



BIROn - Birkbeck Institutional Research Online

Feldman, David (2018) Towards a history of the term anti-Semitism. *American Historical Review* 123 (4), pp. 1139-1150. ISSN 0002-8762.

Downloaded from: <https://eprints.bbk.ac.uk/id/eprint/22832/>

Usage Guidelines:

Please refer to usage guidelines at <https://eprints.bbk.ac.uk/policies.html>
contact lib-eprints@bbk.ac.uk.

or alternatively

DAVID FELDMAN

The historiography of anti-Semitism encompasses a dispute between ‘eternalists’ and ‘contextualists’. Among the former, it is the “historic continuity” of anti-Semitism that denotes the “essence” of the subject.¹ We find this focus on continuity stated explicitly in volumes that announce themselves as histories of anti-Semitism and provide an account of the phenomenon over centuries, across countries and, on occasion, traversing continents.² Here scholars have gathered an assortment of acts and corral them beneath the same heading. They divine unity across diversity: events in medieval Europe are joined, categorically as well as chronologically, to the history of the continent in the twentieth century, and the history of Europe in the *longue durée* is linked to the history of the Ottoman Empire and its successor states in the modern Middle East. They enjoin us to comprehend popular violence

I am grateful for comments on earlier versions of this essay from reviewers for the *American Historical Review* as well as from Jonathan Judaken, Julie Kalman and Ira Katznelson.

¹ Shmuel Ettinger, “Jew-Hatred in its Historical Context” in Shmuel Almog ed., *Antisemitism Through the Ages* (Oxford, 1988), 1-12, here 1; On “eternal anti-Semitism” see Hannah Arendt, *The Burden of Our Time* (London, 1951), 7-8.

² Walter Laquer, *The Changing Face of Anti-Semitism. From Ancient Times to the Present Day* (Oxford, 2006); Robert Wistrich, *A Lethal Obsession. Anti-Semitism from Antiquity to the Global Jihad* (New York, 2010)

and legal discrimination, religious vilification and social exclusion, negative personal interactions and stereotyped representations, all as expressions of a similar anti-Semitic outlook. For Salo Baron the continuous element was structural: “dislike of the unlike,” as he put it. Shmuel Ettinger found continuity at the level of ideas, which he traced from the ancient world to the modern. Robert Wistrich saw an arc of continuity from the onset of Christianity in the west: it was “the longest hatred.”³ An assumption of continuity or structural similarity is also implicit in accounts that explore the history of anti-Semitism in particular times and places, from the ancient world to the present day, and on every continent on the globe. Their use of the term anti-Semitism affiliates the particular case study at hand to myriad examples in other epochs and in other places.

These interpretations have been challenged in two ways. First, some historians have acknowledged continuity but have also placed emphasis on the intellectual cultural and social meanings of anti-Semitism in particular times and places.⁴ Second, and more radically, David Engel and Gavin Langmuir have argued that the unity of the phenomena conventionally grouped as instances of anti-Semitism is a mirage, as Jonathan Judaken discusses in the introduction to this roundtable. Engel proposes we dispense with the term anti-Semitism altogether.⁵ He points out that the category of anti-Semitism was first constructed in the late-nineteenth-century and asks us to acknowledge the contingent character of a concept that has too often been taken to be a mirror on the world. He enlists this insight to promote a critique

³ Salo Baron, “Changing Patterns of Antisemitism”, *Jewish Social Studies*, 38, no.1 (1976): 5-58, here 5; Ettinger, “Jew-Hatred,” 4; Robert Wistrich, *Antisemitism: The Longest Hatred* (London, 1991). See too example, Bernard Lewis, *Semites and Anti-Semites. An Inquiry into Conflict and Prejudice* (London, 1986), 22. For an important restatement of the necessity of a long term perspective but not one organised around the concept of anti-Semitism, see David Nirenberg, *Anti-Judaism. The History of a Way of Thinking* (New York, 2013)

⁴ For example, Shulamit Volkov, “Anti-Semitism as a Cultural Code: Reflections on the History and Historiography of Anti-Semitism in Imperial Germany,” *Yearbook of the Leo Baeck Institute* 23 (1978): 25-46; David Nirenberg, *Communities of Violence. Persecution of Minorities in the Middle Ages* (Princeton NJ, 1996).

