Antisemitism in the guise of Anti-Nazism: Holocaust Inversion in the UK during Operation Protective Edge

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> Antisemitism has returned in the guise of anti-Nazism (Anthony Julius, 2010: 508).

Introduction

This chapter is a case study of the moral disease of Holocaust Inversion, i.e. 'the portrayal of Israel, Israelis and Jews as modern-day Nazis, and Palestinians as the new Holocaust-era Jews' (Gerstenfeld 2007a). Its focus is the presence and meaning of the Inversion in the United Kingdom during Operation Protective Edge, the 51-day conflict between the state of Israel and the military forces of Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad in summer 2014.[1]

The theoretical resources – and, unavoidably, the rather specialised language – developed by Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe are used to read the Holocaust Inversion as the heart, the 'nodal point' of a distinct 'discourse', or way of talking about Israel, which I call 'antisemitic anti-Zionism' (Johnson 2015b).[2] Inversion-talk establishes a 'chain of equivalence' between 'Nazi' and 'Zionist' and, in so doing, twists the meaning of 'Israel' and 'Zionism' out of shape until both become fit receptacles for the tropes, images and ideas of classical antisemitism. In short, the Inversion means that what the demonological Jew *once was* in classical antisemitism, the demonological Jewish State *now is* in anti-Semitic anti-Zionism: evil; uniquely malevolent; vampiric, full of blood lust; the all-controlling but hidden hand in global affairs; the obstacle to a better, purer, more spiritual world; uniquely deserving of punishment (Wistrich 2012; Johnson 2015a; Johnson 2015b; Hirsh 2007).

Part one defines Holocaust Inversion and explores its *ideological sources*. Part two examines the *presences* of Holocaust Inversion discourse in the UK during Operation Protective Edge, while part three considers the *meaning* of Inversion discourse, in particular whether it is merely offensive and hurtful, or also antisemitic.[3] So, ideological sources, local presences and political meanings.

Definitions and Sources

Definitions

Lesley Klaff has defined Holocaust Inversion as 'an inversion of reality (the Israelis are cast as the "new" Nazis and the Palestinians as the "new" Jews), and an inversion of morality (the Holocaust is presented as a moral lesson for, or even a moral indictment of "the Jews")'. Klaff also points out that, in an especially cruel twist of the knife, 'those who object to these inversions are told … that they are acting in bad faith, only being concerned to deflect criticism of Israel.' In all these ways, she argues, Holocaust inversion discourse *weaponise*s the Holocaust, turning it into 'a means to express animosity towards the homeland of the Jews' (Klaff 2014. See also Klaff 2013; Julius 2010:506-516; Gerstenfeld 2007a; Gerstenfeld 2007b; Gerstenfeld 2009).

Manfred Gerstenfeld argues that Holocaust Inversion is now a 'mainstream phenomenon in the European Union', extrapolating from a 2008 study of seven European countries which found high levels of agreement with the statement 'Israel is carrying out a war of extermination against the Palestinians' to conclude that 'out of 400 million citizens of 16 years and older, 150 million embrace a demonic view of Israel' (2015). In 2009, the European Institute for the Study of Contemporary Antisemitism noted the 'growing normalisation' in the UK of discursive acts 'involving the use of Nazi or related terms or symbols (Nazism, Hitler, Swastikas, etc) in reference to Jews, Israel, Zionism' (Iganski and Sweiry 2009:4), while the lawyer and writer Anthony Julius has claimed that the Inversion is now 'a reflex' in certain quarters in the UK (2010:507). Certainly, it is no longer unusual to find, in the European public square, Israel's Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu portrayed as a modern-day Hitler, or the Israeli Defence Forces as the modern-day SS. Israel's anti-terror operation in Jenin in 2002 – in which *52* Palestinians were killed, around half being combatants, as well as 23 Israeli soldiers – is routinely described as being 'just like the Warsaw Ghetto', in which approximately 300,000 Jews were murdered during the Holocaust.

In response, the European Union's European Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia (EUMC) decided in 2005 to include within its 'Working Definition' of antisemitism those several ways in which criticism of Israel can, depending on the context, be manifested as antisemitism, including the act of 'drawing comparisons of contemporary Israeli policy to that of the Nazis' (EUMC 2005).[4] Versions of the Working Definition are now used by the

European Parliament, the UK College of Policing, the US Department of State and the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (See IHRA 2016).

