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9 Norwegian Antisemitism after 1945

Current Knowledge

Abstract: How did the Second World War and the trauma of the German occupation affect the extent and nature of Norwegian antisemitism after 1945? This article provides an overview of research dealing with postwar and contemporary antisemitism in Norway. Furthermore, it seeks to suggest some directions for further research. One priority, it argues, should be to analyse the development of Norwegian postwar antisemitism on a broad historical basis. Postwar antisemitism has gone through different stages since 1945. Which elements of antisemitism survived the experience of the Holocaust, which have been weakened, and which have faded away? Another important dimension for further research is the scope and development of Norwegian everyday antisemitism, as a discourse and as a form of practice. How has antisemitism been expressed outside of the public sphere, and how has this affected the Jewish minority in Norway?

Keywords: Antisemitism; anti-Zionism; attitudes; far right; historiography; Norway; post-Second World War.

The defeat of the Hitler regime in 1945 and revelations of the scope of Nazi crimes during the Second World War mark a turning point in the history of European antisemitism. Due to the experiences during the Second World War, “fascist ideology quickly became indelibly linked to savagery and extermination in the European and American public imagination.”¹ As a result, Swedish historian Henrik Bachner concludes, anti-Jewish sentiments – at least in their open, political form – were consistently rejected in the public sphere after 1945:

The culture of prejudice, which earlier was tolerated to a certain degree, was no longer accepted [*rumsren*]. Anti-Jewish and antisemitic sentiments and ideas became taboo.²

However, this public rejection of antisemitism did not lead to its disappearance as a *latent cultural structure* of stereotypes and negative representations. As has

1 Matthew Feldman and Paul Jackson, “Introduction,” in *Doublespeak: The Rhetoric of the Far Right since 1945*, ed. Matthew Feldman and Paul Jackson (Stuttgart: ibidem-Verlag, 2014), 7.

2 Henrik Bachner, *Återkomsten. Antisemitism i Sverige efter 1945* (Stockholm: Natur och kultur, 2004), 15. Translation by Simonsen.

been noted in several studies, antisemitism has continued to occur in less visible contexts, such as in everyday discourse and internal communication within distinct groups.³

What was the impact of the war and the trauma of the German occupation on the extent and nature of Norwegian antisemitism after 1945? How has antisemitism developed from 1945 to the present? Like other countries occupied by Nazi Germany during the Second World War, Norway was deeply affected by the Holocaust. Altogether, 773 Jews from Norway were deported, most of them sent to Auschwitz-Birkenau. Only thirty-eight of these deported Jews survived. In total, the Nazis and their collaborators murdered between thirty and forty per cent of the Jews living in Norway before the German occupation.⁴

This article provides an overview of existing research on postwar and contemporary antisemitism. It seeks to summarize the current state of knowledge on the scope, nature, and development of Norwegian antisemitism after the Holocaust. Furthermore, and in extension to this, it also presents some suggestions for further research.

General works

For many decades, antisemitism in Norway was explored by historians only to a limited extent. However, starting in the 1990s, knowledge of the subject has been greatly expanded. The exclusion of Jews in the Norwegian Constitution of 1814,⁵ representations of the Jew in the daily and satirical press during the first decades of the twentieth century,⁶ the debate leading up to the prohibition of Jewish re-

³ See for example Jan Weyand, “Das Konzept der Kommunikationslatenz und der Fortschritt in der soziologischen Antisemitismusforschung,” *Jahrbuch für Antisemitismusforschung* 26 (2017): 37–58. Weyand claims that a core of “der beobachteten Veränderung des Antisemitismus nach 1945 [ist]: Er wird zwar in der Öffentlichkeit skandalisiert, kann im privaten Raum aber weitgehend ungehindert artikuliert werden” (the observed change in antisemitism after 1945: Although it is scandalous in public, it can be voiced relatively freely in the private sphere). Quotation on p. 47.

⁴ On the Holocaust in Norway, see in particular Bjarte Bruland, *Holocaust i Norge: Registrering. Deportasjon. Tilintetgjørelse* (Oslo: Dreyer forlag, 2017).

⁵ The ideological background of this article of the Constitution is analysed in detail in Håkon Harket, *Paragrafen: Eidsvold 1814* (Oslo: Dreyer, 2014). An anthology in English is also published on the subject, see Christhard Hoffmann, ed., *The Exclusion of Jews in the Norwegian Constitution of 1814: Origins – Contexts – Consequences* (Berlin: Metropol, 2016.)

⁶ Lars Lien, “‘...pressen kan kun skrive ond om jøderne.’ Jøden som kulturell konstruksjon i norsk dags- og vittighetspresse 1905–1925” (PhD thesis, University of Oslo, 2016).

ligious slaughter in 1929,⁷ and the antisemitism of the fascist collaborationist party *Nasjonal Samling*⁸ are among the topics that have now been thoroughly examined. Several works have also outlined the history of Norwegian antisemitism before 1945 in a more general sense.⁹

Still, very little of this research has focused on the historical development of antisemitism in Norway *after* the Holocaust. No single work analysing the extent and development of antisemitism in Norwegian society from 1945 to the present currently exists.