⁵ Gavin Langmuir, *Toward a Definition of Antisemitism* (Berkeley, 1990), 311-52; David Engel, “Away from a Definition of Antisemitism: An Essay on the Semantics of Historical Description”, in Jeremy Cohen and Moshe Rosman eds., *Rethinking European Jewish History* (Oxford, 2009), 30-53.

of historical practice in the field. However, the recognition also suggests something else: that we stand in need of a history of the concept of anti-Semitism. In particular, this essay asks what it is that people have opposed when they have said they are against anti-Semitism.⁶

We know very well that journalists, academics, clerics and politicians promoted the terms Antisemiten and Antisemitismus in Germany in the years after 1879. They argued that civil and political equality for Jews – only decisively achieved in 1871 - had been a grave error and that the state should take action to protect Germans and Germanism from Jews and Jewish influence.⁷ The terms were taken up rapidly not only by the self-acknowledged advocates of anti-Semitism but also by Jews, their allies, and by commentators, and they were soon transplanted from German into other languages.⁸ This was not only a history of diffusion but also one of semantic change over time. It is a multifarious history and this essay explores just one strand. In doing so it advances four claims. First, by attending to its changing meanings, we will see that anti-Semitism, like any other concept, has a history: but in this case, one that remains largely uncharted. Second, we will discover how and when anti-Semitism was conceived as the continuous and capacious phenomenon that frames both academic orthodoxy and popular understanding in the early twenty-first century. Third, we will find that the development of the concept of anti-Semitism is closely bound up with the history of rights and with the changing relationship of Jews to states. Finally, once we acknowledge that the concept of anti-Semitism carries this history we will be better placed to understand why the term has become so contentious in the present.

Here I focus primarily but not exclusively on this history as it developed among Jews in Britain. Yet this is not only a local history but one that is part of international politics and

⁶ Engel, “Away from a Definition”. Engel proposes that the meaning of the term anti-Semitism became fixed in the late-nineteenth century. As this essay demonstrates, this is not the case in the Anglophone context.

⁷ Moshe Zimmermann, *Wilhelm Marr: The Patriarch of Antisemitism* (New York, 1986), 70-111; Peter Pulzer, *The Rise of Political Anti-Semitism in Germany and Austria*, revised edition (Cambridge Mass., 1988), 72-1119.

⁸ Joseph Jacobs, *The Jewish Question, 1875-1884. Bibliographical Handlist* (London, 1885)

transnational debate. We can bring it into focus by examining the writing and political work of Lucien Wolf, the Anglo-Jewish writer and lobbyist. Wolf provides a useful starting point because his deliberate and particular use of the term anti-Semitism alerts us to the importance of examining the term as a facet of political culture.

Born in London in 1857, Lucien Wolf built a notable career as a journalist writing on diplomatic relations for the *Daily Graphic* and the *Fortnightly Review*. From the outset of his career Wolf's journalism and activity extended to Jewish affairs. Between 1877 and 1893 he wrote for the *Jewish World* and he edited the newspaper from 1906-08. He was one of a cadre of intellectuals who lived by their pens and who criticized and served British Jewry in these decades. From 1903 Wolf took a leading role in the lobbying activity of the Conjoint Foreign Committee, the patrician communal body that aimed to influence British diplomacy and thereby assist Jews elsewhere who suffered persecution.⁹ The Committee's greatest concern was to safeguard the 5 million Jews living in the Russian Empire. The outbreak of war in 1914, by placing Britain in a military alliance with Russia, rendered its task impossible. Increasingly, Wolf directed his thinking and activity to the eventual peace and the opportunity it would give to ameliorate the status of Jews in Eastern Europe. At the Paris Peace conference following World War I he played a significant role in formulating the treaties that aimed to guarantee Jews and other minorities' political citizenship and collective rights in the post-imperial states of Eastern Europe.¹⁰

⁹Mark Levene, "Lucien Wolf (1857-1939)", *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004, online edn, Sept 2015, [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/38145>, accessed, 10 July 2015]; Cecil Roth, "Lucien Wolf; A Memoir," in Cecil Roth ed., *Essays in Jewish history by Lucien Wolf*, (London, 1934), 1-34; Arie Dubnov, "'True Art Makes for the Integration of the Race': Israel Zangwill and the Varieties of Jewish Normalization Discourse in *fin-de siècle* Britain" in Geoffrey Alderman ed. *New Directions in Anglo-Jewish History* (Boston, 2010), 101-34.

¹⁰ Mark Levene, *War, Jews and the New Europe: The Diplomacy of Lucien Wolf, 1914-1919* (Oxford, 1991); Carole Fink, *Defending the Rights of Others. The Great Powers, the Jews and International Minority Protection* (Cambridge, 2004), 69., 148-51, 193-202, 247-64;

