

Brian Klug

**What Do We Mean When We Say  
'Antisemitism'?**  
Echoes of shattering glass

**Proceedings** / International conference  
"Antisemitism in Europe Today: the Phenomena, the Conflicts"  
8–9 November 2014

*Organized by  
the Jewish Museum Berlin,  
the Foundation "Remembrance, Responsibility and Future"  
and the Center for Research on Antisemitism Berlin*



**Jüdisches Museum Berlin**

Brian Klug

**What Do We Mean When We Say 'Antisemitism'?**

Echoes of shattering glass

Guten abend.

Let me begin by apologizing for the fact that those might be the only words in German that you hear from me this evening. I really have no excuse. I learned German – twice: once at the University of Vienna and again at the University of Chicago. And I forgot it – twice. Which goes to show that Klug by name does not necessarily mean Klug by nature. I grew up in London. My parents spoke Yiddish at home, which should have given me a solid foundation for speaking German. But, like many Jewish parents of their generation, they did so in order not to be understood by the children. And they succeeded. So, thank you, in advance, for listening.

Let me also express my thanks to my hosts for their invitation, especially for inviting me to speak here and now: *here*, in Berlin, at the Jewish Museum, an institution that I admire immensely, and *now*, on the eve of the 75th anniversary of Pogromnacht, which took place across Nazi Germany and Austria on 9 November 1938. (In Britain, we still say 'Kristallnacht'. I know and I respect the reasons why this word has been retired in Germany, and in my lecture tonight I shall use the name Pogromnacht. But I shall also allude to the connotations of the Night of Broken Glass.) In view of this anniversary, the question I am asking, 'What do we mean by "antisemitism"?', might seem redundant, even absurd. If you want to know what antisemitism is, surely the answer can be given in one word: Pogromnacht. What more is there to say? Well, if there were really nothing more to say, then I could sit down now and you could be spared the burden of having to hear me lecture in English for the next fifty minutes. But matters are not that simple. They are not that simple because antisemitism does not always come in the form of thugs and vandals smashing shops and synagogues and murdering people on the streets. It does not always wear its hate on its sleeve. And, alas, it has not faded away with the years. The title of this weekend's conference is 'Antisemitism in Europe Today: the Phenomena, the Conflicts'. Europe today is not incubating another Shoah, but no one with a sense of history can doubt that the well of antisemitism runs deep. And it has not run dry. It is still with us, in the here and now.

Europe today: what is it exactly? Some years ago I took part in another conference in Berlin, with a title similar to this one: 'Anti-Semitism Today: A European Comparison'. It was organised by the Heinrich Böll Foundation and included panels of speakers from different countries. As one panel followed another, it soon became clear that Europe is not homogenous: it is not just one place. So, for example, a vital concern for the French panel was how to interpret a spate of attacks on Jews by young men of North African extraction. This was not exactly a burning issue for the panel from Poland. Europe has roughly fifty countries. In each country, there are different debates about antisemitism: different debates, but the same

word. Which brings me to tonight's topic: What do we mean when we say 'antisemitism'? Do we *know* what we mean? Does it matter?

The *word* matters because the *thing* matters. It matters because unless we use the same word in the same way we will be talking at cross purposes. It matters because we want to develop social policies that reduce hostility to minorities, and so we need to try to pick apart different *kinds* of hostility: xenophobia, nationalism, anti-immigration sentiment, antisemitism and other forms of racism. It matters because social statistics matter and we cannot have valid or reliable data about antisemitic incidents or antisemitic attitudes if we do not know what 'antisemitic' means. Finally, the word matters because it is heavy with history, echoing with the sound of shattering glass. As a result, it is not only a difficult word but a dangerous one, for it is a word that can do harm if it is misused. Yes, it is a label that we need, a name for something that needs naming and denouncing. But a label can turn into a libel when it is pinned on the wrong lapel. Antisemitism has rightly been called a 'monster'.<sup>1</sup> But false accusations of antisemitism are monstrous too. For all these reasons and more, the word matters a great deal.

What matters about the word – about *any* word – is its meaning. And, as Wittgenstein points out over and over again in his philosophical work, a word is not always the best guide to its own meaning. "For a *large* class of cases," he says, "... the meaning of a word is its use in the language."<sup>2</sup> 'Antisemitism' fall into this class. It is a good example of how a word takes on a life of its own. *Antisemitismus* is a term that was coined in a particular place and epoch – Germany in the second half of the nineteenth century – by people who were hostile to the Jewish presence in Europe. New terms are coined for a reason. The reason in this case was to mark a departure from the old hatred of Jews with its vulgar name: *Judenhass*. The new term was a fancy word for a secular idea that supposedly reflected the state of science at the time, especially the (so-called) science of race. Racial ideas were fundamental for the *völkisch* nationalism that was on the rise (and which led, of course, to Nazism). Thus, the term 'antisemitism' was initially associated with a quite specific phenomenon: a biologically-based conception of Jewish identity and a political movement rooted in a racial ideology. But, despite some scholars who would like to keep the term in its box, the word has escaped into the world. Today, in its usual, everyday employment, 'antisemitism' covers a broad spectrum of attitudes and actions that target Jews, whether those actions and attitudes are based in biological racism or not. Moreover, the reach of the word now spans the centuries: we speak of antisemitism in antiquity and of antisemitism today. 'The meaning of a word is its use in the language' and this is how this word has come to be used. It is too late for a committee of academics to veto its wider meaning – or to substitute another term that they prefer (such as 'Judeophobia'). The question is: what do we *make* of the word and do we take it seriously?

