taking aim at Arab lackeys. In the words of Nasser, ‘... Arab leaders say Israel and the Jews. They are afraid to say England’. This independent spirit emerged against the backdrop of a progressive Arab intellectual mindset in the 1970s. Pointing out the difference between the political programmes of the Right and of Left is crucial when tackling essentialism. Palestinian intellectuals developed some of the most radical analyses of antisemitism, taking pains to differentiate between Jews and Zionists and eschewing false hope. There were also disagreements, but these were discussed *openly* in magazines and during public events. Progressive Arabs would confound the idea that it is ‘impossible to see Jews as victims while you are victimised by them’. In a discussion of Palestinian poet Mahmoud Darwish’s statement (cf.

44 Achcar 2010, p. 247.

his epigraph above), including his emphasising that ‘Nazism is the enemy of all the worlds’ peoples’, Achcar discusses the kind of left-universalism horizon I formulated via Sekyi-Otu at the beginning of this article. Its strategic vision was for a democratic, secular state for all its inhabitants. The debates included Zionism and the future place of Israelis in a decolonised Palestine. Meanwhile, deep frustration with the international silence nurtured by the political Right and conservative forces diverted widespread resentment about the imperial carve-up *away* from (materialism) imperialism and *towards* (culturalism) Jews. Progressive thinkers were a bigger threat to the Zionists (and, later, Israel and Israel’s allies) than any reactionary conspiracy theory. Israel has conducted a

campaign of liquidation against progressive political cadres and of actively helping to crush left-wing movements; this was backed by Western states who all along supported right-wing dictators subservient to them, and here their glad-handing of dictators who entertain anti-Jewish conspiracy theories is telling.

That this era – one could even argue, the most progressive to date – is hidden, is, of course, unsurprising. Where comprehending the globally connected era we live in used to make sense in reference to progressive justice, it became increasingly filtered through cynical negativity rather than transgressive rebellion. The assassination policies prevalent globally in the 1960s and '70s meant the near-complete decimation of the revolutionary left (I refer here to Black radicals in USA, and left political parties and trade unions in South America, West Asia, and North Africa), and that this has resulted in historical amnesia is surely unsurprising. The balance of forces in which the left operated was extremely adverse: eventually the progressive left was unable to make advances because of the counter-revolutionary violence. Because progressive thinkers proved far more threatening than reactionary conspiracy theorists (note, for example, the assassinations of pflp intellectuals Abu Iyad and Ghassan Kanafani) we should, at least in part, consider the rejection of antisemitism not in terms of *principles* but as a *modality* through which antisemitism is given meaning. Relating this to the posters with Jewish symbols helps convey the political contradictions and uneven awareness (sometimes reflecting a certain balance of forces and political order) they inhabit. The statements and representations on these posters have meanwhile changed too – for better or for worse. What do both sides of the paradox tell us about the current political state of affairs? In some, an anti-Zionist gesture, while, in others, it conflates Jews in general with Israeli murderers. The aesthetic symbols in the circulation of political culture that marked these radical ideas are important for how they traverse movements and reverberate from the specific to inspire the general.

4 Re-discovering Progressive Arab Critique

I kept returning to some of the configurations on the posters. The reason I tie this artwork to debates about Zionism and antisemitism raised by Arab radicals in the 1960s and '70s is that these inspiring images are also deliberately erased as part of the occlusion in mainstream historicising. My reflections on the Palestinian revolutionary posters (and the sentiments they concurrently reveal and conceal) have changed, considering the present-day, highly problematic conflation of antisemitism and anti-Zionism. As did the endless assaults on Palestine solidarity that occurred around the same time. I selected from the poster archives a few pieces that

reflect the contradictions. The visuals shared here mediate the political contradictions of symbols and their interpretations. On poster 1 we can see a swastika, with the word ‘Fascism’ superimposed on a bleeding background and a fedayeen profile (holding a Kalashnikov and wearing a keffiyeh) composed on the bottom-right space. In the circular area of the enlarged S just above the swastika is a Star of David. Poster 2 depicts three Star of David figures – each with an image corresponding to the words Expansion, Oppression, and Occupation. And on poster 3, *Jews not Zionists* hovers over a picture of two Jews in orthodox attire, walking in what seems like East Jerusalem; above it the framed slogan ‘Zionism is Racism’. The texts are in English, Arabic and Hebrew. While poster 3 conveys a progressive pedagogical meaning – the necessity of distinguishing between Jews and Zionists –, poster 1 and 2 seem to conflate a religious symbol with a political ideology. How to reconcile this apparent paradox?

But, if we look again, the combination of the colour blue and the lines suggests that it is a reference to a flag, to the flag of Israel. This suggests a different message, namely an *accusation*: pointing to a violent settler-colonial state (note here the dripping blood). All three posters symbolise colonialism and



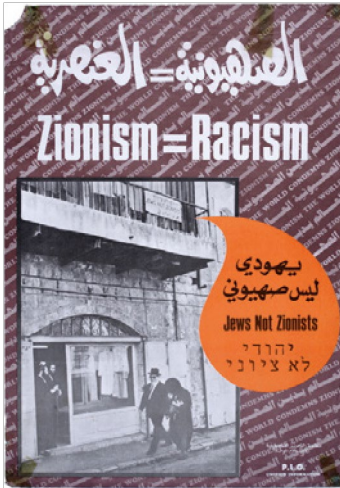
poster 1
Fascism (swastika under the Star of David)



poster 2
Zionism = Racism

poster 3

Jews Not Zionists



and *also* the adaptation to a dominant (a state that claims to be synonymous with Judaism) grammar. An alternative assessment of these visuals is to acknowledge their value precisely in their ambiguity. These posters are products of their time, with strengths and limitations that are, in turn, specific to their conditions. Like all movements, this is in motion: 2 is placed after 1, and 3 after 2 to envision *uneven* or *enhanced* insights.

