

Recycled Right-Wing Rhetorics of Post-October 7 Left-Wing Antisemitism

Abstract

The year since October 7, 2023 has brought not only increases in antisemitic violence and rhetoric but also intense feelings of isolation for American and British Jews. As protest against Israel's military response has grown, progressive academics and left-wing activists have increasingly relied upon and reproduced right-wing antisemitic tropes, stereotypes, and discourses, creating a troubling convergence of antisemitic rhetoric that has already endangered Jewish people. Drawing upon rhetorical content analysis employing conceptual frameworks of antisemitism, the authors explore how the often covert usage of antisemitic tropes and stereotypes by the progressive left mirrors the overt usage of the same among right-wing antisemites. While progressive activists' motivations may be different from those of their white supremacist counterparts, their rhetoric, as well as their methods of protest and intimidation, follow similar patterns and reinforce similar narratives that are detrimental to Jews and, more broadly, to all who proclaim to be social justice advocates.

Keywords: antisemitism; anti-Zionism; Israel; Jews; protest; rhetoric

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For many liberal and progressive Jews in the United Kingdom and the United States, where support for and criticism of Israel are often mapped reductively and unproductively onto a political binary of right and left, the year since October 7, 2023 has brought not only increases in antisemitic violence and rhetoric (ADL, 2024; Sherwood & Ofori, 2024) but also intense feelings of isolation (Buller, 2024; Kopstein et al., 2024). Almost immediately after October 7, we, two self-identified progressive Jewish educators with limited personal connections to the modern state of Israel, found that, despite our political values and commitments to progressive issues and social justice, our Jewish identities now put us at odds with our ideological peers. Nothing had changed in our belief systems, yet, seemingly overnight, how others perceived *us* changed drastically.

When Author 1, an experienced antiracist educator and activist, called out the lack of empathy for the Israeli victims of October 7 and the use of antisemitic tropes on social media just days after the attack, some of her disciplinary colleagues stopped speaking to her - but only after calling her a Zionist and comparing her to Nazis and right-wing media. Author 2, a scholar in the areas of social justice and antisemitism and former K-12 teacher, had similar experiences. He was attacked by several U.S. ethnic studies organizations on social media for writing a peer-reviewed article that explored whether American Jews warrant inclusion in K-12 ethnic studies classes. On X (formerly known as Twitter), his academic work was attacked (called everything from a poorly written op-ed to a work of propaganda), and he was personally berated and called names such as “Zionazi.”¹

¹ This slur combines “Zio,” a term used by former Ku Klux Klan leader David Duke as a pejorative for “Jew,” and “Nazi,” demonstrating the rhetorical strategy of Holocaust inversion. (For more on Holocaust inversion, see Gerstenfeld, 2007; Lipstadt, 2019).

Our individual experiences are not unique, but representative of a broader climate in which hardline anti-Israel sentiment has become de rigueur among progressives, especially on university campuses (Arnold & Taylor, 2019; Clarke, 2023; Davidai, 2023; Olshonsky, 2023; Roitman, 2023). Progressive Jews who have refused to condemn not only Israel's military actions and policies, but also its very existence, have been positioned as racist and politically and socially conservative, regardless of their actual identities or ideologies. Given that Jews are consistently among the most liberal voters, including in the year since October 7 (Pew, 2021; Rosenfeld, 2024), this perceived shift is as frustrating as it is inaccurate.

Even more shocking is that in the process of fighting against Israel, the progressive left has increasingly relied upon and reproduced right-wing antisemitic tropes, stereotypes, and discourses to display their displeasure with Zionism, Zionists, and Jews in general. Drawing upon content analysis and rhetorical analysis, we examine in this essay how the often covert usage of antisemitic tropes and stereotypes by the progressive left mirrors the overt usage of the same among right-wing antisemites. While progressive activists' motivations may be different from those of their white supremacist counterparts, their rhetoric, as well as their methods of protest and intimidation, follow similar patterns and reinforce similar narratives that are detrimental to Jews and, more broadly, to all who proclaim to be social justice advocates. Following a broad discussion of antisemitism as a bipartisan phenomenon, we explore how the same antisemitic tropes, narratives, and approaches manifest on right and left by looking at three primary dynamics: 1) the trope of Jews as inhuman; 2) the narrative of Jewish (or Zionist) world control; and 3) the approach or defense of ignorance. This is by no means a complete list of the parallels; the salient dynamics we focus on are intended to be illustrative rather than exhaustive.