The book that comes closest to being a general historical account, at least from 1945 to the mid-1980s, is the second volume of Oskar Mendelsohn's *Jødenes historie i Norge*. In this broad synthesis, Mendelsohn points to several examples of antisemitism in Norway at different times in the postwar period. Mendelsohn claims that open, political antisemitism never attained the same intensity as in Central and Eastern Europe. He also states that the conditions for anti-Jewish thought were further weakened during the postwar period.¹⁰ In *Jødenes historie i Norge*, antisemitic attitudes and actions are described as “setbacks” within the framework of a generally positive development:

But setbacks occur. Several [people] claim to recognize some elements of antisemitism or related features in statements from certain extreme political circles since the late 1960s. Also, cases of what can be called vulgar antisemitism have occurred and most likely still occur, in the form of derogatory comments and crude remarks ... They show that inherited beliefs about the Jews may still live on ...¹¹

Mendelsohn also mentions that antisemitic narratives such as Holocaust denial were common among the organized groups of former members of *Nasjonal Sam-*

7 Andreas Snildal, “An Anti-Semitic Slaughter Law? The Origins of the Norwegian Prohibition of Jewish Religious Slaughter. 1890–1930” (PhD thesis, University of Oslo, 2014).

8 Kjetil Braut Simonsen, “Vidkun Quisling, antisemittismen og den paranoide stil,” *Historisk tidsskrift* 4 (2017): 446–67.

9 See, for example, Oskar Mendelsohn, *Jødenes historie i Norge gjennom 300 år*, vol. 1 (Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 1969), 488–96 and 556–70; Terje Emberland, “Antisemittismen i Norge 1900–1940,” in *Jødehat: Antisemittismens historie fra antikken til i dag*, ed. Trond Berg Eriksen, Håkon Harket, and Einhart Lorenz (Oslo: Cappelen Damm, 2005), 401–20; Per Ole Johansen, *Oss selv nærmest: Norge og jødene 1914–1943* (Oslo: Gyldendal, 1984), and Einhart Lorenz, “Vi har ikke invitert jødene hit til landet – norske syn på jødene i et langtidsperspektiv” in *Forestillinger om jøder: Aspekter ved konstruksjonen av en minoritet 1814–1940*, ed. Øivind Kopperud and Vibeke Moe (Oslo: Unipub, 2011), 35–52.

10 Oskar Mendelsohn, *Jødenes historie i Norge gjennom 300 år*, vol. 2 (Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 1987), 364.

11 Mendelsohn, *Jødenes historie*, vol. 2, 364. Translation by Simonsen.

ling and within other right-wing circles.¹² He cites several examples in which Norwegian national newspapers, such as *Arbeiderbladet*, *Dagbladet*, *Aftenposten*, and *Verdens Gang*, took a clear public stance against antisemitism.¹³

While it is based on a huge amount of empirical material, Mendelsohn's book has several shortcomings. For one thing, the book is more a chronicle of sources than a historical *analysis*. Antisemitism is documented through individual cases, and the author makes few efforts to summarize his findings or to discuss the characteristics and functions of postwar antisemitism more systematically. In other words, the book reveals interesting empirical data and contains many historical details, but it gives no general evaluation of postwar antisemitism as a phenomenon.

As general studies of the historical development of postwar antisemitism in Norway are lacking, much of the knowledge sought has to be gleaned from works focusing on either specific political groups, topics, or individuals. In the following, I will discuss the different aspects of postwar antisemitism thematically. One subtopic is public discourse and the creation of an anti-antisemitic taboo after 1945. A second theme is the continuity of far-right antisemitism. A third theme is leftist antisemitism and anti-Zionism. A fourth topic is *contemporary* antisemitism: research dealing with present manifestations of antisemitism rather than its historical development. For all of these, I will discuss the most relevant available research and use this to try to outline the current state of knowledge.

Public discourse and everyday antisemitism

As already noted, the National Socialist policy of persecution – especially the Holocaust – led to a profound change in public discourse in Western Europe. This also became the case in the Scandinavian countries. During the first decades of the twentieth century, negative stereotypes of the Jew were to a large degree accepted within the public sphere. Both in satirical magazines and mainstream newspapers, the Jew was represented as the incarnation of capitalism, communism, and other “threatening” phenomena.¹⁴ In the shadow of the Holocaust after 1945, this culture of prejudice was no longer *salonfähig*. However, the

¹² Mendelsohn, *Jødenes historie*, vol. 2, 365–366.

¹³ Mendelsohn, *Jødenes historie*, vol. 2, 346–54, 367–68.

¹⁴ See Lien, “...pressen kan kun skrive ond”; Lars M. Andersson, *En jude är en jude är en jude ...: Representationer av “juden” i svensk skämtpress omkring 1900–1930* (Lund: Nordic Academic Press, 2000).