An important explanation for the deterioration in principled rejection of antisemitism lies in political failures, which, in turn, led to intellectual defeatism, as discussed above. Edward Said tirelessly pointed out how the popularity of antisemitism was a reflection of ideological regression in the face of the important transformations of the 1990s. Political defeat in the broad sense, but also, in particular, the historical injustice suffered by Palestinians, created a breeding ground for the acceptance of European antisemitism. The warm reception afforded the Frenchman Roger Garaudy and his Holocaust denialism was added cultural significance when he converted to Islam.⁴⁵ Progressive Arab intellectuals explicitly rejected granting Garaudy legitimacy and argued that his pseudo-intellectual critique had done great damage to the Palestinian cause in Europe. This new kind of politics served to exacerbate simplistic interpretations of the Star of David and the ‘Zionism = Nazism’ slogan, as seen on the posters. But note that there are left-wing legacies entailing the *reverse*: rather than seeking to minimise the importance of the Holocaust, Arabs began invoking it as part of their own public diplomacy. These expressions are often misconstrued because underlying them are fascinating reminders of a history of thinking on the part of Arab communists in the 1930s *against* antisemitism. In the equation ‘Zionism = Nazism’, the left was thus calling for an equal aversion to both. The Nazi genocide was not disputed in mainstream Arab discourse. This progressive intellectual stance has been

correctly characterised as a rejection of competition between tragedies. Crucially, though, *competing* is not the same as *comparing*. And, yet, the very attempt to compare has resulted in one of the strongest bones of contention: the putative *incomparability* of the Holocaust.

Almost *all* claims of comparability – be it aesthetic in the case of the swastika or discursive in the use of the term – are now painted as being akin to antisemitism. In this anti-intellectual approach neither intention nor context is considered relevant. To return to Achcar's *Arabs and the Holocaust*, trivialising Nazi references has a long history, from David Ben-Gurion calling Menachem Begin 'another Hitler', to Leibowitz naming IDF soldiers 'Judeo-Nazis', to outspoken Israeli Jews being labelled antisemitic in smear campaigns, etc.; all of this devalues the history of antisemitism. But comparing and relating need not mean that we to flatten out our histories and subjectivities. Indeed, it is

45 Achcar 2010, p. 248.

important to differentiate between the policy to wipe out a population because they were an obstacle to an expansionist settler-colonial project, and industrial mass murder to satisfy a desire born of ethnic hatred for the *Untermensch*; wiping out Jews (as well as Roma, Sinti, and the disabled) for the sake of the fantasy of breeding a pure race. But, sometimes, the layers of different stories overlap. Certain experiential aspects *are* analogous and should not be thought controversial. For the native population, being removed through killing and forced exile, the Nakba was indeed a *genocidal mass extermination*. And that, I believe, is why Darwish continued⁴⁶ the opening quote with:

It is not overly severe to say that the Israeli Zionist behaviour towards the original people of Palestine resembles Nazism.

The Holocaust was a terrible act by human beings against other human beings – to draw a parallel is not *per se* offensive. To say that it is, is both anti-intellectual and seeks to turn historical episodes into metaphysically singular events. And therefore, as the sociologist Zygmunt Bauman argues, precisely when an extraordinary historical event has occurred it must be understood comparatively, thus rejecting this ontology of *incomparability*.⁴⁷

Not unlike the posters' attempts at public diplomacy, Muslim communities in Europe comparing themselves to Jews emerges from both an emotional motive and a tactical source. Yet this explanation is overwhelmingly ignored, as part of a strategy of the dehumanisation of

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Muslims. As Salaymeh maintains, contemporary European states do not recognise anti-Muslim rhetoric as falling under the category of hate speech *because they are not forms of discursive violence directed against Global North states or their colonialism*.⁴⁸

In a sense, these posters are like artefacts that provide small slices of a complex history. I consider the posters not only as mediators of transgressive acts but also as expressions of the contradictory realities and uneven progresses that were specific to their conditions and ambiguities, which have been flattened out over time. They hark back to a context in which resistance movements produced intellectual transformations with ground-breaking debates and were nurtured by the epistemology of liberation and freedom. I have tried

46 Darwish (1973) cited in Achcar 2010, p. 222.

47 See Bauman 1989. Afropessimist claims (especially by Wilderson) of a Black ontology that precludes the comparison of Black suffering with any other form of suffering shows similarities with arguments adduced in favour of the purported incomparability of the Holocaust.