Sources

Holocaust Inversion discourse draws on several disparate, even contradictory, ideological sources. In each case it is possible, to paraphrase Theodor Adorno, 'to discern … a concealed and … poisonous interest' (Adorno 2005 [1951]). The Arabism of parts of the British civil service was embodied in the figure of Sir John Glubb Pasha, a man who routinely compared Zionists to Nazis and Israel to the Third Reich in mid-century (see Gerstenfeld 2009:106-7). Litvak and Webman have shown how the idea of Israelis as the new Nazis has been a theme in pan-Arabist politics since the late 1940s and early 1950s (2011). However, the most important source by far has been the left: the 'anti-Zionist' campaigns waged by the Communist bloc during the cold war were uncritical adopted by large parts of the western New Left after 1967 (Gerstenfeld 2007b, Crooke 2001). In the decade before 2014, this far-left anti-Zionism effected a political merger with Islamist antisemitism – the so-called Red-Green Alliance – creating the basis for the partial mainstreaming of Holocaust Inversion discourse in the UK.

Stalinism spread over large parts of the globe after World War Two. In the new context of cold war, the Soviet Union and its satallites organised well-funded, long-running and large-scale 'anti-Zionist' propaganda campaigns through which the global left became acquainted with the idea that Zionism was the new Nazism. Wistrich (1984) observed that by the 1980s, 'the Soviet Union … stood in the forefront of the global campaign to equate Zionism with Nazism' while Julius claims that the Inversion became 'the major trope in the 1960s and 1970s Soviet antisemitism' (Julius 2010:509). In fact, almost every idea constitutive of antisemitic anti-Zionism today, including the Inversion, was promoted by the Stalinists then: Zionism is nothing but a pro-imperialist and anti-socialist tool to advance imperialist interests in the region; Zionism is nothing but a conspiracy to covertly control the foreign policy of the USA; Zionism controls the media of every Western state and has bought the intellectuals; there is no relationship between the rise of antisemitism and the emergence of Zionism in Europe; Zionists cry 'antisemitism' to prevent criticism of Israel; Zionists have bought the opinion formers; 'Arab antisemitism' is a myth spread by Zionists; Zionism itself is responsible for all antisemitism; Judaism is a dirty religion based on violence and supremacism; Israel is a racist or 'apartheid state'; and the capstone, Zionism is itself a kind

of Nazism, the Zionists collaborated with the Nazis, and the Zionists pursue the same policies towards the Palestinians as Hitler did to the Jews (Crooke 2001).

According to Wistrich, it was the 'willingness of supposedly anti-Soviet radical leftists to swallow these made in Russia fabrications' which ensured that a demonising anti-Zionism became 'an integral part of the cultural code of many Leftist and some liberal circles' in the West (1984; see also Cohen 1984). By 2014 the Inversion had certainly been in use for at least three decades in far-left circles in the UK, as demonstrated by these cartoons published in 1982 in the hard-left *Labour Herald* newspaper and in the Socialist Workers Party's monthly magazine *The Socialist Review* (see Cohen 1984; Wistrich 2012; Cohen 2004; Gerstenfeld 2007a and 2007b).

Labour Herald, June 25 (1982) According to his biographer Andy Hosken, Ken Livingstone, who had a leading role at *Labour Herald*, insisted that this cartoon was published.
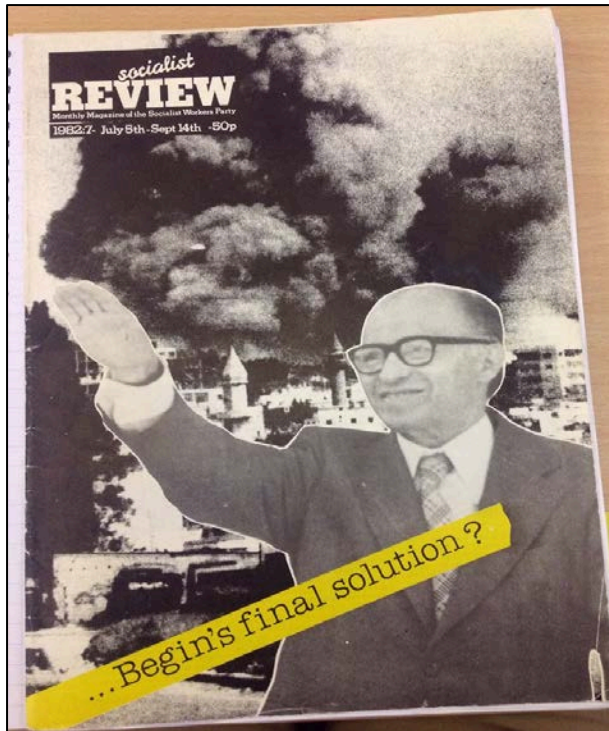
Socialist Review, 5 July-14 September (1982).

