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The Fight against Antisemitism and the Iranian Regime: Challenges and Contradictions in the Light of Adorno's Categorical Imperative

I Categorical Imperatives

The purpose of a critique of antisemitism is to disable it and to decipher it through a critique of ideology. Any reconstruction of the mentality of the antisemite, however trenchant, and any account of the history of antisemitism, however comprehensive, ends up in stunned amazement at the projective madness of the Jew-hatred that one is committed to countering at the practical level. As Maximilian Gottschlich put it: “when all is said and done, there is only one serious motive for concerning oneself with antisemitism: to resist it.”¹ However, if we wish to resist it without illusions, a critical reconstruction of the antisemitic mentality is essential.

In some established academic schools of thought, the impression is given that antisemitism is a result of a lack of knowledge about Jews, Judaism, or the Jewish state. I think that this idea is not only wrong but also underestimates the problem. Were it correct, the situation would not be nearly so bad and could be easily addressed, for example, through meetings between Jewish and non-Jewish young people, synagogue open days, and study trips to Israel. Of course, all these things should be done; however, they will not banish antisemitism, because it is a comprehensive worldview of a delusional-projective kind. Instead of downplaying antisemitism as mere prejudice, we have to decipher it through a critique of the “antisemitic society,” as Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer put it in their *Dialectic of Enlightenment*.²

Anti-Jewish hatred must be viewed in the light of the basic constitution of this society. Antisemitism is not an anthropological constant but an ever-changing, delusional reaction to the historically existing society. A developed critique of antisemitism must, unlike a traditional theoretical approach, feel itself ob-

1 M. Gottschlich, *Die große Abneigung. Wie antisemitisch ist Österreich? Kritische Befunde zu einer sozialen Krankheit* (Wien: Czernin, 2012), 9.

2 T. W. Adorno and M. Horkheimer, *Dialektik der Aufklärung: Philosophische Fragmente* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1997), 209.

liged to offer “a single existential judgement.”³ From this point of view, the anti-semitism of the twentieth and twenty-first century is simply the epitome of anti-emancipatory ideology, in which hatred of enlightenment, self-awareness and freedom are combined.

Modern antisemitism is essentially a reaction to an uncomprehended, fetishistic, and self-mystifying capitalist society. The urge for a delusional concretization of abstraction—which seems to me to be one of the decisive elements of antisemitism—is inherent to modern capitalist society.⁴ The task of any materialist critique of antisemitism is to make visible the connection between the antisemites and the society that produces them. At the same time, however, we must make it clear that this connection exculpates neither the antisemite nor the society.⁵ Even in such an unfree society, individuals who decide to engage in hatred and violence against Jews are responsible for their decisions and must be held accountable for them.

Antisemitism is a regressive revolt against the global principle of subject-less rule and an abstractness of the economy and politics that is perceived as a burden and a threat. Understood in this way, antisemitism is a basic ideology of a capitalist society that produces its own negation, both positively and negatively. The critique of the fetishism and mystification of capitalist society developed in Karl Marx’s critique of political economy is of decisive importance for the critique of this ideological worldview. The conceptual sharpness of the developed critique of political economy is necessary in order to prevent or at least decisively impede the mutation of economic criticism into persecutory resentment.⁶

A critique of antisemitism must show that it is not simply a form of racism directed against Jews. This does not mean that it must be fought more than racism. But it does mean keeping in mind the different modes of operation of racism and antisemitism in order to be able to combat them more effectively. Racism expresses a demarcation from “those of lesser worth.” The victims of racism are reproached not for their superiority but for their inferiority. Racism biologizes historically and currently existing differences of productivity; it is directed at the powerlessness of the racially classified.⁷

3 M. Horkheimer, *Traditionelle und kritische Theorie: Fünf Aufsätze* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 1995), 244.

4 Cf. M. Postone, *Anti-Semitism and National Socialism* (London: Chronos, 2000).

5 Cf. G. Scheit, *Suicide Attack: Zur Kritik der politischen Gewalt* (Freiburg: Ça Ira, 2004), 14.

6 Cf. S. Grigat, *Fetisch und Freiheit: Über die Rezeption der Marxschen Fetischkritik, die Emanzipation von Staat und Kapital und die Kritik des Antisemitismus* (Freiburg: Ça Ira, 2007), 273–81.

7 Cf. J. Bruhn, *Was deutsch ist: Zur kritischen Theorie der Nation* (Freiburg: Ça Ira, 1994), 77–110.

Antisemites are secretly aware of the vulnerability of the Jews, which enables a one-sided onslaught on them—at least prior to the establishment of Israel. However, they imagine their prospective victims, in sharp contrast to the victims of racism, not as powerless, but as all-powerful. As the embodiment of abstraction, in the eyes of antisemites, Jews rule the whole world, something which, in the minds of racists, would be beyond the capacities of the victims of racism. To put it another way: nobody fantasizes about an “African world conspiracy.” Antisemites fantasize about their destruction by a superior intellect, the “masters of money” or a Jewish statehood that is deemed illegitimate. They see themselves as forestalling this imagined threat through the destruction of this abstraction in the form of the Jews, whether individually or as a sovereign political entity.