48 Salaymeh forthcoming 2024, p. 18.

to locate, at least on a basic level, why this transgressive knowledge has proven so difficult to find. The disappearance of political movements that reproduced universal ideological visions, as hinted at above, involved their literal removal (assassinations of figures on the left, in particular Mehdi Ben Barka, Ghassan Kanafani, etc.), as if to preserve intact an exclusively Zionist version of representations of the resistance. But there is an *additional* erasure, and this concerns the Jew as a European anti-Zionist subject and the Arab-Jewish revolutionaries. A missing piece of the puzzle lies with important figures of the Left negating the claims of Zionism from *within*. They, too, need to be restored to our collective and political memories; this is both crucial to our discussion about antisemitism and a reminder that a radical re-emergence with the Arab uprisings in recent decades has meant a rediscovery of precisely these subversive protagonists for new generations.

5 Historical Amnesia: The other Jew

My brothers, my sisters, I am writing to you from the depths of this prison where I am held as a revolutionary, in the same country from which you were chased. It is now twenty or thirty years since the lies of the Moroccan Jewish bourgeoisie pulled you into the trap that is Zionism. The discriminatory and racist politics of the majority of the

Moroccan Muslim bourgeoisie did the rest, even whilst you were under the supposedly protective tutelage of the Moroccan regime – itself nothing but a feudal subjugator – reinforced by the racist brutalities of the police. Since 1961 this regime has never hesitated to sell you off to Zionism.

abraham serfaty, 'Letter to the Damned of Israel', 28 September 1982⁴⁹

As witnessed during the preparation and inauguration of the Documenta fifteen exhibition, the convergence of Palestine with antisemitism has become a deliberately *habitual* reference. German law-enforcement going so far as to prohibit Palestinian solidarity protests, arresting those carrying Palestinian flags, relates to a familiar pattern whereby critiquing Israel as a state is considered polemical on same level as if one were illegitimately generalising about Jewish people. People who engage in discussions about Palestine/Israel often experience this formulaic trait. Being rendered antisemitic is sometimes done explicitly. This is echoed in the rushed condemnations of and accusations aimed at

⁴⁹ Serfaty 2024, p. 213.

pro-Palestinian art exhibitions, and warped interpretations of the revolutionary posters as antisemitic. At others times it is more subtle, as when a critical opinion is countered with the response, 'as a Jewish person I am [shaken, upset, disappointed, offended]'. Endless examples involving Jewish critics, organisers and Palestine supporters have exposed the selective application of this rule. As discussed above, attempting to render Jewish suffering historically incommensurable and placing the concept of antisemitism within a distinctly European ideological frame are also about obscuring European responsibility. Europe transferring its sense of culpability for industrial-scale slaughter onto Palestine and, with that, the imputation of antisemitism, is surely one means of shifting the burden of guilt. Moving from the message to the messenger is behind the assumption that only Jewish people can reflect on policies or opinions related to Israel. But, of course, the key question is, which Jews? If it were up to pro-Israel opinion-formers, the antiracist and revolutionary chapter in the history of world Jewry would be all but forgotten.

At the start of this essay, we saw that an open-minded ideology became a buffer against analytic reductionism but that regression on the part of progressive movements and the emergence of political short-cuts and chauvinist personalities ensured the erasure of such radical constellations. This amnesia was initially cultivated via the disappearance of progressive intellectual Arab theory and praxis. Secondly, this dismissal of a

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transgressive legacy – in all its ambiguities – conspired to promulgate an essentialist profile of an antisemitic culture at the expense of this revolutionary constellation. Nazism, fascism and counter-revolution killed millions of working-class people, decimated progressive cadres, and prevented the realisation of important humanistic visions and transgressive alternatives. Here, I consider this decimation to be part and parcel of the denial of Jewish diversity that includes revolutionary legacies. Jews were integral to movements for justice, either as part of national-liberation struggles or in opposition to their oppressive rulers, kings and sultans, and were often prominent personalities of the '60s generation. Be they Abraham Serfaty (in Morocco), Henri Curiel (in Egypt), Daniel Timsit (in Algeria), or Daniel Bensaïd (son of Algerian Jews in France), they belonged to the revolutionary left and voiced strong opposition to the displacement of Palestinians from their land, and regarded Zionist representatives, who were encouraging local Jews to leave, with distrust. To fully understand the complexity of Jewish-Arab regional affinities, we need to take a step back to consider how the colonial powers acted. They established the bases for fractures within Arab society across religious lines and divisions within Amazigh identities through official censuses.

The position of Jews in the region shifted both with the creation of the State of Israel and with colonialism. But both dynamics were played out in the way Jews were considered by British colonial powers as allies in Middle East imperialism or by the French colonial powers as potential settlers in Algeria, since they were outnumbered by those they aimed to rule. Through the legal orders and material statuses of the Crémieux Decree, Algerian Arab Jews were given French nationality and thereby turned into extensions of the colonial project.⁵⁰ Colonialism constructed outrageous racial categories to divide indigenous populations, and while it caused enormous damage in the years that followed this served as an important example of how colonisers positioned Jews ('lifted up' into French civilisation) in direct opposition to the majority of indigenous Muslim populations. Meanwhile, France could simultaneously oppress Jews in the metropolis while 'freeing' them in Algeria. As Englert succinctly put it: 'They were to be used as both a stick against the Algerian Muslims and a shield behind which to hide the motivations for the violence and oppression of the French colonial state.' Far from liberating Algeria's Jews this segmenting and segregating along ethnic, religious, and geographical lines led eventually to their own breakdown.⁵¹