The Bipartisanship of Antisemitism

Antisemitic rhetoric and violence were on the rise in Europe, the U.K., and the U.S. long before Hamas' attack on Israel on October 7, 2023. The Anti-Defamation League noted that acts of antisemitism hit a new record in 2022, which was the third time in the previous five years that recorded acts of antisemitism reached new highs (2023a). Following the massacre on October 7, anti-Jewish sentiment and rhetoric took on a new, if frighteningly familiar, fervor. Acts of antisemitism skyrocketed by 537% in the U.K. (Dodd, 2023), 300% in France (Le Monde, 2023), 320% in Germany (Bartov, 2023), 482% in Australia (Klein, 2023b), and 961% in Brazil (Klein, 2023a). Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) statistics show that anti-Jewish bias comprised 15 percent of all U.S. hate crimes in 2023, and anti-Jewish religious hate crimes continue to hold the top position of anti-religious bias at 68 percent (TOI, 2024, para. 2). Antisemitism has grown progressively worse on college and university campuses. A recent survey found that 74 percent of all Jewish college students witnessed or experienced some form of antisemitism during the 2023-24 school year (Camera, 2024, para. 7), which ranged from slurs and insults, both in person and online, to being threatened physically (ADL, 2023b). Indeed, there are few spaces where hostility to Jewish people, ideological if not assaultive, has not persisted before and since October 7, 2023.

Antisemitism, particularly in western countries, is often thought to be a right-wing phenomenon. In the United States, as scholar and civil rights strategist Eric Ward (2017) has noted, "antisemitism forms the theoretical core of White nationalism," an ideology in which Jews are thought of as "the demons stirring an otherwise changing and heterogeneous pot of lesser evils" (n.p.). Indeed, far-right white supremacists have committed some of the most violent acts of antisemitism, including mass shootings in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania and Poway, California synagogues in 2018 and 2019 respectively. Some sociologists and activists have

suggested that the linkage between antisemitism and white nationalism has contributed to the oversight of antisemitism from more progressive spaces (Arnold & Taylor, 2019). Importantly, however, antisemitism is a feature of many populist movements (Subotic, 2022), which may also contribute to its prevalence on the far left (Hersh & Royden, 2023).

Ironically, perhaps, much of today's antisemitism seems to be coming from individuals and groups who consider themselves advocates for racial and social justice. There is an extensive body of research that explores how the presumption of Jewish whiteness (Author 1, 2023; MacDonald-Dennis, 2006; Paresky, 2021; Author 2, 2017) and deeply ingrained antisemitic narratives about Jewish power and privilege (Author 1 & Co-Author, 2023; Hirsh, 2018; Robinson-Wood, 2016) have served as obstacles to addressing antisemitism in progressive spaces and discourses. The most salient obstacle, however, remains negative perceptions of Israel (Arnold & Taylor, 2019; Hirsh, 2017; Montefiore, 2023; Rich, 2023; Stern, 2020; Tabarovsky, 2022; Wright et al., 2024).

The progressive perspective of Israel and the outsized space Israel occupies in the progressive imagination have impacted the left's ability and willingness to recognize, let alone interrogate or challenge, antisemitism in its ranks or rhetoric (Arnold & Taylor, 2019). This dynamic dates back to at least the 1960s, when a Soviet propaganda campaign used traditional antisemitic narratives to bolster growing criticism of Israel among the left (Billig, 1987; Randall, 2021; Tabarovsky, 2022). While these narratives have continued to influence progressive politics, some scholars mark the 2001 UN Conference against Racism at Durban as a turning point in left-wing antisemitism, where posters displayed antisemitic caricatures and pictures of Hitler (Fiss, 2008; Lantos, 2002; Schoenberg, 2002), presenters sold copies of the notoriously

fictitious antisemitic tract *Protocols of the Elders of Zion* (Bayefsky, 2002; Fiss, 2008), and Jews were threatened and prevented from speaking (Bayefsky, 2002).