It is of the essence of antisemitism that Jews are placed in a no-win situation. Rich Jews are faulted for their success and the poor derided as scroungers. The assimilated Jew is deemed a treacherous subverter of the people, the traditionalist an incorrigible misfit. The sexually active Jew is considered a corrupter of youth, the abstinent an impotent weakling. Anything Jews do will be used by antisemites as new material for their delusions. Should a behaviour not fit into the projective imagery of an antisemite, the unexpected action will be construed as a particularly devious means of hiding the Jew’s true intentions.

For critical theory, therefore, a critique of antisemitism is concerned not with the objects, but the subjects of antisemitism: so, not with the Jews, Judaism, or the Jewish state, but with the psychic needs and the sometimes conscious and sometimes unconscious motives of the Jew-hater. In a delusional projection onto the “Jewish principle” and its supposed physical embodiments, antisemites are fighting against social and individual ambivalences, and against individual and social contradictions and crises. This seems to me to be the constant factor in the different manifestations of antisemitism.

One means for combating the above mentioned antisemitic reactions would be the mass education of thinking individuals so that they learn to deal with these individual and social ambivalences, contradictions, and crises in a mature and responsible way.⁸ However, in the critique of antisemitism, one must constantly keep in mind the “limits of enlightenment,” a phrase that not by chance was used by Adorno and Horkheimer as a subtitle for their famous essay “Elements of antisemitism.”⁹ So, wherever feasible, social relations should be established that promote an essential minimum of individual and social reflection and the formation of an effective maturity. The problem however is this: modern

⁸ Cf. T. W. Adorno, *Erziehung zur Mündigkeit* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1971).

⁹ Adorno and Horkheimer, *Dialektik der Aufklärung*, 177.

forms of socialization both *create* and *sabotage* the possibilities for the formation of such a reflective mature individuality. The aim here must be to at least preserve the possibility of counteracting the antisemitic delusions that antisemites allow themselves to be terrified by, promoting self-understanding and encouraging self-criticism. Nevertheless, to keep in mind the “limits of enlightenment” means where the above is impossible, preventing the antisemites from pursuing their goals, whose culmination is mass murder, by all available means. Indeed, Adorno himself stated that, in the face of blatant antisemitism, the “available means of coercion” should be used “without sentimentality.”¹⁰ This sentiment is true both within the framework of the nation-state and in the confrontation with antisemitic actors on the international stage.

In the face of antisemitic agitation required to produce or sustain the persecutory mentality, we are not powerless. Antisemitism can, in the last analysis, only be made to disappear through the abolition of its social foundations. “An end to antisemitism” would therefore ultimately mean the establishment of a society free from domination and exploitation in which everyone could be different without fear or pressure.¹¹ However, even in this society, the “arm of criticism and the criticism of arms,” to paraphrase the young Marx,¹² are also effective against antisemitic agitation and practice. Every action, whether political, police, judicial or even military that is directed towards the prevention of antisemitic practice and propaganda is proof that genuinely effective resistance to antisemitism is possible. However, these urgently necessary defensive measures cannot put a definitive “end to antisemitism.”

The simultaneous necessity of both a fundamental critique of society and urgent action against immediate antisemitic threats highlights the tension between the categorical imperatives of Marx and Adorno. Under the given conditions, it is urgently necessary to adhere to Marx’s demand from 1844 to “overturn all relations in which man is a humiliated, enslaved, forsaken and contemptible being”¹³ in order to maintain at least the theoretical possibility of envisaging a final end to antisemitism. At the same time, we must also keep in mind the need for “unfree mankind to arrange their thoughts and actions so that Ausch-

10 T. W. Adorno, “Zur Bekämpfung des Antisemitismus heute,” in *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 20.1, ed. R. Tiedemann (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1997), 364.

11 Cf. T. W. Adorno, *Minima Moralia: Reflexionen aus dem beschädigten Leben* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1993), 131.

12 K. Marx, “Kritik der Hegelschen Rechtsphilosophie: Einleitung,” in *Marx-Engels-Werke*, vol. 1, ed. Institut für Marxismus-Leninismus (Berlin: Dietz, 1988), 385.

13 Ibid.

witz will not repeat itself, so that nothing similar will happen.”¹⁴ That is the new categorical imperative, which, however, may fade from the memory of the past if its meaning in the contemporary context is not concretized.

II The Right and the Left

The analysis of the geopolitical reproduction of antisemitism in the form of anti-Zionism is today a central task for a critical theory of antisemitism. This was proved by the anti-Israeli mass demonstrations of summer 2014 and those accompanying the farce over the so-called recognition of Jerusalem as the capital of Israel. When, at demonstrations in Germany, Hamas and Hezbollah flags are quite openly displayed and phrases such as “Jew, Jew cowardly pig, come out and fight alone” are shouted by hundreds¹⁵ of participants without any intervention from the police, and when a leader of a NATO member country, Turkey, states that the defensive measures taken by Israel against Hamas and Islamic Jihad surpass the barbarism of Nazis¹⁶ without this having any consequences, we get an idea of the isolation of the Jewish state.

At the practical level, we must counter this isolation with educational programmes that convey a realistic picture of the Middle East conflict. In discussions about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, one constantly comes up against the assertion that antisemitism in the Arab and Islamic countries is a *result* of the Middle East conflict. Against this assertion, educational efforts at all levels must explain the extent to which Arab and Islamic antisemitism are a central *cause* of this conflict, whose course they have decisively influenced both in the past and the present.¹⁷ In the academic sphere, we need institutes devoted to the criticism of antisemitism that do not restrict themselves to historical research into European Jew-hatred but make a priority of the study of contemporary Israel-fixated antisemitism.