In 1910 the eleventh edition of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, published its first entry on “Anti-Semitism” having commissioned Wolf to write it. The essay, which runs to 18000 words, surveyed developments in Germany, Russia, Rumania, Austria and Hungary and France, and stands as one of the first overviews of the subject in any language.¹¹ Anti-Semitism, Wolf explained, was a recent development. It was not synonymous with all forms of Jew-hatred through the ages. Repeatedly, Wolf connects the progress and decline of anti-Semitism to opposition to the advance of industrial and commercial capitalism. Accordingly, he associates the positive reception given to Wilhelm Marr’s pamphlet *Der Sieg des Judenthums über das Germanenthum* (The victory of Judaism over Germanism) in 1873 with the financial scandals and crash of that year. Similarly, he links the outburst of political anti-Semitism after 1879 to Bismarck’s abandonment of the National Liberals for the “ultra-Conservatives and Roman Catholics.” This constituted not only a political shift, Wolf proposed, but also a new alliance with agrarian capitalism that required the Chancellor to desert the bourgeoisie and “Manchester Liberalism” in favor of protection.¹² Wolf thus minimized the specific content of the ideas promoted by Marr and others. Their writing became significant only when “submerged by the ignorant and superstitious voters who could not understand its scientific justification, but who were quite ready to declaim and riot against the Jewish bogey.”¹³ In contrast to these novel developments in Germany, Wolf argued that the “murderous riots” and “incendiary outrages” in Russia in 1881 were “essentially a medieval uprising animated by [the] religious fanaticism, gross superstition and predatory instincts of a people still in the medieval stage of their development.”¹⁴ In both his public writings and private correspondence, Wolf eschewed the term “anti-Semitism” when

¹¹ Lucien Wolf, “Anti-Semitism”, *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 11th ed. (Cambridge, 1910), 2: 134-146.

¹² He detects a similar dynamic at work in 1892 when the Conservative Party broke with Bismarck’s successor, Count Caprivi, and incorporated anti-Semitism within its political program. Wolf, “Anti-Semitism,” 135-7.

¹³ Wolf, “Anti-Semitism,” 138.

¹⁴ Wolf, “Anti-Semitism,” 139.

discussing events in Russia. It was a designation he tended to reserve for the new political movement at work in Germany.¹⁵

There are three features of Wolf's understanding of anti-Semitism that require particular emphasis. First, is his conviction that anti-Semitism is a modern phenomenon that emerged no earlier than the late-nineteenth century. Although it interacted with "medieval" religious prejudices he understood anti-Semitism to be something distinct from them. It was a political ideology inspired by nationalism: an attempt to reverse the social and political gains of emancipation and to exclude Jews from the public life and German civil society. These ideas gained political momentum, he believed, from the conflicts generated by capitalism, from the migration westwards of Jews from Eastern Europe and from appeals to the mass electorate.¹⁶ Yet Wolf's apprehension did not displace his optimism. In his view political anti-Semitism in Germany was underpinned by myths whose persuasive power was in decline. The growing strength of the Social Democrats, he believed, meant that real social conflicts had eclipsed the fictions that fed anti-Semitism and the forces of reaction now counted on support from the Jewish middle class.¹⁷

Second, according to Wolf, because anti-Semitism was a symptom of the birth pains of modernity and the triumph of the bourgeoisie in economic and political life, it was by no means the worst thing that could befall the Jews. Their situation appeared to him to be far worse where these developments had failed to take hold. In 1912-13 Wolf assumed the

¹⁵ In the case of the May Laws of 1882 he made an exception. Designed to restrict Jews to towns within the Pale of Settlement, Wolf believed the May Laws were "the most conspicuous legislative monument achieved by modern antisemitism." They had "had the effect of creating fresh ghettos with the pale of Jewish settlement." In other words, the laws attempted to exclude Jews from any shared social, economic and civic life with non-Jews and in this sense they provided a parallel to the program promoted by anti-Semites in Germany. Wolf's apparently anomalous depiction of the May Laws as anti-Semitic contained a consistent element. Wolf, "Anti-Semitism," 139.

¹⁶ Wolf, "Anti-Semitism," 138, 145.

¹⁷ Wolf, "Anti-Semitism", 138

editorship of *Darkest Russia* and his writing there underlines this point.¹⁸ The aim of the weekly newspaper was to reveal the Russian government as uniquely terrible and to demonstrate the “miserable futility” of the Duma and other reforms. The word anti-Semitic and its analogues are largely absent from the pages of *Darkest Russia*.¹⁹ The legal disabilities and popular persecutions Jews faced in Russia are here presented as beyond parallel. Invoking anti-Semitism would have been counterproductive, proposing a similarity of type if not of severity between the Jews’ persecution in Russia and the troubles they experienced elsewhere in Europe.