In the eyes of progressive organizations and university faculty from various disciplines (most of which do not address Jewish histories or cultures), Israel was already the prime example of colonial evil prior to October 7, 2023 (Edthofer, 2015; Kirsch, 2024; Linfield, 2022; Montefiore, 2023); no actions of terrorist cells or dictatorial governments could change that perception. It is unsurprising, then, that the Israel-Hamas War has become a veritable marching point, not only for seasoned activists, but for progressive academics, students, and self-styled activists on the internet.² For many of these social media users, activists and academics among them, the Israel-Palestine conflict is viewed almost entirely through lenses of colonialism and racism rather than as an enduring conflict of national movements (Rich, 2024). Spencer Sunshine (2019), scholar of the American far right, asserts that:

The problem is not just limited to the open and coded conspiracy theories about Jews and Jewish collectivities that circulate on the Left. It also can be seen in how the complex conflict in Israel/Palestine is compressed into a black and-white portrayal, complete with the demonization of one party — and mixed with out-of-hand dismissals of the Jewish community's complaints about antisemitism. (pp. 1-2)

Rather than acknowledging the complexity of a conflict between two peoples with legitimate grievances, traumas, and claims to the same land (Kirsch, 2024), these frameworks position Palestinians as indigenous, powerless people of color, and Israelis as white colonizers (Berkovits, 2021; Sacks, 2023; Sahhar, 2022).

² Sometimes referred to as “clicktivists” or “slacktivists” by the media and social commentators (Fisher, 2020).

Those who claim they are not antisemitic but only anti-Zionist - a distinction that many, though not all, scholars of antisemitism suggest does not exist (see Rosenfeld, 2019) - may be unaware that Zionism and Jewish people, labeled as Zionists, have been subjected to iterations of the same arguments and methods that characterized early twentieth century antisemitism. Yet, to many of us who study antisemitism, the progressive left has begun to sound like the far right, reproducing narratives and tropes eerily similar to those historically employed by far-right hate groups. Dehumanizing and antisemitic slurs, signs, and tropes have been observed at ostensibly justice-oriented protests on college campuses. Protestors calling attention to the war and destruction in Gaza have repeated antisemitic slogans, reproduced antisemitic imagery, and reposted antisemitic memes (Abramsky, 2024; Jikeli, 2024; Montefiore, 2023; Tabarovsky, 2024). The rhetorical tropes and strategies of left and right antisemitism make it apparent that “antisemitism in the U.S. now encompasses both sides of the political spectrum” (Perliger, 2023, para. 7).

Trope: Jews as Inhuman

Throughout history, antisemites have thought of the Jews as inferior, subhuman, the lowest form of animals, such as worms, lice, and vermin (Almog, 1991; Cantor, 2012). Known as zoomorphism, the depiction of Jews as animals was a common manifestation of Jew-hatred in the Middle Ages. In Nazi Germany, “Hitler could slaughter Jews because he regarded them as vermin; to him they were subhuman, the offspring of pigs” (Lloyd Jones, 1999, p. 18). Today, extremists on the far right dehumanize and portray Jews as rats and pigs in cartoons and antisemitic imagery online (The Antisemitism Policy Trust, 2020). As one example (and there are too many to mention here), a leader of the white supremacist group, the New Jersey European Heritage Association, said after the October 7 massacre of Israelis, that the “privileged

supremacist Jews [are] fleeing chaos they provoked like the cowardly rats they are” (ADL, 2023c, para. 3). As for all other detestable vermin, the far right calls for the death of Jews everywhere. This recurring trope of Jews as loathsome and inhuman, while not shocking to the Jewish people, still thrives amongst antisemitic individuals and far right groups across the United States and around the world. More shocking, perhaps, is that many of the same ideas and images have recently been employed by progressive left organizations and protesters in their attack of the State of Israel, Zionists, and Jews, at large.

From the perspective of the progressive left, Jews, in the form of Israelis, are framed as inhumane, violent, and hateful creatures who, like vermin, must be eliminated. Consider, for example, a protest at New York University, where students depicted Jews as vermin polluting the world via signs reading “‘Keep the world clean,’ alongside a drawing of a Star of David in a trash can” (Jikeli, 2024, p. 68). We have also seen images of Israel as a powerful octopus wrapping its tentacles around the earth, images that reproduce Nazi propaganda and antisemitic tropes from the Middle Ages (The Antisemitism Policy Trust, 2020). Part of the message here is that, as vermin, Israelis, Zionists, and Jews deserve whatever horrible things befall them.