Holocaust experience also created an image of antisemitism as a phenomenon more or less exclusively associated with Nazism and political extremism. Such interpretations, Swedish historian Henrik Bachner states, have led to a “partial blindness towards milder forms of antisemitism, towards prejudices rooted in culture and negative attitudes passed on by broader segments of the population.”¹⁵

In Norway, the change in public expressions of antisemitism since 1945 has not been analysed in depth. Nor has the question of the degree to which everyday antisemitism survived in non-official contexts. Still, the theme has been touched upon in several works. Four of them will be discussed below.

In his book *“Jødefolket inntar en særstilling.” Norske haldningar til jødane og staten Israel*, historian Karl Egil Johansen analyses the change in attitudes towards Israel and Jews between 1945 and 2008. Johansen’s focus is primarily on discussions of Israel/Palestine, which will be analysed in detail later in this article. However, Johansen also presents material which shows how the anti-antisemitic norm affected public discourse in postwar Norway. Of particular interest is his discussion of the antisemitic wave at the end of 1959 and the beginning of 1960. Starting in Cologne, more than two thousand five hundred incidents of antisemitism were registered worldwide from December 1959 to February–March 1960. In Norway, anti-Jewish slogans and swastikas were painted at several spots in Oslo and other parts of the country. One Jewish businessman received threats by letter.¹⁶ As Johansen shows, these incidents triggered disapproving reactions in the Norwegian press, which sharply condemned both Nazism and antisemitism. The leading newspaper *Morgenbladet*, for example, stated that the mentality which had led to the Holocaust would not be tolerated.¹⁷ However, although antisemitism was universally condemned, some newspapers tended to trivialize the incidents, describing them as a form of apolitical hooliganism. “We believe it would be too wrong to ascribe too much importance to these phenomena,” the daily *Verdens Gang* stated in an editorial: “...in most cases, this seems to be brattish behaviour committed by irresponsible and thoughtless youngsters.”¹⁸

One reason for this ambiguity, Johansen suggests, was that the incidents were interpreted differently when they were committed in Norway than when

15 Bachner, *Återkomsten*, 13–19, quotation p. 14. Translation by Simonsen.

16 Karl Egil Johansen, *“Jødefolket inntar en særstilling.” Norske haldningar til jødane og staten Israel* (Kristiansand: Portal, 2008), 88–89.

17 Johansen, *“Jødefolket inntar en særstilling,”* 88–92, statement on p. 90.

18 Extract from quote, cited in Johansen, *“Jødefolket inntar en særstilling,”* 89–90. Translation by Simonsen.

they were committed in Germany. This corresponds with Henrik Bachner's research in Sweden. While the wave of incidents in Germany was more or less universally represented as a revival of antisemitism, many considered it unlikely that such incidents in Sweden could be caused by homegrown antisemitism.¹⁹ In other words, although antisemitism was condemned, it was also, to a certain extent, reduced to a German (and fascist) phenomenon.

A second relevant publication is a PhD dissertation from 2014, written by historian Jon Reitan. The main focus of the thesis is the thematization and representation of the Holocaust in Norway from 1945 to the present. According to Reitan, a national-heroic narrative functioned as a hegemonic interpretation of the Nazi era in the first decades after 1945. An unbridgeable dividing line was drawn between the "good national forces" (the resistance movement) and the un-national elements (*Nasjonal Samling*). As a result of this interpretation, antifascist norms and values were linked to the formation and reconsolidation of a postwar national identity.²⁰

Although this is not discussed in depth by the author, his empirical material clearly shows the extent to which antisemitism was associated with Nazi Germany and the Norwegian Nazi collaborators, and, therefore, described as un-Norwegian and unacceptable.²¹ This implied only limited systematic critical reflection on homegrown antisemitism in Norway before 1940. "The profound decline in culture on which the hatred of the Jews depends," *Dagbladet*, for example, pointed out in an editorial in 1947, "has fortunately not been experienced in Norway. Here, in this country, a human is still a human."²²

A third work is a 2006 master's dissertation written by historian Ingjerd Veiden Brakstad. Brakstad focuses on the description and remembrance of the Nazi persecution of the Jews between 1942 and 1948. Through this, she also highlights important material related to the perception of antisemitism during the first postwar years. Like Reitan, Brakstad notes that the rejection of antisemitism in many cases was related to "national character," a "Norwegian mentality" which had been resistant to antisemitism since the days of Henrik Wergeland.²³ Furthermore, she provides several examples of everyday Norwegian antisemitism. For

¹⁹ Bachner, *Återkomsten*, 139–40.

²⁰ Jon Reitan, "Møter med Holocaust: Norske perspektiver på tilintetgjørelsens historiekultur" (PhD thesis, Trondheim: NTNU, 2014), 99.

²¹ Reitan, "Møter med Holocaust," 99–136, esp. quotations on p. 132.

²² Quoted in Reitan, *Møter med Holocaust*, 132. Translation by Simonsen.