---

<sup>1</sup> For example, Cobi Benatoff in 2004. See 'EU vows to tackle anti-Semitism', BBC News, 19 February 2004, available on the BBC website at <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/europe/3502019.stm> (viewed 28 September 2013). Benatoff was president of the European Jewish Congress at the time.

<sup>2</sup> Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, Oxford: Blackwell, 1958, p. 20, par. 43.

No one would be here tonight, on the eve of the 75th anniversary of Pogromnacht, if they did not take antisemitism seriously. Indeed, feelings tend to run high with this subject. And perhaps they should. But sometimes argument over antisemitism seems more like a bar-room brawl than a civilised debate. We need light as well as heat. In this lecture I am setting out to do just one thing: turn up the light, clarify the concept. This means that I shall not discuss such issues as the *causes* of antisemitism or the *extent* of antisemitism. I shall barely touch on the different forms that antisemitism takes. And only towards the end will I briefly broach the place of antisemitism in the larger picture of racism in Europe. All these topics are important and I am sure they will be examined over the weekend by people here who are knowledgeable about the facts. I shall certainly *refer* to facts from time to time, but only in order to illustrate a point. And, as a philosopher, the point I wish to illustrate will always be logical or conceptual rather than empirical. Nor will it be political. Like anyone else, I have my political views. But my aim in this lecture is to step out of the political arena and to offer a framework of analysis. I hope this framework will be useful to other people who hear what I hear in the word ‘antisemitism’: echoes of shattering glass.

### A ride on a London bus

So, what *do* we mean when we say ‘antisemitism’? To help us explore this question, I have brought along a cast of imaginary characters thrown together on an imaginary ride on a double-decker London bus: the no. 73, whose route passes through the multicultural borough of Hackney.<sup>3</sup> Apart from being where I live, Hackney includes the district of Stamford Hill, home of Europe’s largest population of Haredi (strictly Orthodox) Jews. The cast of three imaginary characters include Lucy (the non-Jewish conductor), Rabbi Cohen (a devout passenger) and Mrs. Goldstein (a Jewish onlooker, also a passenger). We shall consider five scenarios in turn, in each of which Lucy evicts Rabbi Cohen from her bus. With each scenario we shall ponder the question: Is she being antisemitic or not?

Let us begin with a simple working definition: antisemitism is hostility to Jews *as Jews* (or *because* they are Jews). Although, as we shall see, this definition is *too* simple, it is still, as Professor Tony Kushner has said, “a useful tool”.<sup>4</sup> It has the virtue of excluding the case where Lucy angrily throws Rabbi Cohen off the bus for smoking, when smoking is forbidden by the rules. Even if Rabbi Cohen prays as he smokes, even if he is wearing a *kipah* [skullcap] that identifies him as Jewish: even so, his situation is no different from that of Jane Smith or Ahmed

---

<sup>3</sup> This portion of the lecture is adapted from my article ‘Interrogating “new antisemitism”’, *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, vol. 36, no. 3, 2013, pp. 468-482. See also chapter 2, ‘The collective Jew’, in my *Being Jewish and Doing Justice: Bringing Argument to Life*, London: Vallentine Mitchell, 2011. I also draw on my article ‘The limits of analogy: comparing Islamophobia and antisemitism’, *Patterns of Prejudice*, forthcoming (2014).

<sup>4</sup> Tony Kushner, *The Persistence of Prejudice: Antisemitism in British Society During the Second World War*, Manchester: Manchester University Press 1989, p.8.

Khan or Bhupinda Singh or any of the other passengers that Lucy evicts that morning from her bus for smoking. His crime is that he is a smoker, not that he is a Jew. This is the first scenario.

It is a little more complicated if Lucy's hostility to Rabbi Cohen is based on the fact that he is singing *zemiros* [hymns] on the upper deck at the top of his voice. But is it because he is singing *zemiros* or is it because he is singing, full stop, thereby creating a disturbance? Suppose he would have been singing 'All you need is love': Would Lucy have still thrown him off the bus? In other words, what is he guilty of: making a nuisance of himself or being Jewish? Let us give Lucy the benefit of the doubt: she is a liberal, tolerant, broad-minded woman, but she cannot let anyone disturb the peace of her bus. The fact that he is Jewish is neither here nor there – for Lucy. But for Rabbi Cohen, of course, it matters: it is the reason why he is singing *zemiros*. Rabbi Cohen is not merely a person who happens to be Jewish and happens to be singing. He is singing *as* a Jew. But she evicts him *as* a nuisance. This is the second scenario. Mrs Goldstein, who is watching this scene from the back of the bus, smells antisemitism. She is wrong.

But now let us *not* give Lucy the benefit of the doubt. Let us assume the opposite: she is an illiberal, intolerant, narrow-minded bigot. But about what or whom exactly? What does she know from 'Jewish'? Rabbi Cohen is singing in Hebrew. Does *she* know it is Hebrew? It could be any foreign language. She looks at Rabbi Cohen, with his strange appearance and his alien ways, and she sees a figure that she recognizes vaguely from the pages of the British tabloid press: an asylum seeker or refugee, coming here to take our jobs, live off our taxes and threaten our British way of life. Seizing the moment, she deports him from her bus. We might call this a prejudice against immigrants. Or maybe xenophobia: hatred of strangers or 'difference'. But it is not antisemitism. This is the third scenario.