¹⁴ T. W. Adorno, *Negative Dialektik* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1994), 358.

¹⁵ Cf. ReDoc—Research & Documentation, Antisemitische Parolen bei pro-palästinensischer Demonstration am 17. Juli 2014, published April 27, 2017, video, 1:34, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pAHuw0tBGvo>.

¹⁶ Cf. L. Jacobsen, “Recep Tayyip Erdogan. Mit Obama redet er nicht mehr,” *Zeit Online*, July 23, 2014, <http://www.zeit.de/politik/ausland/2014-07/recep-tayyip-erdogan-tuerkei-israel-nahost-gaza-usa>.

¹⁷ Cf. S. Grigat, *Die Einsamkeit Israels: Zionismus, die israelische Linke und die iranische Bedrohung* (Hamburg: Konkret, 2014), 7–11.

Today antisemitism is in no way solely a problem relating to parties on the far right of the political spectrum, as has repeatedly become apparent in recent years. As the historically decisive protagonist of blatant antisemitism, the right has, of course, deserved special attention. It would be a grave error rightly to target implicit, secondary, and structural antisemitic arguments from the left while giving a pass to the right simply because, apart from the openly neo-Nazi groups, openly anti-Jewish statements are now rare there. Just as with the left, we must consider how parties such as the *Alternative für Deutschland* (AfD), *Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs* (FPÖ), or *Front National* (FN), without resorting to openly antisemitic arguments, nonetheless promote an antisemitic worldview in their ideology and political utterances. Of particular note here is the aggressive defence against the past that has recently been displayed within, for example, the AfD.¹⁸

Quite clearly, developments relating to antisemitism are taking place within the parties on the right end of the political spectrum on which we must also keep a close eye. If, in fact, a firmly anti-antisemitic right were to develop, this would really offer some relief to Europe's Jewish communities and would provide Israel with far greater room for manoeuvre in its European alliances.

However, the actions of parties like the AfD and FPÖ point more towards an opportunist exploitation of the theme than a serious attempt at a critique of antisemitism or—in the case of the FPÖ—a sustained attempt to face up to its own antisemitic history. In a nutshell, even though what Gerhard Scheit has aptly described as these parties' "simulation of Israel solidarity"¹⁹ is certainly better than the open hostility towards Israel displayed by sections of the left, such parties cannot be allies in the fight against antisemitism. And we should always keep in mind, that the FPÖ-nominated Foreign Minister Karin Kneissel described Zionism as a "blood and soil" ideology.²⁰

The existence of antisemitic resentment on the left is today evident and, in the light of the abundant evidence repeatedly proving the point, the persistent denial of the problem can only be seen as one of its forms of expression. Such resentment is present as a specific form of post-Auschwitz antisemitism

18 Cf. S. Grigat, "Von Österreich lernen. Die FPÖ als Vorbild der AfD und Antisemitismuskritik in Zeiten islamistischer Mobilmachung," in *AfD & FPÖ: Antisemitismus, völkischer Nationalismus und Geschlechterbilder*, ed. S. Grigat (Baden-Baden: Nomos, 2017), 9–23.

19 G. Scheit, "Eingeschrumpfter Behemoth und neue 'Souveränisten'. Über die Voraussetzungen der Erfolge von FPÖ und AfD," in *AfD & FPÖ: Antisemitismus, völkischer Nationalismus und Geschlechterbilder*, ed. S. Grigat (Baden-Baden: Nomos, 2017), 170.

20 F. Markl, "Eine Außenministerin mit fragwürdigen Ansichten," *Mena Watch*, November 21, 2017, <https://www.mena-watch.com/mena-analysen-beitraege/eine-aussenministerin-mit-fragwuerdigen-positionen/>.

in most forms of anti-Zionism. On the one hand, because of a lack of concrete hate objects, and on the other, because of the tabooing of open Jew-hatred in left-wing circles, the collective Jew, the state of Israel, is targeted. The only reason that the anti-Zionist fantasies of, and attempts at, destruction have not been realized is Israeli state power.

In the decades after 1945, it was the left that transformed the dictum “Never again Auschwitz, never again War” into the dogma “Never again War against Antisemitism.”²¹ After Israel has however been forced to do exactly that, this dogma has become one of the key rationales for the delegitimization of Zionism. This rationale leads to the absurd situation where criticism of the military assertiveness of the Jewish state is proclaimed as a lesson learned from National Socialism.

In order, however, to avoid any misunderstanding: the critique of left-wing antisemitism must not become a pretext for the abandonment of ideas of general human emancipation. On the contrary, the task is to criticize Marxism with Marx and the really existing left with the critical theory of Adorno and Horkheimer.

Central protagonists of the delegitimization of Israel come from the left wing. But on the other hand, especially in Austria and Germany, this is also true for its harshest critics. This split is also reflected in theoretical references. To put it simply: Those making reference to Critical Theory lean toward defending Zionism as a necessary response to antisemitism.²² Those who refer to post-structuralism and post-colonial theory lean towards defending the so-called “legitimate rights of the Palestinians” and attacking the legitimacy of Israel and Zionism. From the practical point of view, this requires the strengthening, and if possible, an institutionalization of academic approaches based on the critical theory tradition.