The other driver of Holocaust Inversion discourse in the UK has been the antisemitism of parts of the Muslim world, brought to the UK with post-war immigration. According to leading UK Muslim political commentator Mehdi Hassan, 'antisemitism isn't just tolerated in some sections of the British Muslim community; it's routine and commonplace.' Hassan went on: 'It's our dirty little secret. You could call it the banality of Muslim anti-Semitism' (2013). And as UK Muslims, like everyone else, live in a global media village, they absorb the ubiquitous Holocaust Inversion discourse of the wider Muslim world. The depiction of the last four Israeli prime ministers – Ehud Barak, Ariel Sharon, Ehud Olmert and Benjamin Netanyahu – in cartoons published in the Arab world, for example, have been shown to rest on the s*ystematic* use of Holocaust Inversion (ADL 2010). The cartoons reproduced below are entirely unexceptional.

Jordanian newspaper *Ad-Dustur* (October 19, 2003) depicts the railroad to the death camp at Auschwitz-Birkenau – but with Israeli flags replacing the Nazi ones.

Arab News, a Saudi-based English language daily (April 10, 2002), shows Ariel Sharon wielding a swastika-shaped axe to chop up Palestinian children.

These far-left and Islamist traditions came together in the UK in a specific political conjuncture marked by the failure of the Israeli-Palestinian peace process, the Second Intifada, the notorious anti-Semitic Durban conference, the 9/11 attacks, widespread opposition in the UK to the '9/11 Wars' in Afghanistan and Iraq, and the decay of the New Labour project. The Red and the Green, both prone to use Holocaust inversion discourse, coalesced within Stop the War, a mass movement in which the Socialist Workers Party, Counterfire and the Communist Party provided the core leadership; in George Galloway's Respect coalition, an alliance between the Muslim Brotherhood-linked Muslim Association of Britain and the Trotskyist Socialist Workers Party, and in the Palestine Solidarity Campaign, which had deep roots in trade unions, churches and humanitarian NGOs –

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themselves more influenced by the thinking of the anti-Zionist far-left that at any time in their history.

Presences: Holocaust Inversion in the UK during the 2014 Gaza Conflict

> An accurate understanding of the Nazi Holocaust is essential to grasp modern Israeli savagery towards the Palestinian people (Mike Napier, Chair of the Scottish Palestine Solidarity Campaign, quoted in Gerstenfeld 2009).

> This is what I have to live with every time Israel does something bad. Out come the swastikas, out come the pictures of Hitler, and the photos, omg, *photos* of graphic images of dead Jews set side by side with images of whatever havoc Israel has wreaked this time. It's a deliberate, systematic attempt to make people relive an experience that left millions of Jews dead and a wound on the collective Jewish memory that hasn't even begun to heal. … Hurting an entire group of people because you're so incandescently angry at a particular set of them is indirect discrimination. In short, comparing Jews, any Jews, to the Nazis is antisemitic and it's wrong. Please stop (Sarah McCulloch, a British Jew, blogging in anguish on 20 July 2014).

Operation Protective Edge triggered a spike in antisemitic incidents in the UK according to the Association of Chief Police Officers who recorded a 221 per cent rise in antisemitic hate crimes in July 2014 (APPG 2015). The Community Security Trust (CST), the UK Jewish community's monitoring organisation, recorded 314 antisemitic incidents that month, the highest ever recorded monthly total, and a further 227 incidents in August. The combined total for these two months was higher than the figure recorded for the entirety of 2013, and around one-third of those incidents involved Holocaust-related language or imagery. Statistics for the year as a whole show that 239 of the 1,168 antisemitic incidents 'employed discourse based on the Nazi period, including swastikas and references to the Holocaust' (CST 2015a:28). The CST pointed out that 'offenders will select from a range of Jewish related subjects, particularly insults related to the Holocaust or Israel, for language or imagery with which to abuse, insult or threaten their Jewish victims' (CST 2015a). Holocaust Inversion discourse was also present on public demonstrations, social media, and in elite discourse.

Public demonstrations

The academic Ben Gidley analysed several mass demonstrations organised by the Palestine Solidarity Campaign (PSC) during Operation Protective Edge. He concluded that while antisemitism was not a 'predominant presence'– indeed, 'the overwhelming majority of messages [...] were not antisemitic' – it was a feature of the street protests, especially in the form of 'a continuum of expressions emphasising the Holocaust' (2015: 6). Home-made placards and banners read as follows: 'Rabid evil mass murderers Hitlers clone', 'Stop the Palestinian Holocaust now – Fascist Israel will not escape justice'. One large banner read 'Genocide Apartheid Holocaust 2014' and 'Baby Killers' alongside a Star of David, and 'Bush and Blair are our Adolf Hitler's and Gaza is our Auschwitz'.

