

Working Paper

Glossary

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Glossary

Antisemitism is a complex, multifaceted belief system characterised by the hatred of Jews; throughout its over 2,000 years of existence, it has constantly mutated and adapted to circumstances.¹

In research, four main forms of antisemitism are usually mentioned: Christian anti-Judaism;² racial antisemitism that emerged in the 19th century, grounded in pseudo-scientific racial doctrines and conspiracy theories about Jewish power;³ secondary antisemitism, which developed in the post-Nazi Europe as a “defence mechanism” against guilt for the crimes of the Holocaust;⁴ and Israel-related antisemitism.⁵

A **stereotype** generalises an ascribed characteristic to all members of a certain group. If a stereotype is associated with moral evaluations – and this is usually the case – corresponding attitudes towards the members of the outgroup are formed. If the evaluations are negative, we speak of prejudice.⁶

¹ Wistrich, Robert, 1992: *Antisemitism: The Longest Hatred*.

² Nicholls, William, 1993: *Christian Antisemitism. A History of Hate*.

³ Poliakov, Leon, 1991: *Histoire de l'antisemitisme. Vol. 2 : L'Âge de la Science*; Taguieff, Jean-Pierre, 2002: “L'invention raciale du Juif”, *Raisons Politiques* 5 (1); Teicher, Amir, 2020: *Social Mendelism. Genetics and the Politics of Race in Germany*.

⁴ Rensmann, Lens, 2017: “Guilt, Resentment, and Post-Holocaust Democracy: The Frankfurt School's Analysis of Secondary Antisemitism in the Group Experiment and Beyond”, *Antisemitism Studies* 1 (1).

⁵ Rosenfeld, Alvin, 2019: *Anti-Zionism and Antisemitism. The Dynamics of Delegitimization*.

⁶ Bar-Tal, Daniel and Graumann, Carl (et al.), 1989: *Stereotyping and Prejudice*.

Antisemitism is supported by a series of stereotypes, which represent a combination of two concepts (e.g. JEWS + POWER).⁷ Concepts are mental units in our cognition that represent the basic elements of our thinking.⁸

The **basic concept** of antisemitism is the idea of JEWS AS THE OTHER.⁹ Throughout history, different social and political groups (the emergent Christian faith, ethno-nationalism in the 19th century, certain strands of radical socialism) attempted to construct a sense of identity from the implacable opposition to the Jews. Depending on how the respective ingroup was defined, Jews could be portrayed as godless heretics, as stateless nomads or as exploitative plutocrats. This is also called a **construction of difference**, in which the Other (Jews in this case) is positioned as the representation or personification of the polar opposite of one's own values and position. "The Jew" functions therefore as the embodiment of a phantasmagorical "otherness" – an almost mythical figure, a folk devil that bears no resemblance to real, living Jewish people, and whose only purpose is to reinforce the sense of identity of the ingroup.¹⁰

This basic idea is the starting point for all the other concepts or stereotypes that ultimately constitute the imaginary world of antisemitism.

In religious antisemitism, Jews are accused of attacking the "Christian" body both symbolically – through the founding murder of Christ and rituals of host desecration – and physically – through the blood libel accusation or well-poisoning. In racial antisemitism, it is the *ethnos*, the race or the state that is threatened by the dissolving influence of cosmopolitan Jewish elites who control the economy, the press and the corrupt political class. Secondary antisemitism also perceives Jews as a minority whose constant admonition stifles national pride and identity. Israel-related antisemitism draws on almost all previous topoi, but adds a few new ones (such as accusations of genocide or apartheid) to the repertoire.

Jews can receive the most diverse and also contradictory attributions. For example, depending on one's own political position, they can be regarded

⁷ Since stereotypes are phenomena that exist on the conceptual, i.e. mental, level and can be reproduced using language, stereotypes are given in small caps in accordance with the conventions of cognitive linguistics.

⁸ Schwarz-Friesel, Monika & Reinharz, Jehuda, 2017: *Inside the Antisemitic Mind: The Language of Jew-Hatred in Contemporary Germany*.

⁹ Lyotard, Jean François, 1990: *Heidegger and the Jews*.

¹⁰ Holz, Klaus, 2005: "Die Gegenwart des Antisemitismus. Islamische, demokratische und antizionistische Judenfeindschaft"; Zukier, Henry, 1996: "The Essential 'Other' and the Jew: From Antisemitism to Genocide", *Social Research* 63 (4).

as the force behind communism, or the secretive masterminds of global capitalism.