21 Cf. S. Grigat, “Delegitimizing Israel in Germany and Austria: Past Politics, the Iranian Threat, and Postnational Anti-Zionism,” in *Deciphering the New Antisemitism*, ed. A. H. Rosenfeld (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2015), 454–63.

22 For the development of a pro-Israel Left in Austria and Germany cf. S. Grigat, “‘Projektion’—‘Überidentifikation’—‘Philozionismus’. Der Vorwurf des Philosemitismus an die antideutsche Linke,” in *Geliebter Feind—Gehasster Freund: Antisemitismus und Philosemitismus in Geschichte und Gegenwart*, ed. I. A. Diekmann and E.-V. Kotowski (Berlin: VBB, 2009) 467–85; cf. S. Erlanger, “‘The Anti-Germans’—The Pro-Israel German Left,” *Jewish Political Studies Review* 21, no. 1–2 (Spring 2009); cf. R. Schlembach, “Towards a Critique of Anti-German ‘Communism’,” *Interface: a Journal for and about Social Movements* 2 (November 2010): 199–219; cf. S. Voigt, “Antisemitic Anti-Zionism Within the German Left – Die Linke,” in *Global Antisemitism: A Crisis of Modernity*, ed. C. A. Small (Leiden: Brill, 2013) 335–43; cf. J. Bruhn, “Who are the Anti-Germans?,” interview by Stephen Cheng, Ça Ira Verlag, May 2007, <http://archive.is/ZDtJl>.

If the left were to take the categorical imperative of Adorno seriously, it would have to be on the frontline fighting against the delegitimization of Israel and against the threats that are emanating, for example, from the Iranian regime and from the support for the Ayatollahs and other Islamists by European companies, politicians, and academics. Were the left to concern itself, in the tradition of Marx or, for example, Oscar Wilde,²³ with the full freedom of the individual, it would never march under the banners of Islamist terror groups such as Hamas or Hezbollah in support of the global intifada.

III The Antisemitism of the Ayatollahs

Virtually all the *topoi* of modern antisemitism, as described by Adorno and Horkheimer in “Elements of Antisemitism,” can be found in the Iranian Islamists’ ideology. In particular, the glorification of a concretely transfigured, organic, authentic, destiny-fulfilling and harmonious community seen as the opposite of a chaotic-abstract, alienated, rotten, artificial, immoral, materialist, conflict-ridden, and in the last analysis Jew-associated social model.²⁴

All this underlines the need for an analysis of the modern-regressive tendencies in Islamic societies in general and in that of Iran in particular. The time has come to write an “Elements of Islamic Antisemitism” in the tradition of the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. The first task in this respect is to decipher the antisemitism in the Islamic world as a delusional and projective reaction to capitalist modernity. Secondly, attention must be paid to the religious component, whose Islamic expression played no role for Adorno and Horkheimer. And, thirdly, we must not lose sight of the decisive role of the contacts of figures such as Ruhollah Khomeini with Nazi propaganda: in the late 1930s, the future revolutionary leader was a regular listener to the Nazi short-wave radio station, Radio Zeesen, which disseminated antisemitic Nazi propaganda in the Middle East.²⁵ From this point of view, the antisemitism of the Iranian regime is a classic example of the continuing global influence of German Nazism after its military defeat.

23 Cf. O. Wilde, *The Soul of Man under Socialism and Selected Critical Prose* (London: Penguin, 2007).

24 Cf. U. Marz, *Kritik des islamischen Antisemitismus: Zur gesellschaftlichen Genese und Semantik des Antisemitismus in der Islamischen Republik Iran* (Berlin: Lit, 2014).

25 Cf. M. Küntzel, *Germany and Iran: From the Aryan Axis to the Nuclear Threshold* (New York: Telos, 2014), 44–45; cf. A. Taheri, *The Spirit of Allah: Khomeini and the Islamic Revolution* (Bethesda: Adler & Adler, 1986), 99.

The Iranian regime's antisemitism is expressed in traditional Jew-hatred, a worldview based on conspiracy theories and projection, Holocaust denial, and hatred of the Jewish state. About ninety percent of the 100,000–150,000 Jews estimated as living in Iran in 1979 have left the country since the revolution. For the Iranian dictatorship, the Middle Eastern conflict is not about improving the lot of the Palestinians, a two-state solution or any kind of agreement or compromise but explicitly about destroying Israel. The destruction of Israel has been the official policy of the Islamic Republic since 1979. It is advocated not only by the fanatical supporters of ex-President Mahmud Ahmadinejad but also by conservatives and those Ayatollahs that the West treats as pragmatists, moderates, or reformists. In Iran, the slogan “death to Israel” has since 1979 been a staple of Islamist state propaganda. In 2012—to give just one example from the time before Hassan Rouhani became president—the Supreme leader Ali Khamenei described Israel as a “cancerous tumour that should be cut and will be cut.”²⁶ Wahied Wahdat-Hagh has aptly described the program of the Iranian regime as “eliminary anti-Zionism.”²⁷ The annihilation of the Jewish state is not mere rhetoric from the early times of the revolution but a non-negotiable doctrine.