However (fourth scenario), perhaps Lucy's prejudice is more specific. She prides herself on not being an ignorant woman. One look at Rabbi Cohen's black clothes and long flowing beard and Lucy knows precisely what he is: a mullah. "Clear off, Abdul" she shouts in his ear as she shoves him on to the pavement. As Rabbi Cohen picks himself up and dusts himself down he reflects philosophically that he is the victim of Islamophobia. But Mrs Goldstein is convinced that all London bus conductors hate Jews.

But suppose now that Mrs Goldstein is right – not about London bus conductors in general but about Lucy. Suppose she has seen through Lucy and, truth be told, the reason why Lucy ejects Rabbi Cohen from her bus is that she is bigoted against Jews. This is the fifth scenario: she knows he is Jewish and she feels contempt or hatred for him *because* he is Jewish. What does this mean? Knowing he is Jewish, what exactly does Lucy think she knows? She is antisemitic: she despises him because he is a Jew. And what, pray, is a Jew?

In his essay 'The Freedom of Self-Definition', Imre Kertész, the Hungarian-Jewish writer who survived more than one Nazi concentration camp, reflects on Jewish identity in the light of his wartime experience. "In 1944," he writes, "they put a yellow star on me, which in a symbolic sense is still there; to this day I have not been able to remove it." What he is unable to remove is the meaning of the word 'Jew' that the Nazis invested in the badge. Kertész recalls Montesquieu's

dictum “First I am a human being, and then a Frenchman” and comments: “The racist ... wants me to be first a Jew and then not to be a human being any more.” In a brilliant dialectical riff, he works through the implications for the victim: “[A]fter a while,” he says, “it’s not ourselves we’re thinking about but somebody else.” That is to say, the self that we think about when we are under the thumb of the racist is not our own: in these circumstances, I am not my own person. “In a racist environment,” he concludes, “a Jew cannot be human, but he cannot be a Jew either. For ‘Jew’ is an unambiguous designation only in the eyes of anti-Semites.”<sup>5</sup>

This is how I understand Kertész: he is saying that the yellow star was not just a form of identification, *picking him out* as a Jew, but a whole identity, *projected onto him* as a Jew. Pinning the star to his breast, they were pinning down the word ‘Jew’ or ‘Jewish’, determining what it means. This meaning or identity – this ‘unambiguous designation’ – belonged to the Nazis, not to the Jews, not to him.

Kertész observes that “no one whose Jewish identity is based primarily, perhaps exclusively, on Auschwitz, can really be called a Jew.” What I think he means is that they cannot call *themselves* a Jew – they cannot define themselves as Jewish – because the word has been snatched away from them: it is someone else’s brand stamped on them and they are stuck with it: ‘Jew’. This appears, tragically, to be how Kertész views his own condition. Recall what he says about the yellow star that was pinned on him in 1944: “to this day I have not been able to remove it.” It is as if he is unable to be Jewish on his own terms. But (to get back to the 73 bus), Rabbi Cohen, singing *zemiros* at the top of his voice on the upper deck, is Jewish on his own terms: in Kertész’s phrase, he ‘can really be called a Jew’. So, Lucy knows Rabbi Cohen is Jewish. Rabbi Cohen knows Rabbi Cohen is Jewish. But do they know the same thing? They do not, for he is not the ‘Jew’ – the lurid figment or fantasy – that Lucy perceives and despises.

Let us recap. We began with a working definition of antisemitism: hostility to Jews as Jews. In the light of the 73 bus we need to amend this as follows: hostility to Jews as ‘Jews’. Adding the scare quotes around ‘Jews’ might seem like a detail, but it transforms the sense of the definition. Spelling it out, it comes to this: antisemitism is a form of hostility to Jews as Jews, where Jews are perceived as something other than what they are. Or more succinctly: hostility to Jews as *not* Jews. (We appear to have turned our working definition on its head.) For, even if some real Jews fit the stereotype, the ‘Jew’ towards whom the antisemite feels hostile is not a *real* Jew at all: the figure of the ‘Jew’ is a frozen image projected onto the screen of a living person. The fact that the image might on occasion fit the reality does not change its status: it remains an image.

Consider the case of Peter Rachman, whose name in England is synonymous with ‘slum landlord’.<sup>6</sup> In the 1950s, Rachman ruled over a property empire based in the Notting Hill area of west London, charging his low-income tenants high

<sup>5</sup> Imre Kertész, ‘The Language of Exile’, *Guardian*, 19 October 2002, available on the *Guardian* website at <http://www.theguardian.com/books/2002/oct/19/featuresreviews.guardianreview12> (viewed 28 September 2013).

<sup>6</sup> ‘Rachmanism’ is a word in the Oxford English Dictionary. His exploits (or exploitations) led to the Rent Act of 1965, which gave tenants security of tenure.

rents that they could barely afford. Rachman was Jewish. He was also, apparently, money-grubbing, unscrupulous, shady, exploitative, all of which are stock themes in the figure of the 'Jew'. Thus, he was also 'Jewish'. Antisemitism consists in collapsing this distinction, so that to be Jewish is to be 'Jewish'. The image, so to speak, fastens on to the reality: It *uses* the reality to proclaim itself falsely as real. 'The rats are underneath the piles. / The Jew is underneath the lot', is how T. S. Eliot puts it in two odious lines of poetry.<sup>7</sup> But 'underneath the lot' is not the *real* Jew, the flesh-and-blood Jew; it is *Eliot's* Jew, the *figure* of the 'Jew', a kind of cud, chewed over and spat out by the poet. For Eliot, this distinction between *real* Jews and *his* Jews is a distinction without a difference. And there's the rub: thinking that Jews are really 'Jews' is precisely the core of antisemitism.

