

## Editorial

Britain's Community Security Trust (CST) has reported an all-time record number of antisemitic incidents for 2019.<sup>1</sup> The single biggest contributing factor was online antisemitism. This saw an increase of eighty-two percent when compared to 2018. More specifically, CST recorded 697 online antisemitic incidents in 2019. This figure amounted to thirty-nine percent of the overall total of 1805. Most of the online incidents took place on social media. As the CST noted, these figures are likely to underestimate the scale of the problem. This is because targeted campaigns directed at individual victims often involve dozens of social media accounts and hundreds or even thousands of tweets, images, or posts. Despite this, each campaign of this type is recorded by CST as a single incident.<sup>2</sup>

Meanwhile, in the United States, there has been a sharp increase in the online activities of far-right and neo-Nazi groups. This has spilled over into the public domain and led to an increase in antisemitic incidents. These included letters sent to several synagogues declaring that Jews are "fake" and part of the "Synagogue of Satan," and Swastikas and antisemitic graffiti painted on public buildings and private homes.<sup>3</sup>

To acknowledge the increase and impact of online antisemitism, this issue of the *Journal of Contemporary Antisemitism* begins with a section on the theme of 'Antisemitism and Digital Media.' In "Antisemitism in the Urban Dictionary and the Responsibilities of Online Publishers," Daniel Allington uses the popular *Urban Dictionary* website as a case study in how white supremacists and other bigots have been able to exploit "web 2.0" sites as a vehicle for hate speech, propaganda, and disinformation. As he shows, "lexicographic bigotry" is not new—but the unwillingness of website owners to accept their responsibilities as publishers has created unprecedented opportunities for

the promotion of ethnic and racial stereotypes, conspiracy theories, and Holocaust denial, as well as for the normalisation of ethnic and racial slurs. Allington suggests that tech companies may be persuaded to take their responsibilities more seriously through commercial pressure—for example, from customers and advertisers who do not wish to be associated with hateful content. Dr Daniel Allington is a Senior Lecturer in Social and Cultural Artificial Intelligence at King's College London.

In "Likes for Antisemitism: The Alternative für Deutschland and its Posts on Facebook," Monika Hübscher considers the ways in which four leading representatives of Germany's far right populist party, Alternative für Deutschland, discuss antisemitism, the Holocaust, and National Socialism on Facebook. Hübscher argues that Facebook not only provides political parties with a communications medium through which to reach the public, but also provides them with feedback that "teaches" them how to communicate their messages more successfully. Because minimisation of Holocaust guilt appears to be a part of the Alternative für Deutschland's agenda, Facebook thus plays a role in exacerbating the dissemination of anti-Jewish content online. Ms Hübscher is a PhD Fellow at the Haifa Center for German and European Studies & Foundation pour la Mémoire de la Shoah, University of Haifa.

In "What Others Dare Not Say: An Antisemitic Conspiracy Fantasy and its YouTube Audience," Daniel Allington and Tanvi Joshi survey the historical links between conspiracy theory, antisemitism, and political extremism before turning their focus to a very successful video by leading British conspiracy theorist, David Icke. As they show, the video itself is both deeply antisemitic and deeply derivative, recycling both form and content from a century

of anti-Jewish propaganda. But, far from being rejected by the active audience of YouTube users, the video was enthusiastically embraced, eliciting thousands of comments, many more of which appear to have been supportive than critical—and a great many of which expressed antisemitic views of their own. Worse, supportive and antisemitic comments appear to have received systematically more “likes” than neutral or critical comments, pushing them higher up the rankings and providing the video with the stamp of community approval. Tanvi Joshi is an independent scholar.

The themed section on ‘Antisemitism and Digital Media’ closes with a research note by Keith Kahn-Harris entitled “Inundated with Online Antisemitism.” Here Kahn-Harris speculates that online technology has produced expressions of antisemitic abuse that, whether or not they are novel in content, do have novel experiential consequences. He argues that online platforms have broadened, although not necessarily deepened, the Jewish experience of antisemitism. They have also multiplied the opportunities for Jewish action against antisemitism. The rapid growth in “decentralized” Jewish activism against antisemitism raises questions about the efficacy of such activism as well as the consequences for Jews who engage in it. He characterises such forms of activism as “nascent, ill-understood, and imperfectly mapped,” identifying the experience of engaging with the world of online antisemitism as particularly under-researched. Kahn-Harris speculates that “exhaustion” has become a key experiential component of the contemporary Jewish experience of antisemitism and the fight against it. Dr Kahn-Harris is a senior lecturer at the Leo Beck College in London and runs the European Jewish Research Archive at the Institute for Jewish Policy Research. His latest book is *Strange Hate: Antisemitism, Racism and the Limits of Diversity* (London: Repeater, 2019).