This message was made very clear after the rape, torture, and murder of 1,200 Israelis (and foreign workers) on October 7, 2023. Hamas’ recorded killings and abductions were brutal and dehumanizing. It is evident that “by killing old people and children inside the borders of Israel, it acted on the principle that every citizen of a settler-colonial state is a fair target, because none of them has a right to be there” (Kirsch, 2024, p. 11). In other words, even if they are non-military, infants, or elderly, Israelis, by virtue of simply being there, have forfeited their chance to live. Their lives are less important, less valuable than others in the region, and, if they continue to live in the land of Israel, they will continue to get what they deserve. (That such

logics would justify harm to residents of not only the United States, Canada, and England but any nation historically touched by colonialism is a point rarely, if ever, addressed by activists or scholars for whom settler colonialism serves as the primary theoretical justification for anti-Zionism.) The October 7 massacre was celebrated by progressive voices on the left, such as by social justice organizations and proclaimed leftist, pro-Palestinian university professors and students (Alter, 2023; Quinn, 2023). As historian Simon Sebag Montefiore (2023) has observed, “the decolonization narrative has dehumanized Israelis to the extent that otherwise rational people excuse, deny, or support barbarity” (para. 5).

Another way we increasingly see dehumanization is through the refusal to engage with Jewish people in human and humane ways, especially in academic spaces. To the anti-Zionist left, Israel is viewed “not simply as a force hostile to Palestinian interests but also as a major source of evil for the world” (Robinson Divine, 2019, p. 2); as such, there can be no discussion or debate about Israel or with Israelis - or, by proxy, Jews. Known as anti-normalization, this policy of not forming relationships or engaging with Zionists in any way so as not to “normalize” their positions (Frommer, 2017; Quer, 2020) does not allow for any form of communication whatsoever. Anti-normalization has become a very serious issue for Jews on college and university campuses and is thought to be a primary reason behind increases in the shouting down (or “deplatforming”) of pro-Israel speakers and even denying these speakers the opportunity to appear on campus (Author 2, in press; Stern, 2020). This practice of deliberate disengagement is a great threat to academic freedom today (Nelson & Greenberg, 2016; Stern, 2020). Not only does such silencing diminish the value of these speakers and their perspectives, it also deprives all parties - and all who might learn from them - the opportunity to challenge and thoroughly examine contrasting perspectives. In this way, such hardline thinking is antithetical to the

educational mission and democratic deliberation (Stern, 2020). Debate is essential for critical, democratic thought, and the attempt to drown out voices one does not understand or agree with is as detrimental as it is dehumanizing.

Narrative: Zionists Run the World

The narrative that animates some of history's most notorious antisemitic tracts, such as *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, suggests that a cabal of Jews (or "Zionists," depending on the text) control the workings of world: *The Protocols* claimed that Jews controlled universities, the press, taxes, the minds of politicians, and the terms of public debate. In *The International Jew*, Henry Ford claimed that Jews were also to blame for jazz music and ruining baseball. *The International Conspiracy* blamed Zionists for destroying White Christian America through racial integration in public schools. More recently, these narratives have been reproduced by right-wing political attack ads suggesting that George Soros, a Jewish philanthropist and Holocaust survivor, controls politics via support for Democratic politicians (Tamkin, 2020), Fox News commentators pushing replacement theory propaganda (Marcus, 2022), and marchers at Charlottesville who chanted "Jews will not replace us" (Sarna, 2021).

The parallel narrative on the left less often depicts Jews as the evil puppetmasters pulling the strings of the world; instead, the narrative is projected onto Israel, the only Jewish nation in the world, where half the world's Jews reside today. For this reason, to some scholars of antisemitism, like Thorsten Fuchshuber (2019), anti-Zionism is merely "the materialization of antisemitism as an international movement" (Fuchshuber, 2018, p. 35). Where nineteenth and early twentieth century antisemitism was anti-Jewish action intended to destroy "the Jew" (the form, we note, that right-wing antisemitism still takes today), anti-Zionism can be understood as a form of anti-Jewish action that seeks to destroy the sole Jewish nation.