²³ Ingjerd Veiden Brakstad, "Jødeforfølgelsene i Norge: Omtale i årene 1942. Framstilling og erindring av jødeforfølgelsene i Norge under andre verdenskrig, i et utvalg aviser og illegal presse" (master's dissertation, University of Oslo, 2006), 83–85.

example, during a debate about Jewish displaced persons in 1947, one Norwegian housing cooperative (*borettslag*) opposed the creation of a “Jewish quarter” in their neighbourhood.²⁴

A fourth work is a PhD dissertation by historian Vibeke Kieding Banik, analysing the attitudes of Norwegian Jews towards Israel between 1945 and 1975. In this work, antisemitic attitudes in Norway during the early postwar period are discussed over five pages. Banik suggests that latent antisemitic attitudes existed in Norway. However, she does not reach a conclusion as to how *widespread* such attitudes were within the population as a whole.²⁵

To sum up, we know from existing research that antisemitism was already viewed as an un-national and un-Norwegian phenomenon during the initial period after the end of the German occupation. However, tensions between a public discourse dominated by a rejection of antisemitic sentiments and the continuation of an informal “everyday antisemitism” have still not been studied in depth. Several questions remain in need of answers: What new expressions of antisemitism have developed in a society where open ideological antisemitism was portrayed as un-Norwegian? Has the anti-antisemitic norm been strengthened or weakened over time? Also, to what extent and how has “everyday antisemitism” affected the relationship between majority and minority?

Antisemitism on the far right

Before and during the Second World War, antisemitism in Norway – as in other European countries – took a particularly radical form on the extreme right. The Norwegian collaborationist party *Nasjonal Samling* (NS), especially from 1935 onwards, embraced antisemitism as a comprehensive “explanatory model.” In NS publications, bolshevism, capitalism, and liberalism were described as “Jewish phenomena.” During the German occupation of Norway, NS leader Vidkun Quisling saw the ongoing world war as a life and death struggle between the “Germanic people” and “International Jewry.”²⁶

²⁴ Brakstad, *Jødeforfølgelsene i Norge*, 88.

²⁵ Vibeke Kieding Banik, “Solidaritet og tilhørighet: Norske jøders forhold til Israel 1945–1975” (PhD thesis, University of Oslo, 2009), 102–06.

²⁶ See Simonsen, “Vidkun Quisling, antisemittismen og den paranoide stil”; Christhard Hoffmann, “Die reine Lehre einer politischen Sekte: Antisemitismus in der norwegischen ‘Nasjonal Samling’,” in *Vorurteil und Rassenhaß. Antisemitismus in den faschistischen Bewegungen Europas*, ed. Hermann Graml, Angelika Königseder, and Juliane Wetzel (Berlin: Metropol, 2001), 253–73.

To what extent did the Norwegian far right maintain this conspiracist and antisemitic worldview after 1945, within a political context where the expression of ideological antisemitism was taboo? To what extent has antisemitism been replaced by other images of the enemy?

During the first decades after the Second World War, an important task of the Norwegian far right was the attempt to rehabilitate former members of the NS. For these people, the German capitulation and the postwar trials led to a widespread decline in power and status.²⁷ A small segment of this group sought to implement organizational measures to rehabilitate the NS veterans socially, legally, and historically.²⁸

The development of an organized neofascist community in Norway has often been dated to the late 1960s, when a new generation of far rightists founded the organization *Nasjonal Ungdomsfylking* (NUF) and later, in 1975, the party *Norsk Front* (renamed *Nasjonalt Folkeparti* in 1980). A second phase began in the late 1980s with the development of organized activism against immigration and the formation of a militant neo-Nazi skinhead subculture. After 2000, the militant right-wing extremist subculture stagnated markedly. At the same time, a new anti-Muslim conspiracist discourse developed in the aftermath of September 11, 2001. Since the turn of the millennium, traditional neo-Nazism has primarily been located in small organizations such as the Odinist sect *Vigrid* and the pan-Nordic National Socialist organization *Den nordiske motstandsbevegelsen* (Nordic Resistance Movement), which has a small branch in Norway.²⁹

The functions and development of far-right antisemitism during the postwar period have primarily been studied as part of a more general analysis of right-wing extremist ideology and practice. One article written by this author and published in the Norwegian peer-reviewed journal *Historisk tidsskrift* Winter 2019, deals with the development of Holocaust denial discourse in the magazine *8. Mai/Folk og land* between 1948 and 1975. This magazine was published by

²⁷ During the postwar treason trials, the NS was categorized as a criminal political organization. A total of ninety-two thousand cases were investigated, and about forty-six thousand persons were sentenced to various kinds of punishment, ranging from fines to the death penalty. See Johannes Andenæs, *Det vanskelige oppgjøret* (Oslo: Tanum-Nordli, 1979), 114–24, 165–68.

²⁸ See Georg Øvsthus, “Dom og oppreisning: Tidligere NS-medlemmers kritikk av landssvik-oppgjøret og deres organiserte forsøk på å oppnå sosial rehabilitering” (master’s dissertation, University of Bergen, 1972), 4, 7–26.