Antisemitism is best defined not by an attitude but by a conception: an answer to the question 'What is a Jew?' Defining the word in terms of the attitude – hostility – rather than the object – Jew – puts the cart before the horse. Indeed, hostility is not the only cart that the horse can pull behind it. Envy and admiration are also possible attitudes towards the 'Jew'; which alerts us to the fact that philosemitism and antisemitism can be very close and can easily turn into each other. What do they have in common? They agree that I, a Jewish person, am larger than life. They share the assumption that I exist for them – to play a role in their *Weltanschauung* – and not for myself. They look at me and what do they see? Not an individual but a token of a type, a representative of a group. They agree that I am not me. With Wilhelm Marr, the man who founded the Antisemiten-Liga in Germany in 1879, we see how close philosemitism and antisemitism can come to each other. Marr wrote "I bow my head in admiration and amazement before this Semitic people ..." But he went on to say "... which has us under heel."<sup>8</sup> Similarly, he described Jews as "flexible, tenacious, intelligent." These are not in themselves terms of contempt.

Their antisemitic bent is evident, however, when they are read in context: "We have among us a flexible, tenacious, intelligent, foreign tribe that knows how to bring abstract reality into play in many different ways. Not individual Jews, but the Jewish spirit and Jewish consciousness have overpowered the world."<sup>9</sup> This 'Jewish spirit' and 'Jewish consciousness' is what Marr meant by *Semitism*. It is the main element in the word he helped popularise: *antisemitism*.<sup>10</sup> It is the horse that pulls the cart.

Who, then, are the 'Jews' that the antisemite hates or fears or despises – or envies or even admires? What is the 'unambiguous designation' of the yellow star that Kertész 'to this day' is unable to remove? When they pinned the badge on him and he became a 'Jew', what did he become? Collecting some of the main themes

<sup>7</sup> T. S. Eliot, 'Burbank with a Baedeker: Bleistein with a Cigar', *Selected Poems*, London: Faber & Faber, 1954, p. 25. The poem was written in 1920.

<sup>8</sup> Wilhelm Marr, *Der Sieg des Judenthums ueber das Germanenthum vom nicht confessionellen Standpunkt aus betrachtet* (1879), excerpted and translated in Paul Mendes-Flohr and Jehuda Reinharz (eds), *The Jew in the Modern World: A Documentary History*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995, p. 332.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>10</sup> Walter Laqueur, *The Changing Face of Antisemitism: From Ancient Times to the Present Day*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006, p. 21.

that ran through antisemitic discourse at the time, we can say this: he ceased to be a mere mortal and became, in a way, timeless: a cipher of 'the eternal Jew', an instance of 'the Jewish peril'.<sup>11</sup> Here is a thumbnail sketch of this figure:

*The Jew belongs to a sinister people set apart from all others, not merely by its customs but by a collective character: arrogant yet obsequious; legalistic yet corrupt; flamboyant yet secretive. Always looking to turn a profit, Jews are as ruthless as they are tricky. Loyal only to their own, wherever they go they form a state within a state, preying upon the societies in whose midst they dwell. Their hidden hand controls the banks, the markets and the media.<sup>12</sup> And when revolutions occur or nations go to war, it's the Jews – cohesive, powerful, clever and stubborn – who invariably pull the strings and reap the rewards.*

Let me clarify the status of this thumbnail sketch and its use in defining antisemitism. The content is based on the antisemitic discourse of a certain period: roughly, from the late nineteenth century to the middle of the twentieth. On the one hand, it is not intended as a definition: to be an antisemite it is not necessary to tick every box, there are themes that I have omitted, different themes are more prominent than others at different times (or in the discourse of different groups or individuals), and over time they mutate. On the other hand, these themes are not peculiar to the modern period; many of them recur in different epochs. Moreover, they are portable: they are detachable from any particular ideology: they can be applied to Jews whether Jews are seen as a people, a nation, an ethnic group, a cultural group, a religious community, a class, a race or whatever. Marr saw Jews as a race: he saw them in biological terms. But his conception of the *character* of the Jew is detachable from his racial ideology. And he did not invent it. He inherited it; for, in one variation or another, the themes in the sketch (or most of them) have been around a long time – long before anyone dreamed up the newfangled theory of race. The 'Semite' of 'antisemitism' is the *Jude* of *Judenhass* in modern dress. It is this *character* that carries the weight of the word 'antisemitism'. And although this character is not identical across time, there are (to borrow and adapt an idea from Wittgenstein) 'family resemblances' between the figure of the 'Jew' at one period and the figure at another; overlapping traits that lead us, with reason, to employ the same word: 'antisemitism'.<sup>13</sup> So, my thumbnail sketch of the figure of the 'Jew' is just that: a sketch. It is rough and ready, not precise and polished: more art than science.

But it is useful – and more than useful. It is *useful* to have a sketch along these lines, however sketchy it might be, because without it the word 'antisemitism' is left floating in mid-air. The themes in the sketch give the word its ballast. You could say that the *form* of the concept of antisemitism – the form of the figure at its heart – is this: 'to be a Jew is to have traits a, b, c ...', as though those traits constitute the *being* of a Jew, the *essence* of what it is to be Jewish. If this is the *form*,

<sup>11</sup> *Der Ewige Jude* (The Eternal Jew) was the title of a famous Nazi propaganda film made in 1940, based on a book with the same name published in Germany in 1937. *The Jewish Peril* was the title under which the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion* appeared in London in 1920.