These anti-Zionist forms of antisemitism are among the motivating ideologies behind terrorist attacks on Israel, but anti-Zionist rhetoric often relies on antisemitic narratives as well, if more covertly. For example, for several years, anti-Zionist activists have propagated the idea that Israeli forces have been training police officers in the U.S. in “an exchange of tactics used in police violence and control including mass surveillance, racial profiling and the suppression of protests and dissent” (Gadzo, 2020). Progressive activists have pointed out that tear gas canisters used in Palestine are made by a U.S. company (Davis, 2016), a relationship that can hardly be described as surprising in a twenty-first century global economy, and that an American activist attempting to stop the destruction of Palestinian houses was killed by an Israeli military bulldozer during the Second Intifada (*Haaretz*, 2003), though approximately two dozen Americans were killed by Palestinian terrorists during that same period (see AJC, 2024; CNN, 2002, 2003). The conspiracism hit a peak, however, when a rumor spread in 2020 that Israeli military forces had trained the Minneapolis police officers who killed George Floyd through their use of “neck kneeling” (Lee, 2020, para. 6). While there is no proof to this effect, this accusation is only one example of how Israel, seen as inhumane and violent, especially in regard to its treatment of Palestinians in Gaza and the West Bank, is accused of spreading their particular form of evil to other countries, an accusation that echoes long-standing antisemitic narratives of Jews as the hidden hand, controlling and infiltrating the world.

In the eyes of progressives, who often pride themselves on their efforts to look at issues critically and humanely, Israel and Zionism, if decontextualized and reductively defined, represent all that is wrong with the world, and therefore, are responsible for any and all conflict in the Middle East. While many progressives respond to accusations of antisemitism by suggesting that criticism of Israel is not itself antisemitic (a supposition with which we agree),

the progressive position on Israel is not merely critical: in fact, many progressives “reject not only certain Israeli policies but the idea of the Jewish state itself” (Roitman, 2024, para. 2).

Israel, especially on college and university campuses, is seen as an evil force that must be eliminated by any means necessary. Antisemitism sees Jews as conspirators, yet, ironically, it is antisemitism that is the conspiracy.

Approach: Ignorance, Infallibility, and Conspiratorial Thinking

The conspiratorial thinking that characterizes antisemitic ideology makes antisemitic beliefs particularly difficult to counter. In fact, attempts to correct erroneous narratives about Jews, to challenge antisemitic attitudes, or to merely identify antisemitism *as* antisemitism are likely to be met with further conspiratorial antisemitic accusations. A light-skinned Jewish person who explains that Jews have not, historically, been considered white may be accused of denying their whiteness (Author 1, 2023). A non-Jewish person who points out antisemitism may be accused of being paid off by “the Jews” (see Hill, 2023). A person who calls out antisemitism in the context of discourse about Israel may be accused of making a bad faith accusation (Schraub, 2019) intended to deflect from criticism of Israel (Hirsh, 2017). A person who corrects misassumptions about the treatment of LGBTQ individuals in various Middle Eastern countries may be accused of “pinkwashing” designed to improve perceptions of Israel (Author 2 & Author 1, forthcoming). Underlying these accusations are the assumptions that Jews are dishonest, deceitful, and collectively working toward nefarious ends. New information, research on conspiracism tells us, does little to change the conspiracy theorist’s perspective (Rich, 2023).

There has been considerable research suggesting that people who align with right-wing politics are more susceptible to conspiracy thinking than liberals or progressives (Hofstadter, 1964; van der Linden et al., 2021). After all, the right wing is associated with conservative

thinking and the preservation, rather than reform, of existing (or even outdated) norms, structures, and attitudes; it stands to reason that those resistant to change would be similarly resistant to new information, especially if it challenges their existing worldview.

On the other end of the spectrum, progressivism, particularly when touted by academic activists, has typically been associated with critical thought and independent analysis of dynamics and intersections of power, ultimately for the social good (Latham, 2024). Yet progressives tend to take hardline anti-Zionist/anti-Israel stances that allow not only for no context, complexity, or nuance but also, often, no basic facts or history. Donna Robinson Divine (2019) has asserted that:

The power of this narrative of the Palestinian-Israeli Conflict, the force that makes it resonate in academia, comes through a distillation of history. But by straining out the awkward facts such as the rejection by Palestinians not by Zionists of a division of the country into two states for two people, the perspective subordinates the historical record beneath a narrative that ignores facts, avoids logic, and closes rather than opens debate, thereby undermining the core principles of the academic mission. (p. 13)