While these Holocaust Inversion placards were untypical, the police and other protestors *tolerated* their presence. The 2015 All-Party Parliamentary Inquiry found that 'banners and placards equating Israel with Nazi Germany … were said to have been paraded without police interruption' (2015:60). At one Gaza demonstration, well-spoken middle class protestors were very comfortable expressing these sentiments: 'I'm not condoning Hitler's actions at all, but I think it's [i.e. the conflict in Gaza] even worse perhaps', 'Hitler probably had more mercy', 'If you look at the Warsaw Ghetto, this is identical' and 'What they're doing is no different' (cited in Gidley 2015:8). During the 11 July demonstration in London, James Thring, a man of the far-right, was an object of much positive interest because of his T-shirt, which bore the words 'Auschwitz, Iraq, Dachau, Palestine' and for his placard opposing the 'Holocaust of Gaza' (Gidley 2015).

One marcher, Daniel Randall, wrote about his experience of challenging a fellow protestor who held aloft a placard bearing the message, 'RESEARCH * The Babylonian Talmud * The Protocols of the Learned Elders of Zion', alongside a Star of David dripping with blood and the Satanic number 666. Although some marchers supported Randall, he was also physically threatened and told that as the target of the placard was the Elders of Zion, i.e. Zionists not Jews, the placard could not be antisemitic. Responding online to Randall's report of this incident, 'Charli' from the Stop the War coalition said 'As for objecting to slogans equating holocausts, comparing Israeli state to the Nazi one, and star of David to Swastika – it may be uncomfortable but it has a lot of truth in it' (see Randall 2014).

Examples of Holocaust Inversion discourse on the Gaza demonstrations also included representations of the Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu as Adolf Hitler, alongside a host of 'antisemitic anti-Zionist' representations of Netanyahu: as the puppet-master of the

UK and USA; as a vampire, drinking the blood of Palestinians but never able to 'get enough'; as well as depictions of Gaza as the 'real Holocaust' or 'Our Auschwitz', of the Star of David morphed into, or equated with, the Nazi Swastika. There were even placards stating 'Hitler would have been proud'.

Other examples of street level Holocaust Inversion during the conflict included a letter sent to an Israeli organisation in London stating 'You loathsome killers, murdering b*****ds; you perpetrators of infanticide. Hope you ISRAELI NAZI WAR CRIMINALS all go to Hell when you die, you rotten to the core modern day NAZI JEWS' (CST 2015a: 27), while several synagogues in Birmingham, Liverpool and London received an anonymous letter containing an image of a swastika inside a Star of David, which read 'Israeli-Nazis have turned Gaza into a modern Auschwitz and are now annihilating its civilians without remorse' (CST 2015a:23).

Social Media

Social media was an important 'platform for anti-Semitic rhetoric' during the conflict, according to the Association of Chief Police Officers, and Holocaust Inversion was an important component of that rhetoric (APPG 2015:40). This was confirmed by Paul Iganski and Abe Sweiry who conducted a pathbreaking analysis of antisemitic discourse on Twitter for the 2015 APPG Inquiry. Using the methods of corpus linguistics they used 22 million Tweets dating from July and August 2014 to analyse a sub-sample of 38,460 that contained the words 'Israel' or 'Gaza', along with the words 'Jew', 'Jews' or 'Jewish'. Their findings suggest that Holocaust Inversion discourse is moving closer to the centre of contemporary antisemitic discourse.

> A keyword analysis … showed that in the sub-sample analysed, the spectre of Nazism, with words such as 'Hitler,' 'Holocaust,' 'Nazi,' and 'Nazis,' was present in the top 35 keywords for the downloaded sample. 'Hitler' was mentioned 1117 times; 'Holocaust' was mentioned in 505 tweets, and 'Nazi' or 'Nazis' were mentioned in 851 tweets.
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> The Nazi theme was also evident in hashtags analysed for the sub-sample, with the high frequency of the hashtags #hitler, # hitlerwasright, and #genocide.' (Iganski et al 2015)

Iganski and his colleagues found that 0.9 per cent of tweets in the corpus that mentioned Israel or Gaza in July 2014 also invoked Hitler, Nazis or the Holocaust – some 99,832 out of 11,008,511 (2015b). Using collocation analysis, they then examined a sub-sample of the twitter data set for the presence of invective and provisionally concluded that 'The largest category in relation to invective, again, was Nazi references' (APPG Report 2015:52).