However, the founder of the Islamic Republic, Khomeini, was not only hostile to the Jewish state, but openly proclaimed his enmity towards the Jews. He considered Islam to have been at war with them since its inception. In a classic case of projection of his own megalomania, Khomeini believed himself engaged in a struggle against an unfolding plan for Jewish world domination about which he had already fantasized in his central text, *Islamic Government*:

We must protect and make the people aware that the Jews and their foreign backers are opposed to the very foundations of Islam and wish to establish Jewish domination throughout the world.²⁸

Elsewhere he asserts:

²⁶ FARS News Agency, “Iranian MP Lauds Hezbollah’s Anti-Israel Stance,” July 24, 2013, <http://english.farsnews.com/newstext.aspx?nn=13920502000466>.

²⁷ W. Wahdat-Hagh, “Die Herrschaft des politischen Islam im Iran. Ein Überblick zu Struktur und Ideologie der khomeinistischen Diktatur,” in *Der Iran: Analyse einer islamischen Diktatur und ihrer europäischen Förderer*, ed. S. Grigat and S. D. Hartmann (Innsbruck: Studienverlag, 2008), 44.

²⁸ R. Khomeini, “Islamic Government,” in *Islam and Revolution: Writings and Declarations of Imam Khomeini*, ed. H. Algar (Berkeley: Mizan, 1981), 127.

And as you see the Jews have grasped the world with both hands and are devouring it with an insatiable appetite, they are devouring America and have now turned their attention to Iran and still they are not satisfied [. . .].²⁹

A major role in the spread of antisemitism in Iran has been played by the Persian translation of the antisemitic screed, *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*. First published in 1978, large print runs of several new editions have since been issued by official Iranian bodies, sometimes with modified titles such as *The Protocols of the Jewish Leaders for the Domination of the World*.³⁰ This modified title is in itself enough to show that the sporadic efforts by the Iranian leadership to draw a sharper distinction between Jews and Zionists have had little effect. Moreover, when Iranian propaganda talks about “Zionists” it almost always associates the term with the conspiracy theories characteristic of traditional antisemitism against Jews. In the Iranian regime’s ideology and propaganda, Zionism is attacked not as an everyday political opponent but as the root cause of virtually all the world’s problems, whose destruction would pave the way to salvation.

One tool in gaining this kind of salvation is Holocaust denial. And that is not only true for the so-called hard-liners: According to the Anti-Defamation League, Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani stated on Iranian radio that his personal researches had led him to the conclusion that Hitler had murdered only 20,000 Jews.³¹ Former president Mohammed Khatami—who to this day is regarded as a shining example of a “reformist Islamist,” and who is a supporter of the death penalty for homosexuals—positioned himself as one of the most passionate defenders of the French Holocaust denier Roger Garaudy, whom he invited to Tehran.³²

Contrary to the impression given by much of the Western media, the election of Hassan Rouhani as Iran’s president in 2013 has not led to any significant change in these respects. Since he took office, Rouhani, like his predecessors, has been a regular attender of the annual Al-Quds march in Tehran. This

29 R. Khomeini, “Speech, September 28, 1977, Shaykh Ansari Mosque, Najaf, Iraq,” in *Kauthar. Volume One. An Anthology of the Speeches of Imam Khomeini including an Account of the Events of the Revolution 1962–1978*, ed. Institute for the Compilation and Publication of the Works of Imam Khomeini, International Affairs Division (Tehran: Institute for the Compilation and Publication of the Works of Imam Khomeini, 1995), 368.

30 Cf. W. Posch, “Juden im Iran. Anmerkungen zu einem antizionistischen Brief an Mahmoud Ahmadinejad. Teil II,” *David. Jüdische Kulturzeitschrift* 84 (2010): 32.

31 Cf. Anti-Defamation League, *Holocaust Denial in the Middle East: The Latest Anti-Israel Propaganda Theme* (New York: ADL, 2001), 8.

32 Cf. D. Menashri, *Post-Revolutionary Politics in Iran: Religion, Society and Power* (New York: Frank Cass, 2001), 279.

event, initiated at Khomeini's behest in 1979, inspires worldwide demonstrations calling for the destruction of Israel. In his address to the 2013 march, Rouhani ranted about the "artificial regime of Israel"³³—thus taking up a classic theme of antisemitic anti-Zionism, in which the traditional opposition between "creative" and "predatory" capital is replaced by one between "organic," "genuine" states and "artificial entities."

On the anniversary of so-called "Kristallnacht" in 2014, Khamenei published a detailed Q&A, headed "Why should & how can Israel be eliminated."³⁴ In 2015, Khamenei re-published his four-hundred-page book "Palestine," in which he again called Israel "a cancerous tumour" and demanded its annihilation.³⁵ In 2016, the regime in clear violation of UNSC resolutions tested ballistic missiles carrying the message "Israel must be wiped out" in Farsi—and Hebrew.

Even as regards Holocaust denial, we see continuity.³⁶ At the start of 2014, Khamenei once again questioned the historical reality of the Shoah. The current President wants to tone things down in this respect and has developed a kind of (if there is such thing) "moderate Holocaust denial": when asked in an interview whether he believed the Shoah was a "myth," Rouhani confined himself to insisting that he was a politician and not a historian and so could not say anything about the "dimensions of historic events"³⁷—which is a known strategy used by neo-Nazis and international Holocaust deniers when speaking in countries where denying the Holocaust is not allowed.

In 2014, one year after the election of Rouhani, the Ayatollahs once again gave a platform to a gathering of Holocaust deniers from all over the world in Tehran. Among the participants were Italian history professor, Claudio Moffa, who was openly presented on the conference website like this: "He achieved in-

33 H. Rouhani, "Die Diplomatie der Regierung der Weisheit und Hoffnung ist die Stabilität in der Region," Official Site of the President of the Islamic Republic of Iran, November 25, 2013, <http://www.president.ir/de/72947>.