Rather than engaging critically with the political, sociological, and ethnoreligious dynamics of the ongoing conflict, progressives have become entrenched in their positions, bolstered by the sort of moral righteousness that undergirds fundamentalist thinking. Consider, for example, the claim that opposing Israel and Zionism puts activists “on the right side of history,” a phrase that implicitly excuses actions committed in the present. Or consider the Rutgers University adjunct professor who concedes that “some pro-Palestine protestors... do stupid things like defend Hamas’s violence against civilians” but derides accusations of antisemitism as “absurd” and warns that those who criticize protestors “will regret it later” (Burgis, 2024).

At the university level, this sort of thinking has turned into what some have called a “progressive herd mentality” (Lathan, [Latham?] 2024) marked by “a pressure to conform to a specific ideological viewpoint, potentially stifling...intellectual independence” (para. 5). This forces intellectual uniformity, which flies in the face of what progressive critical thought is supposed to entail or engender, especially in higher education.

Students, in particular, may simply have so little knowledge of the history or even geography of the Middle East that they believe, and subsequently repeat, what they hear from their ideological peers. For example, a study soon after October 7 found that a large percentage of non-Palestinian, anti-Zionist progressive students had no understanding of what the chant “From the river to the sea” meant or how or why it could have been interpreted negatively by Jewish people (Hassner, 2023). An overwhelming number of college and university students who participated in the study (86 percent) supported the use of the chant as a form of anti-Israel protest, yet almost half of the survey respondents were unable to name the actual river and sea being referred to in the phrase itself. Importantly, once the students learned some basic facts about the region, almost 68 percent of them no longer agreed with the message behind the slogan (Blake, 2023, para. 4). Azarmehr (2024) has noted similar issues of ignorance and misunderstanding among protestors in the U.K., surmising that “today’s young protesters are high on ideology, but woefully thin on facts” (Azarmehr, 2024, para. 9). Therefore, progressive college students have fallen into a “prevailing academic group think” (Roitman, 2023, para. 8). Dave Rich (2024), Head of Policy at the Community Security Trust, explains that the current decontextualized understanding of Middle Eastern geopolitics:

is a way of fitting the Israel-Palestine conflict into a broader, but also simplistic, understanding of the world, one that makes sense for politically conscious teenagers and

students who don't actually know anything about Israel and Palestine but have absorbed the argument that the world is organized to protect and privilege systemic white supremacy. (p. 233)

As scholars of rhetorics of racism and white supremacy (Author 1) and ethnic studies (Author 2), we want to be clear that many societies are indeed organized in ways that sustain systemic white supremacy (Mills, 1997), but this fact on its own is too broad a stroke to paint the complexities of human existence, nation-building, and geopolitics. Attempts to apply a reductive binary racial framework, developed within and for the analysis of European and American societies, to a national conflict that existed prior to such racial theorizing and which, despite European immigration to Israel, now primarily involves neither European nor American peoples, are anti-intellectual at best and dangerous at worst. Ironically, such attempts reek of the same epistemic colonialism their adherents claim to abhor.

Moreover, as researchers of campus antisemitism have noted, the October 7th attack on Israeli kibbutzim and concertgoers should have disrupted that oversimplified oppressor/oppressed worldview, at least temporarily. Many scholars, including Zionist leftist historian Susie Linfield (2023), initially supposed that, for progressive anti-Israel activists, October 7 “would have inspired serious moral and political self-interrogation” (para. 6), yet that never seemed to occur. As researchers of campus antisemitism Jeffrey Kopstein, Ana Schugurensky, and Rachel Shenhav-Goldberg (2024) have pointed out, “given the human toll of attacks, antisemitic attitudes after October 7, 2023, should have decreased on campuses regardless of attitudes toward Israel” (n.p.) Their research, however, found that the opposite was true. A “substantively visible and statistically significant” rise in antisemitic attitudes among university students was observed almost immediately after October 7th, a finding Kopstein and

colleagues note as “most disturbing” (n.p.) and demonstrative of “an empathy failure” (n.p.). Their statistical analysis demonstrated that anti-Israel attitudes were the greatest predictor of antisemitic attitudes among college students, echoing past studies in the U.S. and England (Kopstein & Shenhav-Goldberg, 2020; Statsky, 2017).