<sup>12</sup> *The Hidden Hand* was a periodical published in England by the Britons, a group on the far right, in the 1920s.

<sup>13</sup> Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, p. 32, pars. 66-7.



then the thumbnail sketch gives its *content*, a content that is variable over time and from place to place, but which is consistent enough for us to think of the figure as singular: the 'Jew'. To this extent (or in this manner) it does the *work* of the word 'antisemitism'. Without it – without *some* such sketch – the word is empty. But a word that is both empty and emotive is dangerous. 'Antisemitism' is an emotive word. Thus, emptied of meaning, the word is worse than useless. Which is why the thumbnail sketch is *more* than useful.

This figure, more or less, is the character that Lucy sees in the fifth scenario when she ejects Rabbi Cohen from the 73 bus. It is what Kertész became when, stripped of everything except the badge they pinned on him, he was made a 'Jew' in Auschwitz. Antisemitism, in short, is the process of turning Jews into 'Jews'. This is what emerges from our imaginary ride on a London bus.

### The voice in the room

At this point I seem to hear a voice in the room. It is the voice of someone who has been waiting patiently for me to pause so that they can express their frustration. This is what I seem to hear:

*It is all very well for you to make distinctions based on an imaginary ride on an imaginary bus. But this has little or nothing to do with the complexities of the real world, where things are usually muddled. You describe five distinct scenarios, as if it were possible to distinguish sharply between one kind of hostility to Rabbi Cohen and another. But the sources of hostility are often mixed. Moreover, you speak as if antisemitism were always visible to the naked eye. But often it is disguised, hidden behind a mask, like the mask of anti-Zionism.<sup>14</sup> You give us a model. But a model is not reality and reality is what ought to concern us. Your model might hold up in the safe haven of imagination, but in the rough and tumble of the real world it is useless.*

One reason why I have introduced this voice is that I suspect it speaks for a number of people here tonight. But it is not just a voice in the room; it is also an inner voice, a voice in my head that expresses qualms I myself have had. However, I would not have got this far tonight – I would not have even begun – if I did not think I have an answer to this voice. So, allow me to pick up the gauntlet and reply.

To begin with, the voice is right: it is reality, not a model, that should concern us. A model is just a tool and a tool is only as good as the work it can do. In general, it is not worth thinking about models unless they help us think about reality. But no model can *match* reality and my bus model is no exception. For one thing, I could have outlined more than five scenarios. For another, as the voice in

---

<sup>14</sup> I take the phrase 'the mask of anti-Zionism' from a letter to the *Guardian*, 18 October 2004, p. 19. See the second letter under 'Expats on anti-Americanism', available on the *Guardian website* at <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2004/oct/18/usa.guardianletters> (viewed 2 October 2013).

the room says, things in the real world are usually muddled. But if there wasn't a muddle, we would not need a model. The whole point of a model is to provide a structure: a structure that we bring to the chaos of experience. Whether the bus model is a *good* model is another question. It is certainly not good enough if it cannot cope with the two kinds of cases that the voice raises. So, let us consider each of them in turn.

The voice objects that in the real world things are not always as neat and tidy as they are on the 73 bus with its five distinct possibilities. Again, the voice is right: the sources of hostility are often mixed. But, on a point of logic, if they are *mixed*, then in principle they are *different*; and if we want to understand the complexities of the real world, then we need to be able to separate them out. The model is a tool that helps us separate them out. One of the first pieces of research into antisemitism that I published in the late 1980s is a case in point. I examined the campaign in Britain against the Jewish and Muslim methods of slaughtering animals for food. The campaign was a mixed bag: some of it was purely about concern for animals, some of it was clearly antisemitic and racist, and some of it was a combination of these factors.<sup>15</sup> I would not be surprised if the same is true today in Poland and other states where Jewish and Muslim methods of slaughter are once again being targeted. Similarly with campaigns against male circumcision. But we must not jump to conclusions. In each case the question needs investigating; and, to reiterate, the bus model is intended as a tool to help us recognise antisemitism when it is present, and also not to condemn it when it is *not* present.

Sometimes the mix is messier. Even as I was writing this lecture, a fierce controversy broke out in Britain over a scurrilous article in one of the tabloids: the *Daily Mail*. Under the spurious headline 'The Man Who Hated Britain', the article attacked the late Ralph Miliband.<sup>16</sup> Miliband, who was Jewish, came to Britain in 1940 as a refugee when the Nazis invaded Belgium, and settled in London. Not only was he a prominent Marxist, but his son Ed is the current leader of the Labour Party. So, there was a clear political motive for a right-wing newspaper like the *Daily Mail* to attack him. And yet, as the writer and journalist Jonathan Freedland put it, there was a "whiff" of something else.<sup>17</sup> Three days later that whiff turned into a nasty smell when, defending the original article, the paper published an editorial with the headline 'An evil legacy and why we won't apologise'.<sup>18</sup>

---

<sup>15</sup> See my 'Ritual murmur: the undercurrent of protest against religious slaughter of animals in Britain in the 1980s', *Patterns of Prejudice*, vol. 23, no. 2, 1989. Revised as chapter 16 in *Being Jewish and Doing Justice*.