The third significant feature of Wolf’s analysis was that Jews could contribute to the spread of anti-Semitism. Since anti-Semitism expressed the erroneous view that Jews were members of a distinct race whose interests were separate from those of their fellow citizens or subjects, anything which gave the impression that Jews claimed a nationality for themselves was likely to feed it. This was at the root of Wolf’s opposition to political Zionism. In 1910 he dismissed the movement as “vitiating by the same errors that distinguish its anti-Semitic analogue.”²⁰ During the First World War the problem posed by Zionism became particularly urgent. He expressed his anxiety on this score in a letter written in January 1916 in which he warned that “to claim a Jewish nationality now... would be to shipwreck all the rights we have gained in Western countries, and so far from helping our persecuted brethren in the

¹⁸ *Darkest Russia* was a newspaper published in London. It had two phases of existence, the first in 1892-3 and the second in 1912-13. In its second period of existence, publication was sponsored by the Jewish Colonisation Association.

¹⁹ The word “anti-Semitism” does appear in *Darkest Russia*, 28 February 2012, 4. Significantly, here the term refers to the exclusion of Jews from the electoral register on Odessa. Characteristically, therefore, this reference was to a question of citizenship and not anti-Jewish prejudice generally.

²⁰ Wolf, “Anti-Semitism,” 145; see too Lucien Wolf, “Zionism,” *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 11th ed. (Cambridge, 1911), 28: 986-9.

East, we should involve the whole of Jewry in one great outburst of justified anti-Semitism.”²¹

Wolf’s understanding of anti-Semitism was not the only one in circulation. Some Jews, notably the religious orthodox, found that the anti-Semitic movement was easily assimilable to the traditional Jewish notion of *sinat yisrae’el*. (haters of Israel): they saw nothing new in the phenomenon.²² Nevertheless, Wolf’s precise use of the term anti-Semitism was matched by others. Between 1880 and 1900 *The Times* contained just one usage of the term “anti-Semitism” in relation to Russia.²³ Similarly, in 1912 the celebrated jurist, A.V. Dicey, wrote a pamphlet that explicated and condemned the treatment of Jews in the Russian Empire without once using the term. Like Wolf, he found “[the] systematic ill-usage of the Tsar’s Jewish subjects now – in 1912 - finds no parallel in any other great Christian State of the modern world.”²⁴

This approach extended to prominent Jewish writers in France, Germany and Austria. The Dreyfusard Bernard Lazare distinguished anti-Judaism from anti-Semitism reserving the latter term ‘for our times’.²⁵ Still more striking is the extent to which some early Zionists embraced this conception of anti-Semitism. Theodor Herzl, regarded anti-Semitism as a novel development born of Jewish emancipation. Arthur Ruppin, the German demographer who settled in Palestine, similarly proposed in 1913, “the anti-Semitic movement grew up on German soil; it is almost as old as the enfranchisement of the Jews.”²⁶ All these writers identified anti-Semitism narrowly: as an attempt to prevent or undo the Jews’ rights to

²¹YIVO, New York, Lucien Wolf papers, personal correspondence, folder 26, Wolf to Dywien, 11 January 1916.

²² Engel, “Away from a Definition,” 42.

²³Sam Johnson, *Pogroms, Peasants, Jews: Britain and Eastern Europe’s Jewish Question, 1867-1925* (Basingstoke, 2011), 13.

²⁴ Albert Venn Dicey, *The Legal Sufferings of the Jews in Russia* (London, 1912), i.

²⁵ Bernard Lazare, *L’Antisemitisme son histoire et ses causes* (Paris, 1894), 2

²⁶ Theodor Herzl, *The Jewish State* (London, 2010), 23; Arthur Ruppin, *Jews of Today* (London, 1913), 198.

political equality. For this reason they understood anti-Semitism to be a recent phenomenon, distinguished from the preceding history of persecution suffered by Jews.²⁷

Following the collapse of four empires between 1917 and 1920 this conception of anti-Semitism was challenged and widely abandoned. The status of Jews and other problematic minorities in the new successor states was formally secured by a series of treaties which obliged the states to guarantee Jews religious freedom, equality under the law and some collective rights in return for international recognition of their borders.²⁸ Over the next decade the integration Jewish minorities in these states was not only shaped by legal disputes over the meaning and implementation of the Minorities Treaties but also by majoritarian nationalist movements, many of whose proponents saw no place for Jews and other minorities, least of all on terms of equality.²⁹ These clashes provoked a significant change in the meaning given to the term anti-Semitism by Wolf and many others and it also led to a still more radical reconsideration of its sources.

The largest of the successor states was Poland. Here Ukrainians, Jews, Germans and Belarussians comprised one-third of the population: Jews alone numbered three million and accounted for 12 per cent of the total.³⁰ In areas in which there were “a considerable proportion of Polish nationals of other than Polish speech,” the treaty signed in June 1919 required Poland to establish primary schools with instruction in that minority’s mother tongue. In the case of Jews, this meant that the state should fund schools in which Yiddish or Hebrew would be the language of instruction. Yet despite the new formal arrangements, Jews

²⁷ In this respect, their reasoning stood in contrast to that of Leon Pinsker who preferred the term ‘Judaophobia’. In his 1882 pamphlet *Auto-Emancipation* he understood this to be an indelible problem. See Scott Ury’s essay in this roundtable.