The remaining section of the journal offers articles on a variety of themes, the first of which is “Antisemitism on College Campuses: A Phenomenological Study of Jewish Students’

Lived Experiences” by Paulina Flasch. This is a timely piece: a recent article by an undergraduate student at an American university details the ways in which campus antisemitism has evolved to take on ever more threatening forms, from ultra-right white nationalism, through Holocaust denial and most recently, to antizionism and the BDS movement. While antizionist and BDS activists claim to be opposed to Israel rather than to Jews, their behaviour on campus tells a different story, as it often involves the denigration of students in relation to their Jewish identity.<sup>4</sup> In this context, Flasch’s article presents a phenomenological study designed to investigate college students’ experiences of being Jewish on college campuses in the United States during the 2016–17 academic year. Her findings indicate that students experienced a combination of internal, external, and existential processes. Internal processes included themes relating to (1) expressing or hiding Jewish identity and (2) invisible minority, while external experiences included themes related to (a) support and safety, (b) lack of support, (d) antisemitism and prejudice, and (c) Israel-related antisemitism on campus. Dr Flasch is Assistant Professor of Professional Counseling at Texas State University.

Meanwhile, in Europe, the antisemitism situation is no better, whether on or off campus. During a speech in Paris on February 20, 2019, President Emmanuel Macron described the resurgence of antisemitism as probably unprecedented since the end of World War II. Almost exactly a year later, at a conference of the European Jewish Association (EJA) in Paris, Mayor Anne Hidalgo reminded those gathered that, “We cannot be disconnected from the history of antisemitism and we should be very careful of hate speech. Attacking Jews is an act against humanity. There is a new form of antisemitism which is anti-Zionism.”<sup>5</sup> Indeed, as our next author Günther Jikeli indicates, antisemitic harassment, insults, and in some cases, violence have become an everyday experience for many Jews in France. His article, “Assessing the

Threat of Anti-Semitic Harassment and Attack in France - Paris in Focus,” uses relevant surveys and incident reports to assess the threat of antisemitism in France with a focus on Orthodox Jews in Paris. It shows that threats and experiences of antisemitism vary greatly, depending on a number of factors, such as age, gender, visibility of Jewishness in public, place of residence, and workplace or school (for children). Dr Jikeli holds the Erna B. Rosenfeld Professorship at the Institute for the Study of Contemporary Antisemitism, Indiana University and is associate professor of Germanic Studies at Indiana University. His latest edited volume (with Olaf Glöckner), *Das Neue Unbehagen. Antisemitismus in Deutschland Heute*, was published in 2019 by Olms Georg AG, Hildesheim.

Although it is vitally important to study antisemitism as it manifests within individual countries, it remains fundamentally a transnational phenomenon. In “The Contemporary Globalization of Political Antisemitism: Three Political Spaces and the Global Mainstreaming of the ‘Jewish Question,’” Lars Rensmann analyzes what he calls today’s “globalization of political antisemitism.” His article focuses on three political spaces in which the ‘Jewish question’ has lately been re-politicized on a global level by Islamism, the radical right, and the radical left. Contextual and other political differences notwithstanding, his empirical analysis of political discourses shows that modernized forms of antisemitism play a relevant role among these different political actors and in the public environments in which they operate. In all cases, there is an increased use and acceptance of anti-Jewish conspiracy myths, Holocaust denial or relativization, and hatred of Israel. Rensmann argues that this globalized resurgence also contributes to a general normalization of anti-Jewish resentments. Dr Rensmann is Professor of European Politics and Society at the University of Groningen in the Netherlands, where he also serves as the Director of the Centre for the Study of Democratic Cultures and Politics and as Chair of the Department of European Languages and

Cultures. His most recent book is *The Politics of Unreason: The Frankfurt School and the Origins of Modern Antisemitism* (New York: SUNY Press, 2017).