Ben Gidley has argued that contemporary antisemitic invective is being shaped by social media's tendency to promote 'cross-pollination' between different ideological traditions. 'Individual posts or memes under which several tweets cluster,' he argues, 'are easily dis-embedded from their original source and travel in unexpected directions' (Gidley 2015:10). Social media is a perfect medium not just for ideological traditions to cross-pollinate but also for different national traditions and different genres of Holocaust Inversion discourse to interact and fructify each other. For example, there was a pervasive use of Holocaust Inversion in the official and semi-official organs of the Palestinian Authority and Facebook pages of Fatah (PMW 2014) both of which were promoted by UK activists. The headline 'Netanyahu is a descendant of the Nazis, worships Hitler's ways' in the official PA daily, *Al-Hayat Al-Jadida* was typical (cited in Solomon 2014). The Iranian regime's Press TV ran the headline 'Gaza massacre Israel rerun of Nazi genocide' (Press TV 2014). The snarky tweets of the US academic Steven Salaita, including one which read 'The @IDFSpokesperson receives money to justify, conceal, and glamorize genocidal violence. Goebbels much? #Gaza #GazaUnderAttack' ensured that the Holocaust Inversion went viral. A much-noted Facebook post of the influential US feminist Naomi Wolf showed images of Israelis, supposedly joyful at the air strikes on Gaza, with her gloss, 'The expressions of gloating and sadism exactly the same as those of Nazis cutting off the beards of Jews' (2014).

Elite Discourse

Holocaust Inversion began to creep into the language of some politicians. Earlier in 2014, in a debate in the House of Commons before the conflict began, the Labour MP Yasmin Qureshi said 'Israel was founded because of what happened to the millions and millions of Jews who suffered genocide … It is quite strange that some of the people who are running the state of Israel seem to be quite complacent and happy to allow *the same* to happen in Gaza' (Press Association 2014, emphasis added). During the conflict, John Prescott, Deputy Prime Minister during Tony Blair's premiership, wrote an influential and much-tweeted column on 26 July in the mass-circulation newspaper *The Daily Mirror*. Israel, he claimed, was 'acting

as judge, jury and executioner in the concentration camp that is Gaza', adding 'you would think [the Holocaust] would give Israelis a unique sense of perspective and empathy with the victims of a ghetto' (Prescott 2014).[5]

The Inversion remained an important part of the discourse of the anti-Zionist Jewish left in the diaspora after the 2014 conflict ended. On Holocaust Memorial Day in 2015 the UK group 'Jews For Justice For Palestinians' posted photographs of the Gaza conflict on Facebook with the hashtag #HolocaustMemorialDay. A photograph of razed Gazan buildings and the caption NEVER AGAIN FOR ANYONE was badged with the JfJfP logo and the #HolocaustMemorialDay hashtag. A second photograph showed a Gazan child crying over a corpse of another Gazan child with the same caption and hashtag (Gold 2015). At the anti-Israel website *Mondoweiss*, Michael Lesher compared Israel's airstrikes on Gaza to the Nazi devastation of the town of Lidice, and compared Hamas to the local Czech anti-Nazi partisans (Lesher 2015). 'Jewish elites turn the lessons of the Nazi genocide upside down,' he claimed, 'using the very methods the Nazis used to convert Gaza into a killing machine.' 'Jewish leaders were following Goering's line' he went on, concluding that the Nazis' methods had 'clearly survived the fall of the Third Reich' and were used today by Israel (2015).

Meanings: Holocaust Inversion as the nodal point of the discourse of antisemitic anti-Zionism

The *meaning* of Holocaust Inversion discourse – specifically whether it is antisemitic – is contested. A locus of the dispute was the contrasting submissions of two academics, David Feldman and Ben Gidley to the All Party Parliamentary Group on Antisemitism enquiry into antisemitism in the UK during the Gaza conflict in the summer of 2014 (Feldman 2015; Gidley 2015). The final report of the Inquiry noted delicately that 'there was some debate between those from whom we took expert testimony regarding the nuances of the definition of antisemitism when it comes to Nazi comparison' (APPG 2015:104). In short, Gidley defined examples of Holocaust Inversion as antisemitic discourse but Feldman, Director of the Pears Institute for the study of Antisemitism at Birkbeck University, did not, arguing that 'the fact that they are wrong and hurtful does not render them antisemitic' (2015:7).

Feldman advanced two reasons to deny that Holocaust Inversion is antisemitic discourse. First, that the Inversion is *banal* (my word not his): i.e. it is a 'much used rhetorical device', a *common* rhetorical trope used in many arguments about many subjects, often light-mindededly, lacking any specifically antisemitic content. Feldman cited attacks on the UK Independence Party (UKIP) as 'Nazis' as one example of banality, and Israel's leaders calling its enemies 'Nazis' as another (2015:7-8). Second, Feldman pointed out that the Inversion is not motivated by an *anti-Jewish subjectivity*. The target, he points out, was Israel, not Jews, and so *therefore* the Inversion cannot be antisemitic. Only when discourse 'endorse[s] Nazi persecution of Jews' (e.g. brandishing a 'Hitler Was Right!' placard on the high street, as at least one protestor did in 2014) did Feldman consider it antisemitic (2015:8).