²⁸ Fink, *Defending*, ch.8

²⁹ Fink, *Defending*, 263-4; Peter D. Stachura, ‘National Identity and the Ethnic Minorities in early Inter-War Poland’, in Peter D. Stachura ed., *Poland between the Wars* (Basingstoke, 1998) 43-59 blames Jews for the Poles’ hostility to them but supports the view that ‘relations with the four principal ethnic minorities’ amounted to ‘a sort of internal war.’ 78.

³⁰ Antony Polonsky, *The Jews in Poland and Russia*, 3, (Oxford, 2012) 70.

remained a disadvantaged minority. State funding for Jewish schools was not forthcoming, obstacles were placed in the way of Jewish students seeking to enter Polish universities, a compulsory Sunday closing law introduced in 1919 damaged the livelihoods of observant Jews who kept their own Sabbath, and demanding administrative regulations left thousands of Jews stateless. There were analogous problems in other successor states. In Hungary, a new law in September 1920 placed limits on the number of Jews allowed to enter universities. In Roumania Jews faced problems over the conferment of citizenship and over access to university places. In Lithuania and Greece the Jews' economic position was weakened by a Sunday closing law.³¹

Wolf, as the secretary of the Joint Foreign Committee, was required to respond to these difficulties. Assiduously, he made representations to governments and to the League of Nations, sometimes in concert with the Alliance Israélite Universelle and the Ligue des droits de l'homme. He urged governments to fulfill their obligations under the Minorities Treaties and the League to enforce them. However, national governments generally denied the alleged wrong-doing, resented outside interference and, buoyed by a democratic mandate, were more concerned with the preferences of their majority populations. For its part, the League was reluctant to intervene in the domestic affairs of nation states.³² Nevertheless, persistent letter writing, meetings, phone calls, interviews, speeches, pamphlets and newspaper articles had at least one significant effect: cumulatively they instated the Minorities Treaties as a new yardstick against which to measure the rights of Jews and the wrongs they suffered. The treaties' validity was acknowledged even as states explained away their failure to act in accord with their obligations. For example, the Hungarian government

³¹Israel Cohen, *Jewish Life in Modern Times* (London, 1929), 131-6; Israel Cohen, 'The Jews under the Minority Treaties' *Contemporary Review*, 135, January 1929, 73-80; Fink, *Defending The Rights of Others*, 257-60, 283-94;

³²Fink, *Defending*, 288-92; Mark Mazower, *Governing the World: The History of an Idea* (London, 2012), 161-2

assured the League of Nations that the *numerus clausus* introduced by law in 1920 was a ‘transitory’ measure that would be removed once conditions allowed.³³ The Treaties thus reinforced and extended the rights that Jews and their leaders imagined they could expect from states.

Diplomats, writers and activists forged new conceptions of anti-Semitism as they contemplated and responded to popular resistance to the new assemblage of minority rights. In contrast to his fastidious refusal to call label pre-war pogroms anti-Semitic, Wolf now denounced violence in Poland as anti-Semitic and he similarly labelled the League for the Protection of the Apostolic Cross, which held mass meetings and spread terror among Jews in Hungary.³⁴ It was the plight of Jews in Romania which most troubled Wolf. Here pamphlets, newspapers and periodicals broadcast secular and religious propaganda aimed at the Jewish menace, public demonstrations led to the destruction of property, and Jews were attacked in schools and universities, and they were driven out of trains, cafes, theatres and other public places. Synagogues were desecrated. A memorandum handed to the Roumanian foreign minister in 1925 complained, ‘For the last four years an anti-Semitic campaign of great intensity has been carried on in Romania.’ While the Minorities Treaties became the yardstick for state policies, Jewish diplomats reserved the term anti-Semitic to describe and decry demotic assaults on Jews in the street, from the platform and pulpit and in the press.³⁵

³³ The Joint Foreign Committee of the Board of Deputies of British Jews and the Anglo-Jewish Association, *The Jewish Minority in Hungary. Report by the Secretary and Special Delegate of the Joint Foreign Committee, together with the official correspondence and other documents presented to the Board of Deputies of British Jews and the Anglo-Jewish Association, January 1926* (London 1926) 1

³⁴ London Metropolitan Archives, JBD C/11/012/41/1, Wolf to Drummond, 23 August 1922; Joint Foreign Committee of the Board of Deputies of British Jews and the Anglo-Jewish Association, *League of Nations, Geneva, 1922. Report of the Secretary and Special Delegate of the Joint Foreign Committee on Jewish questions dealt with by the Second Assembly of the League*, (London, 1922) 30

