Modern Capitalist Society, Competing Nation States, Antisemitism and Hatred of the Jewish State

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1. INTRODUCTION

The fear of losing national identity and the power of nation states has once again become popular in Europe in the context of the discourse against so-called globalisation, the “unification” process in the European Union and, most recently, the financial crisis. In the context of the European Union, some observers have argued that the concept of the nation state based on ethnic or religious definitions has transformed into a transnational identity. The idea of a post-national era with a common identity and collective memory was promoted during the reforms. Furthermore, scholars such as Bunzl have argued that, in the age of the formation of a European identity, antisemitism would decline and Muslims would serve as the new scapegoats in the construction of a common European identity. But in fact the opposite is true. Rather than disappearing, the nation state as a regulator and the concept of the nation as an identity have remained, and the Jews are once again serving as scapegoats. Antisemitic statements and attacks have become more frequent and aggressive since the Al-Aqsa Intifada of 2000, the anti-American attacks on 9/11 and well over a hundred terrorist suicide bombings targeting and killing as many Jews as possible—mostly in Israel. In Europe, the mass killing of Jews in Israel and antisemitic attacks in Europe were partly rejected as antisemitic, but often (at least partly) rationalised as a form of resistance against the “Israeli occupation”. Hating the Jews has once again become popular in Europe and is partly authorised in the mainstream media—especially in the guise of Israel bashing.

Different studies show that classic modern antisemitic perceptions of national and international socio-economic processes have once again become prevalent. Over 40 per cent of Europeans agree that Jews have too much power in the business world and in

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international financial markets. Over 30 per cent blame Jews in the financial industry (at least partly) for the economic crisis. Almost half of interviewees agree that Jews are more loyal to Israel than to the country where they live. In a country like Spain, 58 per cent of Spaniards agree with statements such as “Jews are very powerful because they control the economy and the media”. The European unconscious knows about the Jews: they are “not true citizens”, they “stick together”, they have built an “artificial state” on others peoples’ land and they dishonestly exploit and dominate nations as an alien power through the financial markets and the media. What kind of perception of the world do these people have and how is it related to the functioning of current society?

To understand some of these dynamics, this paper analyses some of the connections between the system of competing nation states, capitalist society, modern antisemitism and hatred of the Jewish state. In order to do so, I will focus on two elements of thought in our societies and their connections to antisemitism and anti-Zionism.

First, I will focus on the role of the system of competing nation states, with their hegemonic ideological rationales: the republican and the primordial or ethnic nation model. Both hegemonic ideological concepts have a specific impact on the perception of “the Jews” and Israel. Inclusion and exclusion, citizenship, rights of the individual guaranteed by the state and the right of a “nation” to its “own” state depend on the ideological rationalisation of these rationales.

Second, I will touch upon the relation between the largely impersonal processes and functioning of modern capitalist societies and modern antisemitism. How do individuals perceive structures, processes and exploitation in our society? What kind of connections exists between these perceptions and antisemitism?

Finally, I will argue that a specific connection between both these elements (the nation state concept and the perception of the functioning of society) forms the basis for conspiracy theories, which are projected onto Jews. One central problem in attempts to combat antisemitism is not only that there are Jewish stereotypes but also that the above-mentioned elements, which form the basis of conspiracy theories and eliminatory antisemitism, cannot be easily deconstructed in the society we are living in.

2. ANTISEMITISM AND THE PERCEPTION OF THE WORLD

In his essay “Portrait de l’antisémite”, Jean Paul Sartre commented that antisemitism is not just a matter of taste, a question of whether or not you like “the Jews”. Rather, he emphasised that antisemitism is a world view that is not limited to being against the Jews. He noticed that one cannot be an antisemite without further intellectual principles.

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3 The poll by the Anti-Defamation League was conducted between December 1, 2008 and January 13, 2009 in Austria, France, Hungary, Poland, Germany, Spain and the United Kingdom. See Anti-Defamation League, Attitudes Toward Jews in Seven European Countries (February 2009) pp. 6-7, available at: <http://www.adl.org/Public%20ADL%20Anti-Semitism%20Presentation%20February%202009%20_3_.pdf>.

4 Ibid., p. 16.

5 Ibid., p. 5.