However, both of Feldman's arguments – from (the presence of) banality and from (the absence of) individual subjectivity risk putting beyond our understanding much that is constitutive of *contemporary* antisemitism. His argument from banality – i.e. that because everyone plays the Nazi card about everything, it is not antisemitic when used about Israel or Jews – is innocent regarding three contexts which ensure that Inversion discourse *works* in antisemitic ways and may have antisemitic *consequences*: the Jewish context, the political context, and the discursive context.

The Jewish context

First, the language Feldman uses to describe the act of treating Israeli Jews as Nazis ('grossly misleading', 'hurtful') radically mischaracterises its object. The Inversion is obscene; it verges on the demonic in its cruelty, as it implicitly demands, as a matter of ethical obligation, no less – and this *after* the rupture in world history that was the Shoah – the destruction of the Jewish homeland as a unique evil in the world no better than the perpetrators of the Shoah. Logically, as Elhanan Yakira puts it, the discourse is, 'annihilationist'. Ben Gidley, using a more English understated style, notes that '[t]o single out Hitler and the Holocaust as the frame for understanding the actions of the Jewish state is not neutral' (2015:8). Iganski, McGlashan and Sweiry point out that 'deep wounds are scratched when the Nazi-card is played … in discourse against Jews.' The inversion is 'not simply abusive,' they add, but rather 'invokes painful collective memories for Jews and for many others' such that 'by using those memories against Jews it inflicts profound hurts' and cam lead to violence (Iganski et al 2015). In similar vein, Dave Rich of the Community Security Trust has argued that Holocaust Inversion in the UK in 2014 played on Jewish

sensibilities 'in order to provoke a reaction' adding that 'another word for that is Jew-baiting' (in Gidley 2015:8). For the CST 'incidents equating Israel to Nazi Germany would normally be recorded as antisemitic' because the Inversion has a 'visceral capacity to offend Jews on the basis of their Jewishness' and 'carries a particular meaning for Jews because of the Holocaust' (2015a:32). Yakira is particularly unimpressed by the argument from banality because it evades the 'more immoral, more significant … more effective … more widespread' character of the Inversion *when applied to Jews and the Jewish state* (2010: 121). Moreover, he points out, when it is applied to Jews, the Inversion actively seeks to 'suppress memory' and so 'can only mean eliminating identity' (2010: 121,122).

The political context

Feldman treats each example of Holocaust Inversion in isolation, missing or ignoring the all-shaping fact that the Inversion is an essential part of the political practice of a global social movement dedicated to the destruction of only one state in the world, the Jewish one. To equate this knowing, relentless, state-sponsored, well-funded political project that has stretched across several decades and several continents, and which has often been promoted by eliminationist antisemitic forces, with the semi-serious, rhetorical use of the 'Nazi' charge in other contexts, such as the criticism of UKIP, is to miss the political point quite spectacularly.

Feldman's approach brackets the brute fact that the Inversion is embedded within a world-wide anti-Israel campaign and beyond the subjectivity of this or that individual user of the Inversion, there is, as Yakira observes, an entire 'eco-system', a veritable 'international community' with a shared code, language, jargon, credo and sensibility (2010:61). This is surely why Robert Wistrich came to believe that the Inversion was 'in practice … the most potent form of contemporary anti-Semitism' (2004). A person who uses the discourse of Holocaust inversion, whatever their intentions, 'exploit[s] the reality that Nazism in the post-war world has become the defining metaphor of absolute evil' and by associating Zionism with Nazism and Israel with the Third Reich, is promoting nothing less than 'a moral obligation to wage war against Israel' as a uniquely malign force in the world (2004). To deny this the status of antisemitism is a definitional trick.

The discursive context

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The Inversion renews the core motif of antisemitism, which is that the Jews are not just Other but also malign (Gerstenfeld 2007:c). The supposed content of this Jewish malignity changes with the times and – as David Nirenberg has shown in exhaustive detail in his seminal book *Anti-Judaism: The History of a Way of Thinking* – also with the needs of the antisemites: the malign Jew as God-killer, later as Rootless Cosmopolitan dissolving every Nation, then as the world-controlling Capitalist-Bolshevik conspirator, and finally as the *Untermenschen*, the biological pollutant of all races. Except it wasn't the final form for Jews to be marked out for death. Holocaust Inversion and anti-Semitic anti-Zionism as a whole, *updates* this core motif of malignity in the era of the Jewish state: *the Jew as Zio-Nazi*. As the 2006 All-Party Parliamentary Inquiry into antisemitism in the UK put it, 'a discourse has developed that is in effect antisemitic because it views Zionism itself as a global force of unlimited power and malevolence throughout history'. When Zionism is redefined in this way, 'traditional antisemitic notions … are transferred from Jews (a racial and religious group) on to Zionism (a political movement)' (APPG 2006:17).