Such (pre-existing) conditions allowed the State of Israel to further exacerbate divide-and-rule, both in terms of extracting Arab Jews who became settlers and in harming Arab social and cultural stability. This was deployed on different levels: by supporting states that compete with Arab

states for regional dominance with military backing or by cultivating alliances with minority groups – and the current normalisation deals with Arab states are the clearest outcome of Israel’s goal of acceptance of its existence in the region. Ethnic divide-and-rule is sometimes discounted as a ‘conspiracy theory’, but those who have been under colonial rule know how common this was (and still is) and that is why Crémieux should be studied alongside the 1950s policy known as the *Alliance of the Periphery*. Developed by David Ben-Gurion (the first Prime Minister of Israel), Israel began to develop close strategic alliances with *non-Arab* partners in the region (through legitimate national questions) for the sake of its own foreign-policy strategy. This was primarily extended towards Turkey, pre-revolutionary Iran and Imperial Ethiopia (including Eritrea). As Takriti discussed with regards to a particularly strong Kurdish–Palestinian affinity, this ‘peripheries strategy’ weakened the Arab sphere on which Palestinian liberation ultimately depended.⁵² There are important long-run

50 Englert 2021.

51 Ibid.

52 Takriti 2022, p. 27.

implications of this, even when they do not reflect popular opinion. We could say that this continued with the top-down normalisation policies that have flourished in recent years. But it was, in essence, a *marriage of convenience*; thus, even while not built on genuine sentiments, it successfully counteracted united opposition to Israel.⁵³ This has been difficult to maintain where official normalisation agreements between states are popularly rejected. More recently, the digital manifestation of Israeli Hasbara propaganda continues to be a part of this history of consistently sowing internal division, spreading propaganda, and fuelling political distraction.⁵⁴

One of the context-and-language specific issues (systematically ignored) is the use of the word *Jew*. For Arabs who had lived with Jews for centuries, ‘Jew’ was simply a common term of reference, not a slander. On the other hand, the ideologically-charged deployment of the adjective *Jewish* is also due to Israeli politicians, generals and civilians, who legitimise massacres, expulsions and house demolitions, and are deliberately distorting grammar by consistently labelling Israel a Jewish state. Yet this argument has yet to enjoy broad acceptance because of the stubborn image of the peoples of this region as preternaturally antisemitic. Although subsequently ridiculed as a component of supposedly bad-faith apologies, ‘Jew’ nevertheless historically became the terminological norm because, hitherto, there had been no State of Israel. The erasure of local Jews eases the frame of hatred of Jews as ‘their’ primordial feature, but becomes problematic in a region

where the Jews are part of the ‘them’. This denial is not arbitrary but has to do with Abraham Serfaty’s proposition that the *Arab Jew* is the subversive subject from within the region, one that is rejected by Zionism by default. West Asia and North Africa were historically familiar with, and still have, deeply rooted Jewish communities that were allied with or led by progressive and socialist movements. In fact, there is no lack of knowledge in this matter, since numerous scholars (Englert, Guebli, Heckman, Nadi, Slyomovics) have been able to provide the relevant insights. But since this has not been widely disseminated, the ‘absence’ of this Arab Jew allows for senseless matters to seemingly make sense. I share the point made by Nadi in this journal that we should not allow the erasure of a specifically Jewish-Arab perspective from our analysis of antisemitism and neither should we confuse them with a putatively universal Jewish people (which here effectively means European).⁵⁵ There is always the option to amplify dissident

53 This is why it matters that the most progressive Arab-regional nationalist tendencies were grounded in a universalist anti-colonial and anti-imperialist ideology. Takriti 2022, p. 18.

54 Aouragh 2025 forthcoming.

55 Nadi 2024, pp. 197–8.

voices, and what we learn collectively from them may take us forward. Here, it is not about a unique or exclusive essence, but a matter of understanding how formations of community and identity are part and parcel of emancipatory politics; of the productive *possibility* to join the struggle against a shared oppressor whilst holding onto communal conditionality. Serfaty argued that it was not the notion ‘Moroccan-Jew’ but ‘Zionist-Moroccan’ that was the real paradox. Why should these Jews *leave their homes to settle in someone else’s*, he asks whilst regarding Moroccan Jews as *exiles* in Israel. And, he continues: *Do you form one people with your oppressors? What an insult! [...] They forced you to leave the land of your ancestors for your current exile.*

As true as this may be, it is important to note that conflicts between Moroccan Jews (Arab and Amazigh) and Muslims did not only occur with the establishment of Israel. They are also connected to a social hierarchy and political economy of racism in which the Muslim and Jewish-Moroccan bourgeoisie tended to support the politics behind Israeli recruitment of local Jews. Prejudices against Jews were promoted by the bourgeoisie and adopted by others. Moroccan Jews were torn from their country (especially since 1961) both through racist politics *and* Zionism. Chauvinist conceptions of identity had to be dealt with head-on, on the basis of a principled stance. The Zionist ideological instrumentalisation of

Arab and Amazigh Jews ensued alongside a broader debate about the place of minorities on the radical left. Ethnic recognition and cultural equity, whether Jews, Sahraoui, or Amazigh, is a basic precondition for a progressive epistemology that reflects left universalism and the different ideas of what constitutes a free(d) subject, as I discussed at the outset. This could not be relegated to an afterthought and certainly not encompassed by an abstract ‘Pan-’ fits-all identifier.