<sup>16</sup> Geoffrey Levy, 'the man who hatred Britaini', *Daily Mail*, 28 September 2013, available on the *Daily Mail* website at <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2435751/Red-Eds-pledge-bring-socialismhomage-Marxist-father-Ralph-Miliband-says-GEOFFREY-LEVY.html> (viewed 7 October 2013). The fact that Levy is Jewish complicates the issue. However, as Jonathan Freedland observed in the *Guardian*, "the most toxic elements were the headline and subsequent editorial" (see next footnote for reference).

<sup>17</sup> Jonathan Freedland, 'Antisemitism doesn't always come doing a Hitler salute', *Guardian*, 5 October 2013, p. 39. See also his comment 'Was the Daily Mail piece antisemitic?' in the *Jewish Chronicle*, 4 October 2013, available on the *Jewish Chronicle* website at <http://www.thejc.com/comment-anddebate/comment/111995/was-daily-mail-piece-antisemitic> (viewed 7 October 2013).

<sup>18</sup> 'An evil legacy and hwy we won't apologise', *Daily Mail*, 1 October 2013, available on the *Daily Mail* website at <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/debate/article-2439714/Ed-Miliband-evil-legacy-wontapologise>.



Freedland drew attention to one passage in particular where, unexpectedly, the editorial brought in the Hebrew scriptures. Here is the passage in full: "We do not maintain, like the jealous God of Deuteronomy, that the iniquity of the fathers should be visited on the sons. But when a son with prime ministerial ambitions swallows his father's teachings, as the younger Miliband appears to have done, the case is different." Two points here. First, the editorial, quite gratuitously, brings in 'the jealous God of Deuteronomy'. This is one of the oldest antisemitic tropes: the vindictive, unforgiving 'God of the Old Testament'. The logic of bigotry at work here is based on the principle 'like attracts like': if the 'God of the Old Testament' is vindictive, unforgiving, and so on, and if the Jews are drawn to this God and vice versa, it follows that the Jews themselves are vindictive, unforgiving, and so on. Second, note the emphasis on Ed Miliband's political ambition. Warning that he might "crush the freedom of the Press", the editorial closes with this remark: if he does, "he will have driven a hammer and sickle through the heart of the nation so many of us genuinely love". *Us*, note, as opposed to the Jewish subversive who inherits from his refugee father a hate-filled "evil legacy" and is liable to use his political power to stab the nation 'we' love in the heart. This is not to say that the *Daily Mail* was consciously pursuing an antisemitic agenda. But the figure of the 'Jew' haunts its editorial like a ghost that cannot be laid to rest.

Let us turn now to the other kind of case: antisemitism in disguise. In raising this issue, the voice in the room mentions the elephant in the room: anti-Zionism. I have no wish to dwell on this subject. But in Europe today, it is impossible to avoid altogether, and at least one panel tomorrow is devoted to it. The difficulty with this subject is that it is so politicized. In the public debate about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, there is a familiar, depressing pattern in which opponents appear to be locked in an embrace from which they cannot escape. Critics of Israel, crossing a line in the sand, find themselves accused of antisemitism. They react by accusing their accusers, alleging that the charge against them is nothing more than the machinations of 'the Israel lobby'. At once, this is seized upon as an antisemitic slur, which in turn is denounced as a Zionist smear. Round and round they go, down and down they go, in an acrimonious circle that gets ever more vicious. Now, the political argument is going to run and run, and all of us have a view about it. These views divide us. But when we come together on a night like this, we must endeavour to put them to one side. If we take the question of antisemitism seriously, as everyone here does, then we must try to extricate it from the political arena. And here, I believe, the 73 bus comes to the rescue. The model can do more than cope with this case. In fact, it is in cases like this, where bigotry is sometimes disguised as something else, that the model proves most useful.

This topic takes me back to my undergraduate days. It was 1968. I was nineteen years old, in my second year at University College London, where I was studying philosophy. In those days, being a student meant being a fulltime activist and only going to lectures when you could spare the time. I was a conscientious student, so I did not attend many lectures! I did, however, take part in a conference of

the National Union of Students, where, representing my college union, I proposed a resolution condemning the so-called anti-Zionist purges carried out at the time by the government of Poland. The resolution (which was passed) said that these purges should be condemned for what they really were: antisemitism in disguise. So, I know full well that antisemitism can be hidden behind the mask of anti-Zionism, as the voice in the room puts it. But think what, as a matter of logic, this means. If it can function as a *mask*, this implies that anti-Zionism, *as such*, is not antisemitic: a mask that is identical with what it masks is no mask. (That would be like a wolf in wolf's clothing.) And if it *does* function as a mask, then once we strip the mask away the thing behind it is laid bare – as if the mask had never been there. In other words, antisemitism is antisemitism, whether disguised as anti-Zionism – or as anything else – or not.

Then what is it? What do we mean when we say, in a particular case, that anti-Zionism is antisemitic? Applying the model of the 73 bus, I suggest we mean this: the figure of the 'Jew' is projected onto Israel because Israel is a Jewish state (or onto Zionism because Zionism is a Jewish movement). Sometimes this is obvious to the naked eye. Take, for example, the cartoon that appeared on the front page of the Italian newspaper *La Stampa* on 3 April 2002. This was during the second Palestinian Intifada, when the Israel Defence Forces were besieging the Church of Nativity in Bethlehem. The cartoon depicted a baby Jesus in a crèche. Seeing an Israeli tank, little Jesus asks, "Are they going to kill me for a second time?"<sup>19</sup> Milking the connotations of the town (Bethlehem) and the name of the church (Nativity) for all they are worth, the cartoon superimposed the mythic role of Christ-killer onto the Israeli army because Israel or its army is Jewish. Here the figure of the 'Jew' lies on the surface of the text.