We don’t know what we don’t know, goes the adage, so students and other young people might not be expected to understand the full history of the region or how their responses to the massacre and subsequent war may be contributing to the spread of antisemitism. It is possible that “ignorance, even at elite universities, makes people more susceptible to phrases of grossly simplistic post-colonial ideologies and Islamist propaganda – whether at university or on TikTok” (Jikeli, 2024, p. 72). While students who truly wish to advocate for the powerless may be unaware that they are trafficking in antisemitic stereotypes, academic and political activists may employ antisemitic tropes far more strategically. After all, antisemitism is rhetorical not only in the sense that it is constructed and maintained by language in context, but also in that antisemitism is *used* as a rhetorical tool toward various social and political ends (Kiewe, 2020). This fact alone should give even the most anti-Zionist progressive pause.

Sadly, however, the conspiratorial logics of antisemitism are sustained by people who believe themselves to be not only beyond conspiratorial thinking, but also, accurate and justified in their conspiratorial beliefs. The anti-Zionism baked into disciplines like ethnic studies, for example, which has been sustained by decades of scholarship, originated with and was nurtured by antisemitic Soviet propaganda (Tabarovsky, 2023). Because it has been so deeply ingrained in disciplinary knowledge production, even well-meaning progressive academics believe it, teach it, and defend it against challenges to its historical (in)accuracy.

Of course, it is both naïve and arrogant to assume that just because one holds a particular identity, has an advanced degree, or is otherwise dedicated to social justice, that they are above such beliefs about the world and the role of Jews in it. Most research shows that, when faced with learning that challenges one's preexisting beliefs, most people don't change their perspectives or interpretation; because cognitive dissonance is uncomfortable, they find a way to fit new information into what they think they already know (Harmon-Jones, 2013), however ill-fitting the framework and conspiratorial the logic.

Conclusion: More than Horseshoe Politics

As antisemitism has increased dramatically, right wing media networks and personalities have called out Jew-hatred (albeit with their ultraconservative spin), while continuing to traffic in antisemitic narratives. After years of platforming virulent antisemites like Tucker Carlson, Fox News launched an online initiative called "Antisemitism Exposed," which featured stories of Jews impacted by antisemitism since October 7 (Mastrangelo, 2023). Still, when Donald Trump suggested that "the Jewish people would really have a lot to do" with a possible election loss (quoted in Slattery & Reid, 2024), Fox reporters emphasized Trump's promises to "stand up for" Jewish voters (Hasnie, 2024) rather than his reliance on antisemitic tropes of Jewish power and disloyalty or his attempt to scapegoat Jews for a national election in a country where Jews make up less than two-and-a-half percent of the population.

Less than three weeks after October 7, right-wing figure Charlie Kirk appeared on Newsmax for a discussion the network promoted about "the rise of anti-Semitism and his own staff being attacked at a pro-Israel event" (Newsmax, 2023). The week prior, Kirk had blamed Jewish organizations like the Anti-Defamation League for antisemitism, saying that they were

“only focused on random conservatives in middle America” rather than “immigration” and “importing people who don’t share your values.” He elaborated:

“the ADL demanded we let the Jew-haters in... and Jewish donors, they have a lot of explaining to do, a lot of de-coupling to do, because Jewish donors have been the number one funding mechanism of radical, open-border, neoliberal, quasi-Marxist policies, cultural institutions, and nonprofits. This is a beast created by secular Jews... And it’s not just colleges; it’s the nonprofits, it’s the movies, it’s Hollywood, it’s all of it.”

Blaming Jewish people for antisemitism is a remarkable demonstration of inversion, and Kirk’s accusations that Jews – specifically in the form of “Jewish donors,” a frequently-used antisemitic dogwhistle that draws on stereotypes of Jews as monied – have funded immigration is an overt reiteration of replacement theory. Pushed in recent years by right-wing pundits, including former Fox host Carlson, replacement theory claims that Jews mobilize nonwhite people to destroy white (read: Christian) America. This so-called theory relies on the same antisemitic narratives about Jewish power and influence that characterized some of history’s most notorious antisemitic texts, including *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion* and Henry Ford’s *The International Jew*. Kirk doubles down when he suggests that Jews control policy, media, and education, echoing the claims made by Ford and in *The Protocols* (see Bronner, 2019).