Holocaust Inversion discourse has a real-world impact because of the effectiveness and reach of what Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe call the 'articulatory practice' that takes it into the institutions of civil society (1985:109). The term means 'any practice establishing a relation among elements [of a discourse] such that their identity is modified as a result' (1985:105). *Articulatory:* because 'elements' from old discourses are put together creatively in new ways – as 'moments' of a new discourse (e.g. Zionism=Nazism). *Practice*: because this articulation is never a purely academic exercise. It happens, if it happens at all, out there in 'the multifarious institutions' of the real world, as Laclau and Mouffe put it: e.g. universities, publishing houses, institutions of popular culture, Churches, trades unions, political parties, and so on.

Articulatory practice takes elements from old discourses and rearticulates them as moments within a new discourse. The elements – Zionism', Holocaust', 'Israel, 'Nazi,' 'Jenin,' 'Gaza,' 'IDF,' 'SS,' 'Ghetto,' 'Concentration Camp' – are reborn in this process of rearticulation, their very meaning now secured not by their original material referent but by their place in the structure of the new discursive field that has been created.

Laclau and Mouffe's concept of 'articulatory practice' applied to Holocaust Inversion	
'Elements' in an existing discourse	**'Elements' in an existing discourse**
'Nazism'	'Zionism'
'Third Reich'	'Israel'
'Holocaust'	'Israel-Palestinian conflict'
'Untermenschen'	'Palestinians'

Moments in the new discourse of antisemitic anti-Zionism

An articulatory practice transforms 'elements' in an existing discourse into 'moments' within a new discourse, transforming their meaning in the process

Zionism =Nazism

Israel = Third Reich

Israeli treatment of Palestinians = Holocaust

Israeli Leaders = Hitler

IDF = SS

Gaza=Concentration Camp

Palestinians = Nazi-era Jews, Untermenschen

For example, the meaning of 'the Holocaust' is rearticulated by antisemitic anti-Zionism so that it no longer really comes into focus as a descriptor of the Nazi murder of the six million. Instead, it is rearticulated as a moment within the new anti-Zionist discourse. It becomes variously: a lesson, unheeded, for the Jews; what the Zionists are doing now to the Palestinians; a card played by Zionists to prevent their incremental genocide of the Palestinians being criticised (see Yakira 2010: 328-9).

No court can intervene and rule against these rearticulations. Articulatory practice decides whether the description of Israel's operations to stop rockets from Gaza as a

'vernichtungskreig' (war of extermination) becomes accepted or not. It is the clash between competing articulatory practices which decides whether or not representations of Israel as a 'Taetervolk' (a nation of criminals) bleed from the fringe to the mainstream or not. As the late theorist Stuart Hall used to put it, in the battle to construct meaning, you lose because you lose because you lose. So, when the far-left writer Tariq Ali says Israelis treat Palestinians as 'Untermenschen' (cited in Julius 2010:512) he is talking nonsense, for sure. But he knows he is not making a truth claim. He knows he is constructing what Elhanan Yakira calls a 'transhipment mechanism' i.e. an awkward but helpful term that means a 'vehicle for transferring blame and negation ... absolute evil, limitless guilt, and suffering' from the Holocaust to Israel and Zionism (2010: 66).

To understand how Holocaust Inversion functions as a transhipment mechanism, consider Tom Paulin's poem 'Killed in Crossfire', notorious for its equivalencing of the IDF and the SS. Here is the poem with its opening epigraph.

> *To me the Zionists, who want to go back to the Jewish state of 70 AD (destruction of Jerusalem by Titus), are just as offensive as the Nazis. With their nosing after blood, their ancient 'cultural roots', their partly canting, partly obtuse winding back of the world, they are altogether a match for the National Socialists (*Victor Klemperer, *June 13, 1934).*

> *We're fed this inert*
> *this lying phrase*
> *like comfort food*
> *as another little Palestinian boy*
> *in trainers jeans and a white teeshirt*
> *is gunned down by the Zionist SS*
> *whose initials we should*
> *– but we don't – dumb goys –*
> *clock in that weasel word crossfire*

When challenged by Jews about his use of the phrase 'Zionist SS' and the Klemperer quote, Paulin doubled down, accusing his critics of 'the usual cynical Goebbels stuff' (Julius 2010: 236-40). But there can be nothing gained by making a window into the soul of Tom Paulin and trying to answer the unproductive question – does Tom Paulin have an antisemitic

subjectivity? It is surely more productive to think about the structure and logic of the discourse Paulin is speaking, and which is speaking through him, and the relation of that discourse to previous iterations of Jew-hatred. When different subject positions (in the case of the poem, 'Nazi SS' and 'Zionist IDF') are symbolically located together (as in Paulin's line about the 'Zionist SS') and placed 'in opposition to another camp' (Nazis in opposition to the Jews of Klemperer's time, Israelis in oppositions to the Palestinians today) then *meaning itself* is 'transformed by their overlapping identifications', as the social theorist Anne Marie-Smith puts it, and this is so whatever the subjective intentions of the poet.