A social analysis was crucial, according to Serfaty, since the exploitation and division allowed by class society meant

[t]he bourgeoisie and the commercial petite bourgeoisie ... getting rid of their ‘poor Jews’ – especially the Jewish peasantry of the Atlas Mountains and of Southern Morocco – who became the favourite target of the Zionist recruiters who were ‘recruiting’ Moroccan Jews in order to send them to Israel.⁵⁶

Regarding the departure of 45,000 Moroccan Jews between September 1955 and June 1956, Serfaty reflects,

⁵⁶ Nadi 2024, p. 201.

The poorest and the most vulnerable became the target of recruiters with the tacit, if not explicit, backing of the bourgeoisie, both Jewish and Muslim, who got rid of this authentic Judaism.⁵⁷

The Moroccan left *conceptualised the different ways in which Palestine was deeply connected to local, regional and global politics through which it had become a crucial issue*, as El Guabli put it.⁵⁸ Serfaty’s lifelong dedication to anti-colonialism and anti-imperialism, his participation in trade unionism, his opposition to the dictatorship of the king of Morocco – all were intimately related to his Arab-Jewish heritage. The Zionist erasures of local Jews is appalling, but nevertheless involve a logic that the dictator King Hassan II applied to Serfaty himself. Hassan II immediately exiled him on the false charge of Serfaty never having been Moroccan but ‘actually’ Brazilian, at the moment he was released in 1991. At stake is a recovery of a rich heritage that avoided the marginalisation of minorities; the broader debates about identity and affinity are part of the universalism of Arab progressivism. Most progressive Jews from the region considered Zionism a *European phenomenon*. The social condition of Arab Jews is also constructed from colonial and social conditions. The extent to which Serfaty’s anti-Zionism related to his reflections shaped his analyses about the social conditions of Arab Jews and the Arab subject as the main threat

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to Zionism. This political thinking is crucial for an analysis of antisemitism. To conflate them with a ‘universal’ Jewish people (which, in effect, means European Jews) shows why Serfaty understands ‘identity’ as a social category rather than a liberal (individual) or cultural category and focused on the class basis of ‘identity politics’. He considered ignoring the question of minorities a critical error for pan-Arabism, especially since Zionists were the oppressors of Arab Jews that also denied the specificity of their identity as Arabs. As Susan Slyomovics reflects in a wonderful essay based on interviews with Serfaty himself, his self-definition as an Arab Jew was that of ‘an exception of the exception of the exception’.⁵⁹ These approaches – which share important features with the figure of a Jewish *conscious pariah* (owed to Bernard Lazare and Hannah Arendt) – were, of course, dangerous to the opportunistic and conservative status quo. The capitalist ruling class had meanwhile rendered very clear how reactionary forces used Palestine as a fig leaf. As El Guabli attests, it was ‘not just a critique but also a forward-looking project to give a new meaning to the

57 Elbaz and Serfaty 2001, pp. 93–4; as cited in Nadi 2024, p. 201.

58 El Guabli 2020, p. 157.

59 Slyomovics 2016, p. 121.

left and its anticipated revolutions’.⁶⁰ When Serfaty speaks of ‘European’, ‘Arab’, ‘poor’, ‘rich’ (Jews), he did not intend ‘Jewish’ as some sort of universal identity, and refused to posit a homogeneous ‘Jewish subject’ that collapses Arab Judaism into the general history of Zionism. Their radical-left politics was also part of a strategy for Jewish inclusion in national-liberation politics that shed light simultaneously on Jewish politics in Morocco and the region and on the phenomenon of Jewish leftist politics more broadly.⁶¹ Unconditional support for the self-determination of the oppressed was a significant development which proved crucial. This is why Serfaty committed himself to the struggle for Moroccan independence, Saharan self-determination, and Palestinian liberation.⁶² But there is a different option that takes us beyond religion or ethnicity. What of that positionality which is neither limited to being Arab-only, nor that of standard Euro-American historiography? Heckman reconciles the story of Jewish attraction to internationalism and universalism with the more marginalised North African case studies.⁶³ Heckman’s discussion of progressive Jews, like Slyomovics via the *conscious pariah*, builds on over a century of principled critique of the state of Israel. This history has been buried under the mistaken assumption that all Jews have consistently supported Zionism. When we expand this *pariah* legacy to understanding contemporary Israeli politics it loses what is considered a key argument.