³⁵ The Joint Foreign Committee of the Board of Deputies of British Jews and the Anglo-Jewish Association, *The Jewish Minority in Roumania. Correspondence with the Roumanian Government Respecting the Grievances of the Jews* (London, 1927), 5, 14

In so far as popular movements aimed to exclude Jews from the public life of the nation and to restrict their rights, the charge that they were anti-Semitic marks a point of continuity with the pre-war conception of anti-Semitism. However, two things were now different. First, following the Minorities Treaties, Jews now claimed a more extensive package of rights. Second, the emergence of anti-Semitism in the new democracies provoked Wolf and others to reconsider the causes of anti-Semitism and its future prospects. The interaction of nationalism and democratic politics in the successor states in Eastern Europe mocked the distinction Wolf had formerly made between anti-Semitism as a modern but doomed phenomenon, originating in Germany, and the “medieval” prejudices of an ignorant East European populace manipulated by imperial rulers. The mutable and dynamic capacities of anti-Semitism in the post-imperial world demanded a new and different explanation of its causes and persistence. Attacks on Jews no longer seemed to reflect the teething problems of modernity or the vestiges of outdated fanaticism but had acquired new vitality and took new forms. By the mid-1920s Wolf no longer ascribed anti-Semitism to economic development and political contingency. The Jewish question in Poland, he reflected in July 1925, was “not a political problem but a psychological problem.”³⁶

Wolf’s change of mind was symptomatic of a broader tendency in thinking about anti-Semitism in the 1920s. Israel Cohen provides a further illuminating illustration of the same phenomenon. Born in Manchester in 1879, Cohen was a prolific author, who wrote about the political and social conditions of Jewish life. In 1922 he was appointed General Secretary of the Zionist Organisation in London. In 1918, in his pamphlet on *Anti-Semitism in Germany*, Cohen did not depart fundamentally from Wolf’s terms of analysis. He characterized anti-Semitism as a new phenomenon dating from “the last quarter of the nineteenth century” and connected particularly to the “reactionary attitude” of the German

³⁶ *Jewish Chronicle*, 10 July 1925, 13.

state.³⁷ Even the pogroms in Poland in 1918-19, on which he compiled a detailed report, did not provoke a radical reassessment.³⁸ By the mid-1920s, however, Cohen viewed Eastern Europe with despair. Anti-Semitism no longer appeared as a doomed vestige of former times but seemed instead to be an integral and developing part of the contemporary scene. In December 1925 he concluded miserably that anti-Semitism is “an elemental instinct in Europe, all pervasive and aggressive and protean in shape and constant in action, philosophic in theory yet political in practice.” It was now “a dominating and irrepressible factor in Jewish life, a malevolent factor in Christian civilization”.³⁹ Notably, Cohen’s new understanding of anti-Semitism was yoked to the failure of the Minorities Treaties, about which he wrote at length. At the end of the decade, he reflected, “scarcely had the signatures become dry before various provisions of the Treaties were violated...in Poland, Rumania, Hungary, Lithuania and Greece.”⁴⁰ In the face of continuing discrimination and the failures of legal guarantees and international pressure Cohen’s hope for improvement had been replaced by pessimism and determinism.

Fatalism was noticeable elsewhere and only reinforced by the ascendancy of National Socialism in Germany. Arthur Ruppin no longer regarded anti-Semitism as a product of the Jews’ emancipation. In 1934 he employed the term as a generic sign for “hatred of the Jews” and moved far beyond politics to encompass day to day social relations. In *The Jew in the Modern World*, he asserted that the phenomenon had existed “ever since the beginning of the diaspora.” Its origins lay deep in human nature and it was driven by “the group instinct which – like the herd instinct of animals – welds men connected by common descent, language and customs and interests into a harmonious community.”⁴¹ The historian Lewis

³⁷ Israel Cohen, *Anti-Semitism in Germany* (London, 1918), 1, 18, 20.

³⁸ Israel Cohen, *A Report on the Pogroms in Poland* (London, 1919), 7-8

³⁹ *Jewish Chronicle*, 25 December 1925, viii

⁴⁰ Cohen, *Jewish Life*, 131-2; Cohen, ‘The Jew under the Minorities Treaties’.

⁴¹ Arthur Ruppin, *The Jews in the Modern World* (London, 1934), 243.

Namier developed this argument to a logical conclusion. If the causes of anti-Semitism lay in human nature then there was nothing “necessarily and inherently wicked” about it: it was simply that “nations do not like each other and they dislike strangers in their midst.”⁴² As Namier saw it, this only confirmed the necessity of the Zionists’ answer to the Jewish question.