²⁹ For an overview of the different historical phases and the present situation, see Tore Bjørgo and Ingvild Magnæs Gjelsvik, “Utvikling og utbredelse av høyreekstremisme i Norge,” in *Høyreekstremisme i Norge: Utviklingstrekk, konspirasjonsteorier og forebyggingsstrategier*, ed. Tore Bjørgo (Oslo: Polithøgskolen i Oslo, 2018), 27–144.

the organized community of former NS members.³⁰ The publication promoted not only NS apologist historical points of view, but also anti-democratic, racist, and antisemitic sentiments. Holocaust denial was embraced as early as the late 1940s onwards and became an integral element of broader NS revisionist arguments during the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s. This denialist discourse also implied a conspiracist outlook on the world. Several articles in *8. Mai/Folk og land* claimed that “International Jewry” was the “real instigator” of the Second World War and that the “myth of the six million dead” had been created by a powerful cabal, aiming to suppress the “true national forces.”³¹ In this case, the community of former NS members functioned as an ideological bridge between traditional National Socialism and postwar neofascism. On the one hand, the milieu kept alive traditional images of the powerful and threatening “Jew.” On the other, the NS veterans were instrumental in introducing new ideological themes adapted to the postwar context, such as denial of the Nazi Extermination Policy. Antisemitic ideas also won support from actors who did not come from an NS background but still harboured right-wing views. In one recent book, historian of ideas Jan Erik Ebbestad Hansen shows that leading anthroposophist Alf Larsen advocated extreme anti-Jewish ideas during the immediate postwar years.³²

Several studies of organized Norwegian right-wing extremism from the 1970s onwards have been published. The “first wave” of Norwegian neofascism from the late 1960s to the middle of the 1980s has been analysed in a monograph by journalist Per Bangsund and in two master’s dissertations.³³ The neo-Nazi subculture of the 1990s has been studied in particular by social scientists Tore

30 On *Folk og land*, see also Espen Olavsson Hårseth, “Folk og land 1967–75: Fra rehabilitering til nyfascistisk opposisjonsorgan” (master’s dissertation, University of Oslo, 2010) and “Mellom revisjon og politisk opposisjon: Avisen Folk og land 1952–1975,” *Historisk tidsskrift* 3 (2017): 280–307; Lasse Lømo Ellingsen, “Folk og land – kor går du?” Avisen Folk og land, miljøet rundt den og forholdet til nynazismen i Norge 1975–1986” (master’s dissertation, University of Oslo, 2016).

31 Kjetil Braut Simonsen, “Holocaustbenektelse i *Folk og land* (8. mai), 1948–1975: En diskurs tar form,” *Historisk tidsskrift* 1 (2019), 8–25, < https://www.idunn.no/file/pdf/67111948/holocaustbenektelse_i_folk_og_land_8_mai_19481975_en_.pdf >.

32 Jan Erik Ebbestad Hansen, *En antisemitt trer frem: Alf Larsen og ‘jødeproblemet’* (Oslo: Press, 2018).

33 See Lars Preus, “Bakover mot det nye Norge: Ideologisk utvikling innen norsk nynazisme 1967–1985” (master’s dissertation, University of Oslo, 2014); Tuva Marie Mcallister Buraas, “Jeg oppfatter meg ikke som nazist, men som nasjonal revolusjonær.” Erik Blüchers politiske ideologi, 1975–1985” (master’s dissertation, University of Oslo, 2018) and Per Bangsund, *Arvtakere: Nazisme i Norge etter krigen* (Oslo: Pax, 1984).

Bjørge and Katrine Fangen.³⁴ Also, the small neo-Nazi organizations of the 2000s have been researched, mostly through works by graduate students.³⁵ Few of these works have antisemitism as the *main focus*,³⁶ but they nevertheless describe and discuss the phenomenon. Based on these works – as well as my ongoing research – I think three points related to the continuity and functions of antisemitism within Norwegian far-right circles should be highlighted.³⁷

1) As a discourse, far-right antisemitism in Norway since 1945 has consisted of two main components. The first is conspiracism: the claim that an international Jewish conspiracy controls international politics and the economy and operates as the driving force behind multiculturalism, globalization, and immigration. This narrative is a continuation of the classical anti-Jewish accusations articulated in *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion* and in National Socialist propaganda.³⁸ The second component is the denial of the Holocaust. This is a new feature of postwar antisemitism, although it builds upon old images of a powerful “International Jewry.” As already noted, Holocaust denial was expressed reg-

34 Katrine Fangen, *En bok om nynazister* (Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 2001); Tom Kimmo Eiternes and Katrine Fangen, *Bak nynazismen* (Oslo: Cappelen, 2002); Tore Bjørge, *Racist and Right-Wing Violence in Scandinavia: Patterns, Perpetrators and Responses* (Oslo: Tano, 1997), 272–311; Tonje Benneche, “Ideologiske knyttnever: Konflikt mellom blitzere og nynazister på 1980- og 1990-tallet” (master’s dissertation, University of Oslo, 2017).