This is why I suggest that political erasure is multi-layered, that political amnesia does not unfold within a singular modus. Put differently, not only are Arab Jews like Serfaty unworthy of being mentioned in contemporary Israeli discussions; anti-colonial and internationalist Jews must also be ignored. Since debates often revolve around *what* constitutes antisemitism, the denial of anti-Zionism as an important strand within Jewish communities across the world does not come as a surprise. For example, the General Jewish Labour Bund in Lithuania considered Zionism the bourgeois answer to the Jewish Question and, as Lorber discusses, they regarded the call for a Jewish state an *escapist* response to antisemitism. Not many Jewish immigrants in the US were looking to the other side of the world; they opted to improve their material conditions and advocate for workers' rights and the advancement of their social status in and through social movements. As Lorber puts it: 'For many decades, the heart of a vibrant secular Jewish Left beat not for the upbuilding of Jewish settlements in mandate Palestine but for the Scottsboro Boys,

60 El Guabli 2020, p. 157.

61 Heckman 2018. 62 Serfaty 2024.

63 Heckman 2018.

the struggles of workers in factories and fields, the fight against fascism in the Spanish Civil War, the movement to defeat Nazi Germany, the unfolding progressive vision for a more just and equal world'.⁶⁴ From figures in the anc, leaders in the Marxist tradition (Rosa Luxemburg and Leon Trotsky), to Jews joining the anti-fascist struggles of the 1930s and '40s, as Alan Wald describes, 'this consideration of the past [Jewish revolutionary internationalism] in the present cannot occur as the tracing of a straight line but only as a shadowing of the contours of a slow spiral [...]. It is a past that must not pass because it once carved deep and distinctive tracks ...'.⁶⁵ There was a noticeably disproportionate Jewish participation *inside* Black liberation. And, when the anti-apartheid activists were arrested (together with Mandela in 1963 Johannesburg), they were put to trial (*viz.* the Rivonia Trial) and subject to severe sentences.⁶⁶ Even if this has been conveniently hidden for the benefit of a stereotype, it is important to beware of cultural essentialism in all cases, as, by the same token, if the *antisemite Arab* does not exist as a primordial given, neither does the *transgressive Jew*. A revolutionary internationalist is the *potential* actuality of multiple identities. This is, in part, because one's emancipation is always bound up with the emancipation of others; as Wald describes it:

There was and remains no consensus as to whether being Jewish is mainly a religious, cultural, ethnic or national identity. What is pertinent [is that] individuals then made a choice in political outlook and behaviour.⁶⁷

The Jew and the Arab share an oppression constituted by racial hatred that directly touches on the realm of definitions in which there is no space given to the progressive and anticolonial Jew. This shows us the point that Lapidot gestured toward earlier about a certain *indifference*, as that ends up organising both antisemitism and anti-anti-semitism. Not only are whole groups of Jews side-lined, the notion ‘New Anti-Semitism’ stands effectively as an alternative to the bigoted terms ‘Muslim Anti-Semitism’ and ‘Islamic Anti-Semitism’. But Europe’s deployment of these notions to discipline Muslim communities is exactly why hate-speech regulation should be contextualised within Europe’s

64 Lorber 2019.

65 Wald 2020.

66 Ibid.

67 Wald 2020. According to Wald, much of the confusion of the Jewish revolutionary internationalist tradition, and what this means for a Jewish identity in the modern world, was facilitated by ambiguities and uncertainties in the original discourse of Marxist positions, especially ‘On *The Jewish Question*’. He quotes Italian scholar Enzo Traverso: ‘The history of the Marxist debate on the Jewish question is a history of misunderstanding.’

own past and present Judeophobia *and* Islamophobia.⁶⁸ Contextualising through spatiality is far more meaningful than it might seem in relation to our discussion here. By recovering grassroots socialist movements rooted in the Jewish working class (with Yiddish as their language), Sai Englert describes the importance of fighting where one is. This means alongside the people one lives with, as beautifully conjured through the notion of *Doykayt* (here-ness) for the Jewish Bund, which was ‘conceived as a rejection of both Zionism and separatism to argue with Jews about the importance of changing the world, their current world’.⁶⁹ Of course, we should tread lightly when asking whether its lessons tell us something exclusively about Jews or about the human condition as a whole. Here, Englert warns against an interpretation of Jewish history in light of ‘Judeo-Jewish’ thought in *which Jews only act for Jews, and others act against them* and thus across a particularistic and universalist focus:

It is a question resolved newly every generation, depending on context, in one direction or another. If the first half of the twentieth century in Eastern Europe represented the universalism of Jewish

thought and action, the second half has undoubtedly been dominated by a narrow particularism.⁷⁰

I take an additional lesson from this perspective regarding the *simultaneous* existence of ordinariness and uniqueness. Because of what I attempted to convey via Achcar, Englert, Heckman, Slyomovics, Lapidot, Lorber, Nadi, Salaymeh and Wald, and returning to the earlier discussion of Sekyi-Otu in this article: What can we still consider a ‘moral universe’? Is not the effort to disseminate a radical pedagogy from the inspiring intellectual legacy of Arab intellectuals discussed above and Jewish internationalism the epitome of a left universalism that itself continues in the legacy of the Black Jacobins? Here I recognise what Wald means by political struggles that share an understanding of capitalism and decolonisation and are situated in a ‘world system that requires that discrete challenges against exploitation locally must of necessity work in harmony internationally. [...] an elective affinity with a heritage animated by a global, supra-national identity’.⁷¹

We, therefore, cannot regard antisemitism as simply the historically-inert aftermath of Hitler’s crimes but should always remember the antisemitic