The likely consequences of Paulin's identification of 'Zionist' and 'Nazi' can be seen most clearly when viewed in the light cast by Laclau's and Mouffe's penetrating reading of the discourse of millenarian peasant movements. These rebellions established an equivalence between the new and detested urban culture of the City and Evil itself. In doing so, in establishing such a logic of equivalence (City = Evil), they opened up 'a logic of simplification of political space' (1985:130). And this simplification is so very dangerous because it produces a 'maximum separation', bringing dialogue and mediation to an end. In the jargon of Laclau and Mouffe, when the point of maximum seperation is reached, 'no element in the system of equivalences enters into relations other than those of opposition to the elements of the other system.' As they remind us, 'When the millenarian rebellion takes place, the assault on the city is fierce, total and indiscriminate' (1985:129-130). In plainer terms, *slaughter can now replace politics.*

Now consider again the 'chain of equivalence' established by Paulin's poem (Zionist=Nazi, IDF=SS). By rendering impossible any relation with Zionism except a relation of *absolute anathema*, Paulin's logic of simplification invites his reader to divide political space into two antagonistic camps. 'Israel' will now occupy the same symbolic place in her head as the City did in the heads of the millenarian peasant movement: an Evil, to be annihilated. Paulin's discourse is preparing the way for a fierce and total assault. So we should not be surprised by what Tom Paulin said to the Egyptian paper *Al-Ahram Weekly* about Israeli settlers: 'I feel nothing but hatred for them', he spat. They are 'Nazis' and 'should be shot dead' (Hall 2002).

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[1] Although the focus of the chapter is the UK, Holocaust Inversion discourse was a global phenomenon in 2014, the ADL publication *Violence and Vitriol* (2014) providing examples on several continents. For Australia, see McCann 2014; for the presence of Holocaust Inversion in US academia see Kramer (2014). The Friedrich Ebert Foundation found one in four Germans believed that Israeli treatment of Palestinians equates with Nazi treatment of Jews. At an election rally on 4th August 2014, Turkish president Erdogan compared Israel to the Nazis: 'Just like Hitler, who sought to establish a race free of all faults, Israel is chasing after the same target.' In South Africa, the ANC's the party's deputy secretary-general, Jessie Duarte, issued a statement, 'As we move towards the month of August and are reminded of [t]he atrocities of Nazi Germany, surely we must ask the people of Israel has the term 'lest we forget' lost it[s] meaning.'

[2] 'Nodal point' is a concept used by Laclau and Mouffe to refer to the central privileged signifier or reference point of a discourse. By 'discourse', I mean 'communicative action expressed in speech, written text, and visual symbols' (Iganski and Sweiry 2009:12). If every discourse 'is constituted as an attempt to dominate the field of

discursivity, to arrest the flow of differences, to construct a centre' (Laclau & Mouffe, 1985: 112) then the discourse of antisemitic arrests the flow of differences about Israel by demonising Israel – most obviously, as a Nazi state. The discourse sits alongside a *programme* to abolish Israel and a *movement* to exclude Israel from the economic, educational and cultural life of humanity. Discourse, programme and movement should be considered as one,

[3] It is impotent to register that discourse demonising Israel has *minority* support in the UK. A 2014 report by Jewish Policy Research (JPR), *The Exceptional Case? Perceptions and experiences of antisemitism among Jews in the UK*, noted that, 'Britain remains a considerably more tolerant and accepting environment for Jews than certain other parts of Europe' (Staetsky and Boyd, 2014:5). An online poll carried out by Populus, 17-18 October 2015, with a sample size of 2,007, established that public opinion is more balanced and stable than the activist noise would suggest, with 19 per cent of the public feeling warm towards Israel, and 20 per cent feeling warm to the Palestinians.

[4] The story of the EUMC Working Definition and the partly successful assault upon it by the global anti-Zionist movement is told by David Hirsh (2013).

[5] A crop of members of the British labour party were suspended in 2016, in many cases for the use of Holocaust Inversion on social media. Examples include Vicki Kirby, a former Labour parliamentary candidate who tweeted that Hitler a 'Zionist god'; Shah Hussain, a councillor from Burnley was suspended for allegedly tweeting at Israeli footballer Yossi Benayoun, 'You and your country doing the same thing that Hitler did tour [sic] race in ww2.'; Miqdad Al-Nuaimi, a Newport councillor was suspended for sending a series of tweets comparing Israel to the Nazi party and suggesting Jews have the 'same arrogant mentality as the Nazis.' (On the Labour Party's descent into antisemitic anti-Zionism see Johnson 2016)