34 A. Khamenei, "Why Should & How Can #Israel Be Eliminated? Ayatollah Khamenei's Answer to 9 Key Questions," Twitter, Photo, November 11, 2014, https://twitter.com/khamenei_ir/status/53136666737717248/photo/1.

35 "Palästina aus der Sicht Ajatollah Khameneis," *Pars Today*, July 9, 2016, <http://german.iri.ir/nachrichten/revolutionsoberhaupt/item/285966-palästina-aus-der-sicht-ajatollah-khameneis>.

36 Cf. M. Mohammadi, "Iranian Holocaust Cartoon Competitions and Exhibitions: Goals, Sponsors, and Themes," May 11, 2016, <https://www.usmmm.org/m/pdfs/PoliticalAnalysisEnglishFINAL.pdf>.

37 A. Karami, "Rohani's Holocaust Comments on CNN Spark Controversy," *Al-Monitor*, September 26, 2013, <http://iranpulse.al-monitor.com/index.php/2013/09/2894/rouhanis-holocaust-comments-on-cnn-spark-controversy/>.

ternational fame through revisionist statements, in particular by the public denial of the Holocaust.”³⁸

Senior government officials attended the conference. Saeed Jalili, an unsuccessful candidate in the 2013 presidential election as well as a former chief negotiator for the nuclear program and Secretary of the Supreme National Security Council, took part as did Alaeddin Boroujerdi, the current President of the Iranian pseudo-Parliament’s Foreign Affairs Committee and Ali Asghar Soltanieh, the regime’s longstanding representative at the International Atomic Energy Agency in Vienna.

The difference from the 2006 Holocaust denial conference, when former Ku Klux Klan leader David Duke had been a guest in Tehran, was striking. While the earlier event drew condemnation from almost the entire world and attracted a great deal of media attention, the only noteworthy protest in the age of Rouhani came from ADL Director, Abraham Foxman. In October 2013, Rouhani had taken care to prevent such a conference happening shortly after his assumption of office. Back then, it would have hindered the charm offensive against the West. In 2014, however, the Iranian regime had clearly ceased to feel the need for such caution.

In 2017, according to Iran’s Press TV, Rouhani repeated one of Khamenei’s catchphrases, when he assailed Israel as a “cancerous tumour,” having previously described the Jewish state as “an old wound that has been sitting on the body of the Islamic world,” and, a year after his election, as a “festering tumour.”³⁹ In 2017 Khamenei proclaimed Western liberal ideas about equality of the sexes to be a “Zionist plot,”⁴⁰ thus demonstrating that the intimate connection between antisemitism and sexism is not the exclusive property of the European far right. Referring to Israel, he reiterated his view that, “there is no cure for the problem

38 “New Horizons: International Conference of Independent Thinkers & Artists,” New Horizon, accessed March 15, 2015, http://newhorizon.ir/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=137:joe-le-corbeau&catid=34&Itemid=31.

39 “Iran needs No Permission to Manufacture Missiles, Planes: Rouhani”, *Pars Today*, April 15, 2017, http://parstoday.com/en/news/iran-i50454-iran_needs_no_permission_to_manufacture_missiles_planes_president_rouhani; IRIB News, “مصاحبه حسن روحانی در روز قفس,” filmed August 2, 2013, video, 0:54, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OF2BBFduwQ&feature=youtu.be>; “Takfiris, Zionists Two Tumors with Same Roots: Rouhani”, Press TV, July 31, 2014, <http://217.218.67.229/detail/2014/07/29/373257/zionists-takfiris-festering-region-tumors/>.

40 L. Dearden, “Iran’s Supreme Leader Claims Gender Equality is ‘Zionist Plot’ Aiming to Corrupt Role of Women in Society,” *Independent Minds*, March 21, 2017, <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/middle-east/iran-supreme-leader-ayatollah-khamenei-gender-equality-women-zionist-plot-society-role-islamic-a7641041.html>.

that this savage and wolfish regime [...] has created except its destruction and annihilation.”⁴¹

Faced with statements of such crystal clarity, even an advocate of closer relations between the European Union and Iran like German-Iranian author Adnan Tabatabai had to admit, “that Holocaust denial remains a permanent feature of the Iranian regime” and that, in relation to Israel and Palestine, the current Iranian regime “clearly opposes a two-state solution.”⁴²

Time and again, the question arises as to what role the antisemitic ideology and hatred of Israel play in the Iranian regime’s political decision-making. The Islamic Republic’s foreign policy has from the outset been characterized by equal measures of pragmatism and destructive irrationality, and this has enabled Western observers to continually downplay the significance of the latter—the destructive fantasies towards Israel—by reference to the former. In fact, however, as Menashri puts it, “Iran’s attitude to Israel [has been] one of the rare examples of adherence to dogma.”⁴³

Representatives of the Realist school of International Relations refer to the concept of Realpolitik and conclude that it should be possible to pragmatically integrate the Iranian regime into an international or at least regional security architecture. Such conclusions overlook the fact that the Ayatollahs have seized every opportunity to expand their sphere of influence, and they also ignore the fact that, as regards the threat to Israel, pragmatism can have no meaning for Tehran other than waiting for the right moment to go on the offensive.