35 See Anett Svevad Riise, “Runemagi og raseideologi: En komparativ analyse av to nyhedske, nynazistiske bevegelser” (master’s dissertation, University of Oslo, 2018); Elise Egeland Nerheim, “Nordfront og nettekstremisme: Den nordiske motstandsbevegelsens fiendebilder” (master’s dissertation, University of Agder, 2015); Siw-Randi Junge Kåsereff, “‘Jeg er ikke mikrorasist, men makrorasist’: En antropologisk studie av Vigrid” (master’s dissertation, University of Oslo, 2009); Lill-Hege Tveito, “Kampen for den nordiske rases overlevelse: Bruken av den norrøne mytologien innenfor Vigrid” (master’s dissertation, University of Tromsø, 2007); Astrid Espseth, “Stemplingens konsekvens: En studie av nynazistiske grupperinger” (master’s dissertation, University of Oslo, 2007); Ellen Nygård, “Nynazisme på nett: En studie av historiebruk på Vigrid og Nordfronts nettsted” (master’s dissertation, University of Stavanger, 2015); Magnus Stavrum Opheim, “Motstandskamp på internett: En diskursanalyse av nettsiden Frihetskamp.net” (master’s dissertation, University of Oslo, 2017).

36 One exception is a master’s dissertation on the Holocaust denier Olav Hoaas. See Ingrid Sætheren Grimstad, “En studie av Olav Hoaas sitt ideologiske standpunkt” (master’s dissertation, University of Oslo, 2014).

37 Lately, I have carried out in-depth research on Norwegian far-right antisemitism after 1945 and have also written an article on the subject which is yet to be published. Kjetil Braut Simonsen, “Antisemitism on the Norwegian Far Right, 1967–2018” (forthcoming).

38 On the 1970s and 1980s, see for example, Preus, “Bakover,” 50–57; on the 1990s, Bjørge, *Racist and Right-Wing Violence*, 272–311 and Fangen, *En bok om nynazister*, 182–89; on the conspiracism of the neo-Nazis in the 2000s, see for example Opheim, *Motstandskamp på internett*, 64–66; Svevad Riise, *Runemagi og raseideologi*, 47–50.

ularly in the NS veterans' publication *Folk og land* during the 1950s and 1960s. From the late 1960s onwards, denialist discourse was adopted by the new generation of right-wing extremists and has been a recurrent theme in neo-Nazi circles up to the present.³⁹

2) The functions of far-right antisemitism in Norway have primarily been *abstract and ideological*. Antisemitism has served as an explanatory model, integrating all phenomena perceived as negative and/or threatening under the same ("Jewish") umbrella. As noted by social scientist Katrine Fangen, antisemitism in this case also tends to be the "esoteric" part of right-wing extremist ideology, which is internalized by new activists only gradually.⁴⁰ In this sense, it is a marker of political dedication and radicalization.

3) Antisemitism as a worldview has not been universally embraced within far-right circles since 1945. Anti-Jewish ideas have been supplemented with, and partly replaced by, new images of the enemy, during the last couple of years particularly anti-Muslim conspiracy narratives. One case in point is the right-wing extremist terrorist Anders Behring Breivik, who murdered seventy-seven people in Oslo and at Utøya. Breivik's political beliefs were based on a conspiracy narrative, which claimed that an alliance of Muslims and "Cultural Marxists" was undermining European civilization.⁴¹ Still, within the broader flora of right-wing radical organizations, antisemitism has often functioned as a marker of a revolutionary and militant outlook.⁴² Support for antisemitism suggests support for a more or less *total worldview*. Amongst groups and actors who have tried to appear moderate or responsible, or who have advocated ideological renewal, antisemitism has been either coded or absent. This also bears witness to the extent to which Nazi and fascist antisemitism has been rejected by the broader public since 1945.⁴³

³⁹ See Preus, "Bakover," 55–56; Grimstad, "En studie av Olav Hoaas"; Simonsen, "Antisemitisme på norsk ytre høyre"; Nygård, "Nynazisme på nett."

⁴⁰ Fangen, *En bok om nynazister*, 184–86.

⁴¹ On Breivik's ideology, see Øystein Sørensen, "Ideologi og galskap: Anders Behring Breiviks totalitære mentalitet," in *Høyreekstremisme: Ideer og bevegelser i Europa*, ed. Øystein Sørensen, Bernt Hagtvet, and Bjørn Arne Steine (Oslo: Dreyer, 2012), 14–44. On Islamophobia in Norway in general, see Sindre Bangstad, *Anders Breivik and the Rise of Islamophobia* (London: Zed Books, 2014).

⁴² Bjørge, *Racist and Right-Wing Violence*, 294.

⁴³ These three points are elaborated further in Simonsen, "Antisemitism on the Norwegian Far Right".