The idea that the wellspring of anti-Semitism lay beyond politics, deep in nature, culture or society, was widespread but conceived in diverse ways. The Christian theologian and historian James Parkes was the most prolific writer on the subject of anti-Semitism in Britain in the 1930s.⁴³ He argued that the minority treaties, even if they were enforced, would not “touch the roots of the disease.” Initially, Parkes found these origins in the First Crusade and “the first outburst of popular persecution” directed at Jews in Europe, which had been repeated in every century since.⁴⁴ Yet further research led him to locate “the basic cause of anti-Semitism” in the still more distant past: “in the triumph of Christianity in Rome which placed an intolerant minority under an intolerant majority.”⁴⁵

In 1936 Parkes was commissioned by the Board of Deputies of British Jews to research and write on aspects of anti-Semitism.⁴⁶ The Board’s embrace of Parkes is one measure of how its conception of anti-Semitism had altered since Lucien Wolf published in the *Encyclopedia Britannica*. For if we return to the three key features of Wolf’s writing on anti-Semitism— its modernity, the conviction that Jews faced worse problems, and that Jews themselves might stimulate anti-Jewish animus – we find that anti-Semitism was no longer

⁴²Lewis Naimier, ‘The Jews in the Modern World’ in Namier, *In the Margin of History* (London, 1939), 51-2.

⁴³On Parkes see Chaim Chertok, *He Also Spoke as A Jew: The Life of James Parkes* (London, 2006); Colin Richmond, *Campaigner Against Antisemitism: The Reverend James Parkes, 1896-1981* (London, 2005).

⁴⁴James Parkes, *The Jew and his Neighbour* (Edinburgh, 1930), 50-1, 183-92.

⁴⁵Parkes, *The Jewish Problem in the Modern World* (London, 1939), 14-15.

⁴⁶LMA, JBD, C 15/3/17/1, Parkes to Laski, 3 November 1936; Laski to Liverman 5 November 1936; Parkes to Brotman 29 January 1937; Parkes to Laski, 5 February 1937; Laski to Parkes 21 March 1937; Brotman to Waley Cohen 14 April 1937; Memorandum 13 January 1937.

conceived as a modern development and that now it was acknowledged to be the greatest danger for Europe's Jews. All that remained was the notion, still held by Parkes and many others, that bad behavior by Jews contributed to the problem.⁴⁷

Anti-Semitism, we have seen, was an invented term whose meaning changed over time. It did not address invented problems, however. It proved a flexible category that allowed Jews and non-Jews to make sense of and respond to successive political challenges. It is also apparent that objections to anti-Semitism were never just that. Explicitly or implicitly, these objections drew attention to a value or project concerning Jewish rights that was being violated. That violation is what defined anti-Semitism. In the late-nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, anti-Semitism was identified with an assault on Jewish emancipation. This conception of anti-Semitism did not disappear in the interwar years. However, the need to guard Jews' rights as individual citizens was supplemented after 1918 by defense of their extended individual and collective rights enshrined in the Minorities Treaties. The identification and denunciation of anti-Semitism between the wars was bound up with the political struggle undertaken to secure Jews these rights. At the same time, the persistence of discrimination and the dynamism of popular hostility led many to revise their understanding of the origins, causes and likely future of anti-Semitism. Once seen as an innovation and a death-spasm of a world that was passing, anti-Semitism was now reconceived as a problem that was both mutable and enduring. The idea that anti-Semitism is continuous and eternal was the product of this particular moment in history.

The connection between rights claims and the charge of antisemitism did not fade after the inter-war period. In the decades after 1945 the meanings of anti-Semitism continued to accumulate as Jewish interests took shape within new political contexts. Campaigns on behalf of Jews in the Soviet Union provide just one illustration of how anti-Semitism

⁴⁷ Parkes, *The Jew*, 183-5.

continued to be defined and made intelligible by the rights it despoiled. From the late 1960s a global coalition of Jewish representative leaders and activists readily drew parallels between the suffering of Jews in the Soviet Union and the victims of the Holocaust, denouncing the Soviet state as anti-Semitic.⁴⁸ These activists insisted on a general right to emigrate, appealing as they did so to article 13 of the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights which asserted that everyone has a right to leave a country, including their own. At the same time, many activists also connected emigration to “the right of Jews to return to their historic homeland.” Rights thus continued to give meaning to the charge of anti-Semitism but the rights to which Jews and other activists laid claim were not the same in 1970 as they had been in 1925, or in 1885, and now, we should note, it was the state, as well as the populace, that was charged as anti-Semitic.⁴⁹

For more than a century from the 1880s, the complaint of anti-Semitism has been allied to the struggle of Jewish minorities for equal treatment. Aspects of this political effort continue to the present, as Jews continue to be assaulted rhetorically and sometimes physically as a powerful, collectively self-interested and harmful.⁵⁰ Yet today the term anti-Semitism also marks another battleground. Objections to anti-Semitism are now most likely to arise in relation to debate on the existence, policies and practices of a Jewish state - Israel. The literature here is voluminous. At its core is the charge that disproportionate or obsessive

⁴⁸ Suzanne Rutland, ‘Leadership of Accommodation or Protest? Nahum Goldmann and the Struggle for Soviet Jewry’, in Mark Raider ed, *Nahum Goldmann: Statesman Without a State* (Albany, 2009), 273-96; Ron Rubin, *The Unredeemed : Anti-Semitism in the Soviet Union* (Chicago, 1968).