When Khomeini took power in 1979 in Iran, he took a purist view of foreign policy, the thrust of which was documented by one of his first prominent visitors, Yasser Arafat, who, in a festive ceremony, was given the keys to the former Israeli Embassy in Tehran after many future Pasdaran officers had received their initial military training in PLO camps in southern Lebanon. If Khomeini had had his wish, his credo that his Islamic revolution was neither “western nor eastern,” that is, neither capitalist nor socialist but some kind of an Islamic “third way,” would have been applied to the foreign policy of the newly established Islamic Republic. However, even a fanatic like Khomeini had to yield to the facts of the situation facing the regime in the first decade of its existence.

41 A. Khamenei, “The Israeli Entity must be Eliminated, Human Logic Rules,” Khamenei.ir, March 18, 2017, <http://english.khamenei.ir/news/4712/The-Israeli-entity-must-be-eliminated-human-logic-rules-Ayatollah>.

42 A. Tabatabai, *Morgen in Iran: Die Islamische Republik im Aufbruch* (Hamburg: edition Körber Stiftung, 2016), 123.

43 Menashri, *Iran*, 281.

In the current situation, many observers are once again pondering the question of how far political pragmatism might affect the revolutionary goal and whether *maslahat*—expediency over and above ideological principles or goals—a principle that the Iranian Islamists have always recognized, will ever entail a renunciation of eliminatory anti-Zionism as part of the basic core of the regime's ideology. Even a mainstream German-Austrian Iran expert such as Walter Posch accepts that there is no chance of this outcome. When it comes to Israel, *maslahat* only means that the Islamic republic is currently not looking for an all-out war with the Jewish state but prefers to support its proxies, like Hezbollah in Lebanon and Islamic Jihad in Gaza and the West Bank, with weapons and billions of dollars and tries to build up a military infrastructure in Syria. *Maslahat* means “not defeating ideology, but at most restricting its scope.”⁴⁴ Moreover, Posch clearly explains what the core of this ideology is: a “strategic vision” based on the “paradigm of the illegitimacy of the state of Israel.”⁴⁵

However, this understanding has not prevented Posch from proposing that the West works with the very same figures who have presented the “end of Israel” as a strategic goal. In particular, he advocates the establishment of relations with that very “Iranian think-tank scene” in which such strategic visions of destruction are expressed in the sober language of international relations analysis. So, the acceptance by the West of the “moderate, constructive foreign policy”⁴⁶ that Posch thinks the Iranian regime could adopt would also mean the acceptance of the “strategic vision” of the destruction of Israel and “paradigm of the illegitimacy of the Jewish state” as legitimate positions in international politics.

IV A New Anti-fascism

For Iran's government, every success in business means progress and a further step in its jihad against emancipation and enlightenment. With the pursuit of nu-

⁴⁴ W. Posch, “Dritte Welt, globaler Islam und Pragmatismus. Wie die Außenpolitik Irans gemacht wird,” *SWP-Studien* 4 (2013): 18. For further discussion of the doctrine of *maslahat* that includes the possibility for the Supreme Leader to overrule Islamic law when such action is considered necessary for the survival of the Islamic Republic, see M. Eisenstadt and M. Khalaji, “Nuclear Fatwa: Religion and Politics in Iran's Proliferation Strategy,” The Washington Institute, September 27, 2011, <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/nuclear-fatwa-religion-and-politics-in-irans-proliferation-strategy>.

⁴⁵ Posch, “Dritte Welt,” 26.

⁴⁶ W. Posch, “Mäßigung statt Neuanfang. Iran nach den Präsidentschaftswahlen 2013,” *SWP-Aktuell* 39 (2013): 1.

clear bomb technology in mind, its agenda has to be understood as a political program of annihilation. If liberal and radical leftists want to be serious about Adorno's categorical imperative, then they should do everything to prevent the Iranian regime from realizing its murderous ideology and facilitate its overthrow.

It seems apposite, and it is not by coincidence that, as the motto for the second part of his collection of aphorisms, *Minima Moralia*, Adorno quoted F. H. Bradley, "Where everything is bad, it's good to know the worst."⁴⁷ When Adorno and Horkheimer debated the necessity of a new *Communist Manifesto*, the representatives of critical theory had in mind that the critique of the late capitalist society was possible only as long as they listed "the reasons that make it possible to keep on living in the West" at the very same time.⁴⁸ The bourgeois ideal of the individual pursuit of happiness now appears to be ideological, because the capitalist mode of social relations limits its realization materially. The Islamist ideal of a "simple and just life," in contrast, solely points towards absolute barbarism. In order to grasp the distinction between bourgeois capitalist society and its negative dissolution, as it was effected by Germany's National Socialism and as it is—historical and ideological differences aside—also aimed at by Islamism, one must understand one decisive difference: a difference between a social mode of production, whose purpose is the realization of capital and where the death of a human is shrugged off as a part of the business, while having never been originally *intended*; and an economy of death that, as a paranoid reaction, originates from instrumental reason but does not coincide with it entirely, as it declares annihilation an end in itself.

The confrontation between Iran and the liberal West, and Israel in particular, represents an existential and therefore hardly negotiable conflict. It is a conflict between, on the one hand, states whose social structure systematically betrays the individual pursuit of happiness but nevertheless defends the individual against repressive collectives; and on the other hand, those powers who consider the destruction of Israel merely a prelude for turning the rest of the world into a jihadistically "liberated" hell.