Although months have passed since the United Kingdom’s General Election on December 12, 2019, British Jews are still breathing a collective sigh of relief at Jeremy Corbyn’s failure to be elected Prime Minister. Indeed, the 2019 General Election was preceded by several years of anxiety within the UK Jewish community and outside it, centred around the assertion that Mr Corbyn and his party posed an “existential threat” to British Jewry. As the debate over Labour and antisemitism has focused on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the treatment of Jews within Labour, and the activities of prominent Labour figures and the Labour Party’s institutional response, the exact nature of the “existential threat,” and how it would manifest has been difficult to quantify. Jack Staples-Butler’s research note, “Did a Corbyn-led Government Pose an ‘Existential Threat’ to Jewish Life in the UK?” adopts a new approach to the subject, going beyond the familiar ground of Corbyn’s association with antisemitic groups and individuals to carry out a comparative analysis of three “revolutionary” states which have strongly influenced Corbyn and his followers: Cuba, Venezuela, and Iran. Staples-Butler argues that the “anti-imperialist” states celebrated both by Corbyn and by parts of the wider British Left enacted social, economic and foreign policies which destroyed Jewish communities despite the absence of the methods of the traditional antisemitic Right. Mr Staples-Butler is an independent scholar.

This issue of the Journal features a new section called ‘Controversy,’ which is intended for papers whose purpose is to expose or respond to debates in academia. Our first paper in this category, “*The Journal of Genocide Research* Featured Still Another Minimization of the Holocaust,” is by Israel Charny. The *Journal of Genocide Research* came under scrutiny in two research studies of readers who are

genocide professionals, and a small number of students of Holocaust and Genocide courses. These studies evoked considerable controversy. Charny's essay was written in response to a subsequent multi-author review in the book forum of the *Journal of Genocide Research* of two books on the Holocaust, and argues that both the review essay and the books under discussion are minimizations of the significance of the Holocaust. Prof. Charny is the Executive Director of the Institute on the Holocaust and Genocide in Jerusalem.

We are also pleased to offer four book reviews in this issue of the journal. The first, by Daniel Allington, reviews the book *Bad News for Labour: Antisemitism, the Party, and Public Belief* by Greg Philo and colleagues. This book is marketed as “[a] ground breaking study on the reality behind the headlines on antisemitism and the British Labour Party”. However, as Allington shows, the book fails to engage with (and for the most part fails even to acknowledge) the existing mass of scholarship on this topic, giving the impression of having been put together in a hurry.

The second, by Carlota Matesanz Sanchioli, reviews the novel *Speechless* by Rivka Bond. *Speechless* tells the story of Chaya, a teenage girl from London, who describes in her diary the changes in her life amidst the increasing number

of antisemitic incidents in London, along with the worrying prospect of the Social Justice Party (SJP) winning the upcoming election. Ms Sanchioli is a PhD candidate in Contemporary History at the Complutense University, Madrid.

Third, Colin Shindler reviews *From Antisemitism to Anti-Zionism: The Past and Present of a Lethal Ideology*. This is a series of essays by numerous academics edited by Eunice G. Pollack. It examines the evolution of antisemitism in the recent past and its manifestation in contemporary times, in particular the crossing over of antizionism into antiemitism. Prof. Shindler is Emeritus Professor at SOAS, University of London.

Finally, Alexander Traum reviews *How to Fight Antisemitism* by *New York Times* columnist, Bari Weiss. In this her first book, Weiss focuses on the three manifestations of contemporary antisemitism: on the Right, on the Left, and Radical Islam. According to Traum, Weiss “brilliantly stares down contemporary antisemitism using a trifocal lens” and successfully awakens people of goodwill to the threat of antisemitism; and offers a road map of how to beat it. Mr Traum is an independent scholar.

My team of dedicated editors and I hope very much that you will enjoy reading this issue of the *Journal of Contemporary Antisemitism*.

**Lesley Klaff**  
Editor in chief

## REFERENCES

- 1 Dave Rich, *CST Antisemitic Incidents Report 2019*, CST, <https://cst.org.uk/news/blog/2020/02/06/antisemitic-incidents-report-2019>, 1.
- 2 Ibid., 3–4.
- 3 Souad Mekhennet, “As Anti-Semitic Incidents Rise in U.S., Group Launches New Online Tracking Tool,” *The Washington Post*, February 1, 2020.
- 4 Eitan Fischberger, “Antisemitism on the College Campus is Evolving,” *JNS*, January 15, 2020, <https://www.jns.org/opinion/anti-semitism-on-the-college-campus-is-evolving/>.
- 5 Michael Curtis, “Conquering Antisemitism,” *New English Review*, February 29, 2020.