But what if we think it is hidden behind a mask? Then we must look between the lines; and if we are right we will uncover the same figure implicit in the text. Text or sub-text, the figure is still the figure of the 'Jew': that is the point. And there are ways of bringing subtexts to light. Suppose there is a group that presents itself as pro-Palestinian, but, like Mrs Goldstein on the bus, we suspect that there is an antisemitic motive. We could look at the literature they produce, their history, their membership, their political connections, and so on. Then we are in a position to form a judgment, a judgment based on evidence. There is no algorithm for doing this. The evidence might be insufficient. Moreover, we can be wrong. There might be room for argument by people of goodwill who weigh the evidence differently, some believing that antisemitism does lie between the lines, others not. But this would be a rational process of argument, rather than the vicious circle of acrimony that I described earlier. The decisive issue would be this: Does the group in question project the figure of the 'Jew' (directly or indirectly, openly or otherwise) onto Israel? Do they, so to speak, pin a yellow star on the place, like the badge that was pinned to Kertész's breast? Do they, in short, turn the Jewish state into the 'Jewish' state?

---

19 EUMC, *Manifestations of Antisemitism in the EU 2002-2003*, Vienna, 2004, p. 130.

Masks come in all shapes and sizes, but the same logic and the same procedure applies to them all. In Europe today, especially on the far right, antisemitism is at least as likely to lurk behind a mask that is *pro-Zionist* as *anti-Zionist*. Take the British National Party (BNP). Here is an observation made a few years ago by Ruth Smeeth, who was the antiracism coordinator for the Board of Deputies of British Jews: "The BNP website is now one of the most Zionist on the web – it goes further than any of the mainstream parties in its support of Israel ..."<sup>20</sup> That is not the end of the sentence. But let me pause to tell you that the BNP is an offshoot of the National Front and is widely regarded as neo-fascist. It is led by Nick Griffin. Griffin is notorious for his denial of the Holocaust in the past. In the 1990s he edited a BNP magazine called *The Rune*, whose antisemitic content led to his criminal conviction.<sup>21</sup> So, what has happened? The remainder of Smeeth's sentence explains it: the BNP website "at the same time demonises Islam and the Muslim world". Jews, at least for the time being, are not in the gunsights of the BNP, whose viewfinder has swivelled and now seeks out Muslims. Support for Israel has become a stick with which to beat Muslims and to try to attract Jewish support. But it is a change of tune and not a change of mind or change of heart. To quote Henry Grunwald, who at the time was president of the Board of Deputies: "Despite all its attempts to portray itself differently we know it is still the same antisemitic, racist party it always was."<sup>22</sup> *How* do we know? By applying Wittgenstein's dictum: "*look and see*".<sup>23</sup> We know by looking behind the scenes – behind the mask – and taking stock of what we see. We know because of what we know about the BNP's past and the track record of its leader, Nick Griffin. We survey the evidence and the evidence leaves no doubt: behind the pro-Zionist mask there lurks an antisemitic face.

It is not always so easy to know the truth about a group. But we can *never* know if we are not able to distinguish the hidden face from the mask that hides it. We need to know how to recognise that face and how to tell it apart from other faces: faces with which it could be confused. This was the point of the five scenarios on the 73 bus. True, the real world is more complex than a London bus. But the bus is a microcosm: a smaller, simpler version of the larger, confusing reality. The model is limited and I am sure it could be improved. But, despite its limitations, I hope it helps us get a little clearer about what we mean when we say 'antisemitism'. That is its role and this is my reply to the voice in the room.

Earlier I gave a number of reasons for saying that the word 'antisemitism' matters. But words, in general, matter: this has been the underlying premise of my lecture. Perhaps I have a particularly keen sense of the weightiness of words because of my education. From the age of 5 to 18 I attended an Orthodox Jewish

---

<sup>20</sup> Matthew Taylor, 'BNP seeks to bury antisemitism and gain Jewish votes in Islamophobic campaign', *Guardian*, 10 April 2008, available on the *Guardian* website at <http://www.theguardian.com/politics/2008/apr/10/thefarright.race> (viewed 2 October 2013). Smeeth was the anti-racism campaign coordinator for the Community Security Trust.

<sup>21</sup> 'A right menace: Nick Griffin', the *Independent*, 23 May 2009, available on the *Independent* website at <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/people/profiles/a-right-menace-nick-griffin-1689784.html> (viewed 2 October 2013).

<sup>22</sup> Matthew Taylor, 'BNP seeks to bury antisemitism'.

<sup>23</sup> Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, p. 31, par. 66.

school in north-west London. And you cannot study Tanakh or Talmud without learning to pay close attention to *letters*, let alone *words*. It is a curious fact about the Hebrew word דבר [*dovor*] that it means both 'matter' and 'word' – as if the language itself were making the selfsame point: words matter. Not that you have to be Jewish to make or take this point. "In the beginning," says John the Evangelist in the opening sentence of his Gospel, "was the Word." Certainly, creation, according to Genesis, begins with words: God speaks and heaven and earth come into existence. And since we human beings are, according to the biblical account, made in the image of God (Gen. 1:26), it seems to follow that we need to watch what we say; for we too can form or deform a world, create or destroy it, with our words. All of which could also be said in a secular voice. Whatever the voice in which we say it, the point is the same: words are more than mere signs or symbols. To adapt a remark that the English poet Byron made about passion: words are the element in which we live.<sup>24</sup> That is why the question of what we mean by what we say is vital. It seems especially vital, in this place and at this time, with the word 'antisemitism'.