Israel and leftist antisemitism

One of the most heated topics related to postwar antisemitism in Norway and other parts of Europe is the relationship between antisemitism and criticism of Israel. In an essay about “the new antisemitism,” Norwegian historian of ideas Håkon Harket claims that the State of Israel has been one of the focal points of antisemitism since 1945.⁴⁴ Although neither strong criticism of Israel nor anti-Zionism are necessary or sufficient conditions for antisemitism, he concludes, the debate about Israel has provided a new platform for the articulation of anti-Jewish prejudice.⁴⁵

In Sweden, the relationship between the left and antisemitism in general, and between anti-Israel and antisemitic sentiments in particular, have been studied in detail by historian Henrik Bachner.⁴⁶ In Norway, no such general work currently exists. However, several works have touched upon the subject. In his book on Norwegian attitudes towards the Jews and Israel, historian Karl Egil Johansen discusses the borders between antisemitism and critical attitudes towards Israel at some length. A special focus is directed towards the debate about well-known author Jostein Gaarder’s column “God’s Chosen People” in 2006.⁴⁷ Following this publication, Gaarder was accused of reproducing antisemitic and anti-Jewish sentiments. Still, Johansen’s work is more a study of the shifting opinions about Israel/Palestine in general than a systematic discussion of postwar antisemitism. He does not provide explicit conclusions on how prevalent antisemitism has been in this debate, nor on where the borders between anti-Jewish sentiments and legitimate political criticism of the State of Israel should be drawn more precisely.⁴⁸ Recently, the changing attitudes towards Israel and Zionism within the Norwegian labour movement have also been analysed in detail by historian Åsmund Borgen Gjerde. However, the borders between anti-Zionism and antisemitism are not the main focus of his dissertation.⁴⁹

⁴⁴ Håkon Harket, “Den nye antisemittismen,” in *Jødehat: Antisemittismens historie fra antikken til i dag*, ed. Trond Berg Eriksen, Håkon Harket, and Einhart Lorenz (Oslo: Cappelen Damm, 2005), 579.

⁴⁵ Harket, “Den nye antisemittismen,” 580.

⁴⁶ Bachner, *Återkomsten*.

⁴⁷ Jostein Gaarder, “Guds utvalgte folk,” *Aftenposten*, 4 August 2006, < <https://www.aftenposten.no/meninger/kronikk/i/weW34/Guds-utvalgte-folk> >.

⁴⁸ Johansen, “*Jødefolket inntar en særstilling*,” in particular 163–70.

⁴⁹ Åsmund Borgen Gjerde, “The Meaning of Israel: Anti-Zionism and Philo-Zionism in the Norwegian Left, 1933–1968” (PhD thesis, University of Bergen, 2018).

A contribution of a much more polemical nature than Johansen's book is an article written by the Norwegian author Eirik Eiglad and published in the anthology *Resurgent Antisemitism: Global Perspectives* in 2013. Eiglad focuses on the ideological position of the Norwegian far left in the late 1960s and analyses its effects on present-day debates about the Middle East. One of his main arguments is that while, in the early 1970s, antisemitism "was not a general problem in Norway," the present situation in 2013 had become much more dangerous:

Today, the situation has changed. Alarming reports of anti-Jewish harassment and vandalism have become more common, and many attitudes that can properly be termed antisemitic have become publicly acceptable, as open antisemitic rhetoric has been smuggled back into mainstream political debates – we even have seen explosive outbursts of antisemitic hatred on the streets of the capital.⁵⁰

Eiglad explains this shift by focusing on the rise of anti-Zionism as a political force on the left from the late 1960s onwards, in particular related to the influence of Maoism. "The Maoists," he states, "introduced anti-Zionism to Norway, first through SUF and then later through AKP (m-l) and its front organizations."⁵¹ Since the 1970s this narrative "migrated" from the Maoist left to the left in general.⁵² However, Eiglad does not present any empirical material from the period *between* the 1970s and the late 2000s. In this sense, the causes of the development of anti-Zionist opinion – and in Eiglad's view, the growing threat of antisemitism – are suggested rather than discussed in a systematic historical manner.

A third work, with a contemporary rather than historical focus, is an essay on leftist antisemitism written by journalist John Færseth. Although the Norwegian left generally does not hold antisemitic views, Færseth claims, parts of the

⁵⁰ Eirik Eiglad, "Anti-Zionism and the Resurgence of Antisemitism in Norway," in *Resurgent Antisemitism: Global Perspectives*, ed. Alvin H. Rosenfeld (Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2013), 140–41. The same writer has also written a personal report of a series of antisemitic incidents occurring during a pro-Palestinian demonstration in Oslo in January 2009. See Eirik Eiglad, *The Anti-Jewish Riots in Oslo* (Porsgrunn: Communalism Press, 2010).

⁵¹ Eiglad, "Anti-Zionism and the Resurgence of Antisemitism in Norway," 142.