68 Salaymeh forthcoming 2024, p. 17.

69 Englert 2016.

70 Ibid.

71 Wald 2020.

targeting of Jewish dissidents everywhere. As a Jew, Serfaty was, for instance, conditioned differently than his comrades precisely because of how the French antisemitic law targeted Moroccan Jews in particular ways during World War ii. Be they communist Jews under US McCarthyism or Arab Jews under Vichy, these Jews often participated in a radical political consciousness, like many on the left in the twentieth century. ⁷² Symbolising the same *Doykayt* subjectivity as the socialist Bund,⁷³ Serfaty did not consider his own to be distinct from the histories and movements of other societies in which they lived. This is why the signifier ‘Jew’ in debates about antisemitism becomes the ultimate arc, and why we must mount a critique of Zionism as ‘Europe’s way to cleanse itself from its two modern historical crimes – anti-Semitism, on the one hand, and colonialism on the other – by transferring their weight onto its primary historical victims’, as Lapidot put it.⁷⁴

Conclusion: a Radical Pedagogy

But nor were these acts products of radical contingency, created ex nihilo, instantaneous results of an explosive and unheralded sense of ‘human universality [that] emerges,’ as in the Haitian Revolution, ‘in the historical event at the point of rupture,’ unanchored in any a priori foundations.

ato sekyi-otu, 201975

They reduce you to workhorses for the most backbreaking of labours and to cannon fodder for their army, with their senseless, criminal dreams of domination and conquest. They refuse you even the chance to exercise the religion that our forefathers practised for centuries. They have transformed this religion of peace, of justice, of mutual respect, into one of hate, of war, of injustice.

abraham serfaty, ‘Letter to the Damned of Israel’, 28 September 198276

The posters I began this essay with were works of art, but it was immediately recognisable that they were, first and foremost, made as part of lived experiences and during ongoing struggles. The manifestation of such expressions remains

72 Cf. Lorber 2019; *Viewpoint Magazine* 2019.

73 Cf. Englert 2016.

74 Lapidot 2020, p. 1.

75 Sekyi-Out 2019, p. 31.

76 Serfaty 2024, p. 213.

astounding. The posters document a Palestinian political heritage in different ways, revealing the significance of celebrating revolutionary victories, but the force of its memory also lies in how these mere paper gears actually transmit a great deal of information about a particular era. Visually providing both the historical facts and commentary thereon of their own world-making, these ground-breaking artefacts are the products of a transgressive anti-colonial politics that must be historicised adequately. As I discussed, the emancipatory horizons were and continue to be side-tracked by unsubstantiated accusations and a racist bias. But, despite how these admonitions were mapped onto these political artefacts, the impending revolutionary reverberations of the posters are something to treasure. They bring to live political causes that underline the importance of radical solidarity and activist alliances as their ethical compass. An important precept for the progressive left to be drawn from this is that the struggle against antisemitism cannot be separated from the struggle against

contemporary Islamophobia and that the erasure of a particular Jewish revolutionary internationalism is also at stake in maintaining Islamophobia. This idea of progressive reciprocity has been replaced by another, a very curious kind of trade-off. The excavation of Palestinian politics shows a radically different reality than what the rituals and political performances related to antisemitism and peace-building show us. And bargaining on these false promises teaches us a cruel yet crucial irony about political strategies.

In 1998, speaking for the White House, Dennis Ross pushed for a token of peace in the form of some sort of formal acknowledgement of the Holocaust. The US State Department and Palestinian negotiators for the Oslo Agreement therefore organised a visit to the Holocaust Museum (Washington, D.C.) by Palestinian President Yasser Arafat.⁷⁷ This approach was criticised for the obvious reasons (why bring Palestinians into the fold of what essentially involved European complicity and crime, in what was eerily similar to an apology?). Yet, the cruel irony is that even this tokenism could not evade the deeply ingrained racism and Islamophobia reserved for Palestinians. The museum director refused to invite President Arafat. Only after much diplomatic urging and the laying down of embarrassing conditions (Arafat was not to enter officially as a political leader, neither as president of the Palestinian people nor as head of the plo, but merely in a personal capacity) did he concede.⁷⁸ The main point here is that – aside from how little sense it makes for Palestinians or

77 Cf. <<https://apnews.com/article/a3fd2088a8a65690302b891fd764ab0a>> and <<https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/politics/1998/01/17/holocaust-museum-denies-arafat-an-official-welcome/74ec9823-56eb-4299-a51a-3da809a3df82/>>, accessed 10 March 2022.

78 Achcar 2010, p. 250.

Arabs to immerse themselves in the business of deflecting European accusations of antisemitism or apologising through ritualistic acknowledgement of the Holocaust – such a performativity is either ignored, subject to suspicion, or plainly rejected. I mean by this that it does not actually do what it aims to do. But this is merely another side of dehumanisation. For it is manifestly the case that key Arab political actors have openly repudiated the entertaining of antisemitic opinions. Achcar gives examples. A shift towards a clearer stance is also notable in the political evolution of Hezbollah (Nasrallah undermined antisemitism in many speeches). But, if we recall sheikh Jamal Mansour supporting the standard, mainstream narrative of the Holocaust, did his proposition to include it within the general school curriculum make any difference? Not really, since he was assassinated a year later. Mansour was one of the thousands targeted amid a popular uprising (the Aqsa Intifada of 2000–5) that changed the course of Palestinian history.⁷⁹ The Oslo peace agreement, in reality, only brought defeat and the Israeli military occupation continued. This had its toll. It would be frankly odd if, after the failed peace process of the 1990s, the Second Intifada, the 2006 war on Lebanon, Operation Cast Lead, and Gaza in 2008–9, 2012 and 2014, antisemitic conspiracy theories had not grown in influence. A deterioration in the sphere of progressive politics opens up the space for reactionary interpretations.