Therefore, and not for bellicosity, a materialist critique in the tradition of Marx and Critical Theory must defy any kind of appeasement towards those protagonists of a barbarism that *originates* in enlightenment and the process of civilization, but is by no means *identical* to it. The fight against the Iranian regime and its allies deserves the support of anybody who is not indifferent to the ideas

⁴⁷ Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, 103.

⁴⁸ T. W. Adorno and M. Horkheimer, *Towards a New Manifesto* (London: Verso, 2010), 57.

of enlightenment and universal emancipation as envisioned by Marx and Adorno.

In the light of all this, we need an anti-fascism that opposes every form of counter-enlightenment. The currently dominant left and liberal anti-fascisms which focus on the European far right parties have to confront the question of why several thousand people rightly demonstrate regularly in Vienna against the FPÖ's Academic Ball, viewed as one of the European far right's most important networking events, but only a handful turn out when representatives of the Iranian Holocaust denier regime are welcomed by the highest officials of state with full pomp and ceremony. And why can tens of thousands be mobilized for marches against the AfD but barely a hundred when supporters of the openly antisemitic Hamas movement hold large-scale events in Berlin?

What we urgently need is a cosmopolitan critique of political Islam that is aware of global conditions and which also, of course, opposes nationalist xenophobes of every stripe. We must argue against the cultural relativism used by both the right-wing ethnopluralists and many left-wing apologists for Islam.⁴⁹ Instead, we should recall, both in our criticism of parties such as the AfD and FPÖ and the propagation of antisemitism within the main currents of Islam, the slogan raised by the tens of thousands of women who demonstrated day after day in 1979 against the imposition of the headscarf: "Emancipation is not Western or Eastern, but universal."

Against this background, in addition to the above mentioned generally accepted tasks relating to the strengthening of mature individuals and political education, we must make the following priorities in the fight against antisemitism: deciphering antisemitism from the left *and* the right; backing the overthrow of the Iranian regime; and consistently opposing all jihadist militias and supporting Israeli self-defence. In the first place, this means: The necessity to fight against European appeasement of Islamic antisemitism and against European cooperation with antisemitic regimes. Concretely that means, to mention only a few practical measures: European governments must ban and punish trade with the Iranian regime rather than promoting it as they currently do. For as long as Iran refuses to recognize Israel and massacres the opposition in the country, all EU states should break off diplomatic relations with Tehran. The Iranian Revolutionary Guards must immediately be placed on the EU's list of terrorist organizations. Here too belongs Hezbollah as a whole, and not just its military wing, in order to put a stop to its fund-raising activities in Europe.

⁴⁹ Cf. A. Benl, "Western Societies, Cultural Relativism, Anti-Zionism and the Politics of History," *Journal for the Study of Antisemitism* 7, no. 2 (2015): 145–64.

On days of remembrance, such as the 9th of November or the 27th of January, representatives of nearly all political factions in Austria and Germany do their very best to caution against and admonish anything with regard to their countries' National-Socialist past. But criticism of contemporary antisemitism in its Islamic and Iranian form hardly passes through a speaker's lips during commemoration ceremonies. Commemoration in Austria and Germany is limited nowadays to Jews that have passed away, while denying solidarity to the Jewish state facing the Iranian threat.

Let me illustrate what I mean by a purely rhetorical condemnation of anti-semitism, with reference to some of the supporters of the conference "An End to Antisemitism" in February 2018 at the University of Vienna: The fact that almost every Austrian region has sponsored the conference is unreservedly to be welcomed, but what are we to make of the fact that companies from each and every one of these same regions are currently doing business with the Holocaust deniers in Iran with public support? It is gratifying that Vienna's Mayor Michael Häupl has sent greetings to the opening of this conference, but if he is really serious about the struggle against antisemitism, why did he make a courtesy visit to Tehran in 2016? It is very good that also Austria's president Alexander Van der Bellen has sent greetings to this conference, but why then in 2017 did he meet Rouhani, who could be best described as the friendly face of terror, in New York? It is certainly helpful that the Austrian Foreign Ministry was backing the conference "An End to Antisemitism," but let us not forget that this very same Foreign Ministry has hosted Manouchehr Mottaki, who as Iranian Foreign Minister gave the opening speech to the 2006 Holocaust denial conference; or that Sebastian Kurz, when he was Foreign Minister, made a courtesy visit to Iran and that the present Foreign Ministry gave no support to the brave demonstrators who at the beginning of 2018 raised slogans against Hezbollah in cities throughout Iran at risk of their lives, while Hezbollah itself has never once merited a mention in the Internal Security Report of Austria.

So, to draw these concluding points together and once again emphasize: Taking Adorno's categorical imperative seriously today means: Giving all possible support to Israel and its armed forces in their defensive struggle against antisemitism in all its forms, while focusing criticism, in both the academic and political spheres, on the anti-Israeli resentment that is encountered, not by chance, on an especially large scale in Austria and Germany, the successor states to Nazi Germany, while also, at the same time, targeting the old antisemitism, for example of the Austrian and German fraternities. And taking Adorno's categorical imperative seriously means above all today: consistently opposing both Sunni Islamism and denying any support to the Iranian regime which, as one of the main protagonists of contemporary antisemitism, now stand on Israel's borders, in

order finally to throw this regime where it has belonged for the past forty years: into historical oblivion.

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