⁴⁹ Samuel Moyn, *The Last Utopia. Human Rights in History* (Cambridge, Mass., 2010) 152-3; Albert D. Chernin, ‘Making Soviet Jews an Issue’ in Chernin and Murray Friedman eds *A Second Exodus. The American Movement to Free Soviet Jews* (Hanover, 1999); Michael Galchinsky, *Jews and Human Rights. Dancing at Three Weddings* (Lanham, Md, 2008), 52-74 and especially Nathaniel Kurz, “*A Sphere Above the Nations*”: *The Rise and Fall of International Jewish Human Rights Politics, 1945-1975*, unpublished doctoral dissertation, Yale University, 2015, ch.5.

⁵⁰ L. Daniel Staetsky, *Antisemitism in Contemporary Britain : A Study of Attitudes Towards Jews and Israel* (London, 2017); David Feldman and Brendan McGeever, “Labour and Anti-Semitism. What Went Wrong and What is to be Done?”, *The Independent*, April 18, 2018; https://www.independent.co.uk/news/long_reads/labour-party-antisemitism-jeremy-corbyn-jewish-left-wing-holocaust-a8306936.html; <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-43782111>

criticism of Israel, as well as categorical opposition to the existence of Israel as a Jewish State, constitutes either the new anti-Semitism or a continuation of the old.⁵¹

The claim has proven contentious.⁵² It has been strongest where it is able to highlight themes and forms of representation, employed in critiques of Israel's policies or origins that draw on a tainted and venerable lexicon of ideas and images that suggest it is the Jewishness of the Jewish state that renders it uniquely malign. However, these elements of continuity accompany a rupture which this essay brings into view. The creation of the state of Israel transformed the relationship of Jews to state power. More specifically, it fundamentally changed the relationship of Jews to the question of minorities. For, in Israel, Jews constitute the majority population and the state is defined as 'Jewish' notwithstanding the presence of a large minority population. The difficulties to which this situation would give rise figured prominently in the minds of Jewish and non-Jewish policy makers in the 1940s; not least, as they contemplated the future in Palestine in the light of the failure of the Minorities Treaties. Some promoted schemes to transfer or otherwise extrude from Palestine the non-Jewish population.⁵³ Their foreboding was well founded. The 1948 War created both a Palestinian refugee population and a large Palestinian minority in Israel that has borne legal and material inequalities. The latter bear a typological similarity to those Jews encountered as a minority in inter-war Poland.⁵⁴ Of course, Israel not only exercises sovereignty within its internationally recognized boundaries but also, since 1967, has exerted dominion beyond

⁵¹ See, for example, Paul Iganski and Barry Kosmin eds., *A New Antisemitism? Debating Judeophobia in 21st Century Britain* (London, 2003); Wistrich, *A Lethal Obsession*; Alvin Rosenfeld ed, *Resurgent Antisemitism: Global Perspectives* (Bloomington, 2013).

⁵² Jonathan Judaken, "So What's New? Rethinking the 'New Antisemitism in a Global Age'", *Patterns of Prejudice* 42, 4-5 (2008) 531-60; Brian Klug "Interrogating 'new anti-Semitism'", *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 36, .3 (2013) 468-82.

⁵³ Benny Morris, *The Birth of the Palestine Refugee Problem Revisited* (Cambridge, 2004), especially ch.2; Mark Mazower, *No Enchanted Place. The End of Empire and the Ideological Origins of the United Nations* (Princeton, 2009), 136-45.

⁵⁴ Dov Waxman and Ilan Peleg, *Israel's Palestinians: The Conflict Within* (Cambridge, 2011); Yoav Peled, *The Challenge of Ethnic Democracy. The State and Minority Groups in Israel, Poland and Northern Ireland* (Abingdon, 2014)

these limits. It is little wonder that the meanings of anti-Semitism have accumulated and shifted markedly in the face of this revolution in Jewish history. As the relationship of many Jews to state power and to the rights of minorities have changed radically so too have the meanings of anti-Semitism. Recognizing this development and the history that precedes it reveals the layers of meaning that lie within the term anti-Semitism and may help us to better comprehend the controversies the term now provokes.