Continuities of stereotypical attributions can be identified when the stereotype of the Jewish banker becomes that of a “Jewish lobby” seeking control of national governments – or the imagined power and influence of the Israeli state across the whole world. In the same way, the idea of Jewish greed was able to adapt itself after 1945 into the claim that Jews had turned Holocaust memory into a profitable industry. And the image of Jewish wickedness and immorality was updated in the context of an awareness of both Nazi and colonial crimes, in such a way that the nature and actions of the Jewish state were equated with these historical atrocities.

In our research project, we start from a **conceptual repertoire** that includes both classic and updated **stereotypes** and more recent **analogies** (Nazism, colonialism, apartheid), as well as **discourse practices** – such as relativisation or even denial of the Holocaust or of antisemitism, or delegitimization of the state of Israel. We have mapped this repertoire based on the findings of research into antisemitism and adapted to the discourses and nuances identified online.

We use the **IHRA definition of antisemitism**.¹¹ However, this definition remains too general on the content level and must be operationalised for corpus analyses such as the one we are conducting in this project.

In addition to the conceptual dimension, the **linguistic dimension**, which is ignored by the IHRA definition, is decisive. How is a stereotype reproduced? By means of puns, metaphors and jokes? What is the chain of inferences according to which a certain conceptual meaning can be derived from an utterance?

For example, in our first Discourse Report we examined web debates on the Jewish investor and philanthropist George Soros and found that users suggestively tweak his name via puns such as “\$oro\$” or use metaphors to accuse him of greed or wealth (“[his eye bags] are money bags”). Users also resort to coded language that requires prior historical or cultural knowledge: an implicit death wish such as “Someone needs to give Soros a ‘shower’” functions as an allusion to the gas chambers. Our analysis explores the ways that writers use so-called indirect speech acts such as rhetorical questions (“Did he pay for the interview?”) or irony (“Yes, Jews have always been so charitable;”). In relation to Israel, for example, is the Nazi analogy realised via a direct comparison (along the

¹¹ [What is antisemitism? | IHRA](#).

lines of *X is like Y*), or via an allusion in which a word or phrase is used outside of its proper historical context in order to reinforce a point context (as in “the final solution of the Palestinian question”)?¹²

This linguistic dimension represents the second level of our work. In order to accurately map the distribution and the latest trends of antisemitic discourses in digital spaces, we need to better take into account indirect or coded verbalisations of stereotypes, analogies or speech acts such as calls for violence or murder. The first corpus analyses in the three country teams of the project already highlighted that only a small part of web comments are characterised by clear references to antisemitic concepts. The majority of utterances rely on implicitness, to a greater or lesser degree, requiring the use of coded language, context and world knowledge.¹³

Furthermore, these language-related analyses can be used to draw conclusions about how socially accepted the respective concept is in a language community. Processes of “mainstreaming” of extremist ideas have increasingly been the focus of inquiry in academic literature. With ample data from real-world internet debates, our research tracks how antisemitic concepts – from conspiracy theories to various analogies such as Nazi or apartheid comparisons – have to navigate and “negotiate” around social norms, using euphemisms, dogwhistles and implicitness. But they can secure acceptability in discourse, at which point they will appear in much more direct, explicit utterances, without fear of sanctions. What forms of justification and reinterpretation can be discerned? Discourse is also dynamic: how are stereotypes grouped together? Do certain concepts merge and evolve?

These considerations are not only important with regard to the language used, but also of images and/or **text-image relations**, known as multimodal units. Imagery of all kinds plays an increasingly important role in web communication in particular and is taken into account in our detailed analyses of comment sections.¹⁴

¹² Becker, Matthias J., 2021: *Antisemitism in Reader Comments: Analogies for Reckoning with the Past*.

¹³ Becker, Matthias J. & Troschke, Hagen, 2022: *How Users of British Media Websites Make a Bogyman of George Soros*.

¹⁴ See Machin, David and Van Leeuwen, Theo, 2016: “Multimodality, politics and ideology”, *Journal of Language and Politics*, 15(3); Mohit Chandra and Dheeraj Pailla (et al.), 2021: “Subverting the Jewtocracy: Online Antisemitism Detection Using Multimodal Deep Learning” in 13th ACM Web Science Conference 2021 (WebSci ‘21). Association for Computing Machinery, New York, NY, USA, 148–157. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1145/3447535.3462502>.

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