### Joining the dots

In my lecture I have been emphasizing the importance of making distinctions; hence the five different scenarios on the 73 bus. In closing, I want to turn briefly to the other side of the coin: the importance of making connections. I shall explain what I mean via a couple of recent examples.

Exactly two weeks ago, when I sat down to collect my thoughts for this concluding section, my eye was caught by a banner headline in the *Guardian* newspaper: 'Fear and distrust of Roma threaten to erupt into a European witch-hunt.'<sup>25</sup> The article reviewed the moral panic that swept through parts of Europe when a so-called 'blonde angel', a little girl with fair skin and blue eyes, was taken by police from a couple in Greece. Because the couple were Roma or Gypsy, the automatic assumption was that they had abducted the child from 'white' parents, an assumption that appears to be false on both counts: they did not abduct the child and the birth mother was herself Roma.<sup>26</sup> Then something similar occurred in Ireland. The London newspaper *Metro* reported it in a story that filled their front page under the blazing headline 'Anger as girl No.2 taken in gipsy raid'.<sup>27</sup> The seven-year-old child, described as having "blonde hair and blue eyes" was taken into care. Subsequently, DNA tests showed that she was indeed her parents' daughter and she was

---

<sup>24</sup> "Passion is the element in which we live; and without it we but vegetate" in Marguerite Blessington, *Conversations of Lord Byron with the Countess of Blessington* [1834], BiblioLife, SC: Charleston, 2009, p. 317.

<sup>25</sup> Helena Smith, 'Fear and distrust of Roma threaten to erupt into a European witch-hunt'. *Guardian*, 25 October 2013, p. 29.

<sup>26</sup> Helena Smith, 'Greek child trafficking exposed as Maria's mother found and more couples charged', *Guardian*, 26 October, p. 32.

<sup>27</sup> Aidan Radnedge, 'Anger as girl No.2 taken in gipsy raid', *Metro*, 23 October 2013, p. 1

returned to her family. Meanwhile, the words in the media do their destructive work, reinforcing the negative stereotype of the 'gypsy'.

The second example is the case of a 25-year-old graduate student, Pavlo Lapshyn, who came to England in April from Ukraine. Within days, he tried to trigger a "race war", stabbing Mohammed Saleem, an 82-year-old Muslim grandfather, to death and exploding bombs near a number of mosques in the West Midlands with intent to maim and kill. At his trial last month he pleaded guilty, saying that "he hated anyone who was not white."<sup>28</sup>

It is not difficult to join the dots; if anything, it is difficult *not* to join them. True, the Roma or gypsies were not targeted on Pogromnacht. But the Nuremberg race laws of September 1935 were amended two months later to include them – and also black people – in the prohibition of marriage and sexual relations with "those of German or related blood."<sup>29</sup> Their link to the fate of Jews under the Nazis is captured in a telegram that Adolf Eichmann sent from Vienna to the Gestapo in 1939. He explained how they would be deported: by attaching "carloads of Gypsies to each transport" of deported Jews.<sup>30</sup>

Like Jews, the Roma were sent to Auschwitz and other concentration camps, where most of them perished. As for Pavlo Lapshyn, his attacks were aimed at Muslims, not Jews. But his social media pages contained "material relating to Hitler" as well as "rabidly antisemitic material".<sup>31</sup>

There are numerous dots with different names: racism, antisemitism, xenophobia, Islamophobia, homophobia, and so on. There is also the dot that consists in demonizing an individual for political purposes: distorting their work, misrepresenting their views, maligning their character: constructing them as someone they are not. (I don't know what name to give this dot but I am quite sure it exists.) Each dot is its own dot, unique in its own way. Each word that names each dot matters in its own right. But it also matters as part of a lexicon of bigotry. We need to single out each dot and bring it into focus. But we also need to see the complete picture that emerges when the dots are joined. In other words (and this is my parting shot), antisemitism points beyond itself: it points to the myriad forms that bigotry can take. If, when we say 'antisemitism', we do not join the dots, then do we really know what the word means? And are our ears sufficiently attuned to the echoes of shattering glass?

Danke für Ihre Aufmerksamkeit.

<sup>28</sup> Vikram Dodd, 'Student killed 82-year-old in 'race war'', *Guardian*, 22 October 2013, p. 1

<sup>29</sup> 'The Nuremberg race laws', available on the website of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum at <http://www.ushmm.org/outreach/en/article.php?ModuleId=10007695> (viewed 26 October 2013).

<sup>30</sup> 'Roma victims of the Holocaust: Roma at Auschwitz', available on the website of the Jewish Virtual Library at <http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/Holocaust/gypsies.html> (viewed 26 October 2013), citing Simon Wiesenthal, *The Murderers Among Us*. NY: Bantam, 1967, pp. 237-8.

<sup>31</sup> Vikram Dodd, 'the shy student who turned killer and bomber', *Guardian*, 22 October 2013, p. 11

Brian Klug, *What Do We Mean When We Say 'Antisemitism'*, 30.09.2014, [www.jmberlin.de/antisemitism-today/Klug.pdf](http://www.jmberlin.de/antisemitism-today/Klug.pdf)



*This work is licensed by the Jewish Museum Berlin and the author under a CC BY-NC-ND 2.0 DE license.*