Meanwhile, liberal and leftist media organizations condemned Israel’s response to the attack almost immediately and have since downplayed antisemitism, while simultaneously trafficking in those very same narratives. At *The Nation*, sports editor Dave Zirin briefly took up domestic and foreign policy when he attributed the rise of antisemitism to Zionism (2023a) yet suggested, mere weeks after October 7, that “antisemitism has no place in a movement for a free Palestine” (2023b). Zirin noted but explained away the “antisemitic signs [and] symbols” at

demonstrations that month, which he explained had appeared “amid the horrors taking place, and emotions ratcheted up to the breaking point” (2023b), suggesting that such expressions were understandable or, worse, justified.

Jacobin writers have condemned right-wing antisemitism (Seymour, 2023), unlike charges of antisemitism leveled “spuriously” (Marcetic, 2024) against the left to silence support of Palestinian liberation. Features editor Daniel Finn dismissed what many antisemitism scholars have called the new antisemitism (Chesler, 2004; Lappin, 2024; Rosenfeld, 2015), a framework for understanding how modern antisemitism may manifest in criticism of Israel (such as when longstanding antisemitic tropes are levied not at Jewish individuals but at the only Jewish nation in the world), suggesting that this entire body of research is “rhetorical jiu-jitsu” by Jewish organizations. According to Finn,

“organizations like the Anti-Defamation League in the United States can articulate this theory in the language of modern social justice activism, talking about the right of ethnic minorities to define their own oppression. However, their true goal is to deny one particular group [Palestinians] the ability to discuss their own oppression.”

In Finn view, not only is scholarship on new antisemitism suspect, any effort by Jewish community organizations to define antisemitism is suspect as well. As Finn sees it, Jews care only about silencing Palestinians; any expressed care for defining their own experiences or upholding the right of other minorities to define theirs is a manipulation. That Finn admittedly references an *American* (not Israeli) Jewish organization further demonstrates how he traffics in the very logics articulated by the type of antisemitism scholarship he has derided: He draws on longstanding tropes of Jewish disloyalty, power, and dishonesty, while simultaneously accusing those who would point out his use of those tropes of lying. Like many such antisemitic logics,

Finn's is circular and tautological – and echoes the defense of *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion* made in a Switzerland court in the 1930s (Bronner, 2019).

Both the left and right, generally speaking, have refused to acknowledge, let alone examine, their own antisemitic ideologies and discourses.

Sociologists have suggested that antisemitic attitudes among a population can be predicted by “a conspiratorial understanding of the world as it is, by openness to totalitarian rule, and, above all, by a desire to overthrow the social order” (Allington et al., 2023, p. 12). These traits do not map any more easily onto western partisan politics than do attitudes toward Israel and Zionism among British or American Jews. Yet on October 8, 2023, assumptions about Jewish positionality shifted, though the beliefs and perspectives of most American Jews remained exactly the same.

If the recent presidential election is any indication, most Jews are not turning away from progressive causes, even if progressives are turning away from them. Although President Donald Trump, a Republican who has repeatedly courted both right-wing white supremacists and single-issue Israel voters, won both the electoral and popular vote in 2024, exit polls suggested that approximately 80 percent of Jews voted for Democratic candidate Kamala Harris (Rascius, 2024). Likewise, Labour party support in 2024 was greater from British Jews than from British non-Jews (Starr, 2024). American Jews largely support progressive causes like access to abortion (PRRI, 2023; “Views,” 2014), minimum wage increases (NCJW, 2024), and even limitations on arms provided by the U.S. to Israel (Rosenfeld, 2024).

Yet there persists today “a tremendous feeling of desolation, of betrayal, of isolation” among Jewish people who identify with “the humane or universalist Left” (Linfield, 2024, para. 3). The progressive left's uptake of right-wing antisemitic rhetoric since October 7 suggests that

antisemitism both informs and is reinforced by the leftist perspective on Israel, even if its ideological adherents remain unaware of their own discriminatory beliefs. To maintain a strong and truly inclusive progressive coalition, political progressives and social justice activists must be willing to examine their own bigotry. If they do not, they are no better than the bigots they claim to oppose. Worse, they may be, regardless of their professed ideologies or advocacy, a danger to Jewish people everywhere.

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