This essay called for moving the focus away from conservative clichés, rejecting the rehashing of right-wing conspiracies in leftist spaces, and engaging more explicitly with the transgressive examples that our radical histories have endowed us with through a left universalist approach. To adhere to progressive approaches with a such a radical vision involves risk, but, as all the scholars I cite illustrate: this would not be the first time, there are many shoulders to stand on, then and now. The milieu and intellectual sharpness was there all along and is still offering inspiring lessons for us today; even if the debates about Zionism and antisemitism raised by Arab radicals in the 1960s and '70s are occluded in mainstream historicising, they remain part of our heritage. Relevant for our historical contextualisation is the connection between defeats and political failures and a decline in the principled rejection of antisemitism. By illuminating some of these voices via the politics of radicals such as Abraham Serfaty, or of Mahmoud Darwish reflecting that important (and regrettably small)

window of Third World intellectual history through these posters, their impact continues to reverberate.

79 Achcar 2010, p. 251.

That is why this article ties the lost history of progressive politics that challenged antisemitism on one side, to the question of what the revolutionary posters simultaneously reveal and conceal on the other. Not only did progressive intellectuals provide important lessons for revolutionary resistance, they argued against divide and rule and for the importance of including minorities and the unequivocal condemnation of the Holocaust. The rediscovery of such ethical and moral visions for contemporary activists occurs both in a subjective and philosophical way. Put differently, we see this on the level of representation – getting acquainted with the Jewish-Arab radical legacy matters –, and on the level of ideology – revising transgressive epistemologies that expand the mind. This expansion is greatly welcome for, rather than closing off the discussion, it provides us with crucial possibilities. The historical moment of the progress of the radical left and the ground-breaking leaps they developed – with specific symbols marking these radical ideas – and then transcended to inspire others, has been deliberately silenced. The reverberations, notwithstanding the deliberate erasures, are therefore extremely valuable. And as Serfaty predicted, no anti-imperial or anti-capitalist struggle can ever truly be successful if it tries to erase cultural and religious specificities.⁸⁰ This *looking back* is never about reproducing linear developments, it is *always* contradictory. We need to move away from binary approaches and simplistic answers, because our histories are uneven. Arab Jews in Israel are both complicit in a colonial project *and* themselves oppressed by that colonial project. And *both* local antisemitism *and* Zionist recruitment in collaboration with the dictatorship of Hassan ii explain the large relocation of Moroccan Jews to Israel. That is why Serfaty regarded the explicit participation of Arab Jews in anti-Zionist politics and the unequivocal identification as a Jew in Arab political spaces as transgressive acts that go together.

The intentional decimation of that radical window was necessary precisely because of its transgressive potential. Intellectual regression and political pessimism gradually detached the movements from progressive

politics and the transgressive ethics that carried forth a particular agency in wider society, and eventually attracted conservative cynicism. Revisiting that process tells us that the counter-revolutionary assaults on Palestinian solidarity are precisely what the erasure of this radical history facilitates. The reactionary influence of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Gulf Cooperation Council funding dependencies, normalisation agreements with Israel, and domestic crackdowns on progressive politics in the region therefore form part of the same story. The endless

80 Nadi 2024, pp. 200–1, 205–6.

accusations of antisemitism faced by critics of Israel in the West are part of the same reactionary catalogue. What the ‘scientific advisory group’ of Documenta fifteen in Germany did or the adoption of the ihra definition in the UK does presently, is not so very different from what repressive bodies in the region do.

If only this were motivated by real concerns about antisemitism! To paraphrase Lapidot, antisemitism is a performance that disregards, forgets, and obliterates itself. Semitism as the double invention of ‘Judaism and Islam – the Jew, the Arab’ are essentially (Western Christian) creations that serve as enemies and objects of hate.⁸¹ The hypocrisy of Western liberal ideals has become the seed for right-wing conspiracy theories. Meanwhile, Muslim migrants in Europe are told to accept Islamophobia in the name of free speech. With every exercise of free speech that condemns Israeli settler-colonialism, accompanied by way of response by the racist assumptions about Arabs or Muslims that underlie debates about Palestine, distrust and cynicism will bloom. Here we should recall that Zionism was locally considered an extension of European colonialism; the practice of colonial favouritism deepened suspicions and inflamed antisemitism, as discussed by Englert and Takriti. Neighbours began to frame Jews as *foreigners* despite their centuries-old Algerian-Jewish local roots. Reactionaries of any denomination fear the revolutionary sparks produced by unity. Those voices that had broken away from cultural essentialism and religious bigotry had to be taken out. The poster collections are a treasure because they restore what is erased, they keep some of the resonance of Arab progressive and radical Jewish epistemology alive.

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