⁵² "In the early 1970s, anti-Zionism was considered a fringe phenomenon associated with the Maoist-influenced left ... Anti-Zionist attitudes are now respectable; they are held by leading figures in academic life, trade unions, and politics, and have clearly colored Norway's interpretation of the conflict in the Middle East." Eiglad, "Anti-Zionism and the Resurgence of Antisemitism in Norway," 150–151.

left tend to overlook anti-Jewish statements or to accept them as a sort of legitimate critique of the politics of Israel.⁵³

The relationship between attitudes towards Israel and antisemitism is also discussed in two reports on attitudes towards Jews and other minorities published by the Norwegian Center for Holocaust and Minority Studies.⁵⁴ Attitudes towards the conflict are sorted into three categories: pro-Israeli, pro-Palestinian, and anti-Israeli. One finding is that respondents with *anti-Israeli* attitudes show a stronger tendency to embrace antisemitic sentiments than the more moderate pro-Palestinian respondents. Still, one main conclusion was that negative views on Israel and its policies were much more common than negative sentiments towards Jews. For nine out of ten respondents who expressed a critical stand against Israeli policies, the report concludes, negative attitudes towards Jews can hardly serve as the explanation.⁵⁵ The report from the 2017 survey also concluded that the relationship between pro-Palestinian attitudes and antisemitism was rather weak.⁵⁶ To a certain extent, this seems to call into question or at least to moderate Eiglad's thesis of a clear connection between sharp criticism of Israel and a rising tolerance for antisemitism.

Further research should dig much deeper into the historical debates on Israel and antisemitism, both on the left and in society at large. Have pro-Israeli attitudes necessarily implied a principled rejection of anti-Jewish stereotypes? Did the changing perspectives from the late 1960s and 1970s onwards lead to a weakening of the anti-antisemitic norm amongst the Norwegian public? Has the awareness of antisemitism within pro-Palestinian circles been strengthened or weakened over time?

Contemporary antisemitism

Several of the latest works on antisemitism since 1945 have concentrated on *contemporary* attitudes towards Jews and other minorities rather than on historical

53 John Færseth, "Den tolererte antisemittismen," in *Venstreekstremisme: Ideer og bevegelser*, ed. Øystein Sørensen, Bernt Hagtvet, and Nik Brandal (Oslo: Dreyer, 2013), 304–19, esp. p. 316.

54 Christhard Hoffmann, Vibeke Moe, and Øivind Kopperud, eds, *Antisemittisme i Norge? Den norske befolkningens holdninger til jøder og andre minoriteter* (Oslo: The Norwegian Center for Holocaust and Minority Studies, 2012), 18–19, 71–73; Christhard Hoffmann and Vibeke Moe, eds, *Holdninger til jøder og muslimer i Norge: Befolkningsundersøkelse og minoritetsstudie* (Oslo: The Norwegian Center for Holocaust and Minority Studies, 2017), 22, 94.

55 Hoffmann, Moe, and Kopperud, *Antisemittisme i Norge?*, 73.

56 Hoffmann and Moe, *Holdninger til jøder og muslimer i Norge*, 94.

developments from 1945 to the present. Four works shall be discussed here, three of them primarily of a quantitative nature and the fourth a qualitative study.

As already noted, in 2012 the Norwegian Center for Holocaust and Minority Studies published a report based on an autumn 2011 survey of attitudes towards Jews and other religious minorities in Norwegian society. Five years later, two surveys partly following up on the 2012 report were analysed in a new publication. The 2017 report focused on attitudes towards Jews and Muslims but also contained a minority study in which Jews and Muslims in Norway were asked about their experiences and attitudes towards each other. In both studies, attitudes are categorized in three dimensions: cognitive and affective dimensions, as well as the dimension of social distance.

The 2012 report found overall that 12.5 per cent of the Norwegian population held attitudes based on negative stereotypes of Jews. In the 2017 survey, the number had decreased to 8.3 per cent. One noteworthy finding was the high percentage supporting the statement “World Jewry is working behind the scenes to promote Jewish interests” (19 per cent in 2011, 13 per cent in 2017).⁵⁷ A suggested explanation for the shift is the growing focus on antisemitism from the mass media as well as from politicians in the aftermath of the terrorist attacks in Paris and Copenhagen in 2015.⁵⁸

The reports also discuss the different factors which seem to make respondents receptive to antisemitic views. As already noted, one conclusion was that while most respondents with critical attitudes towards Israel did not hold antisemitic sentiments, such attitudes were more common among respondents classified as anti-Israeli than among other respondents.⁵⁹ Furthermore, antisemitism was more common among men and less prevalent among younger persons and persons with higher education.⁶⁰ The 2017 report also concludes that negative attitudes towards Muslims are much more common than negative attitudes towards Jews. Overall, 34.1 per cent of the respondents held anti-Muslim stereotypes.⁶¹ Also, one main conclusion is that antisemitism was most common among respondents with sceptical attitudes towards other minorities and immigrants. In other words, it seems to be related to a broader xenophobic mindset.⁶²

57 Hoffmann, Moe, and Kopperud, *Antisemittisme i Norge?*, 6, 22; Hoffmann and Moe, *Holdninger til jøder og muslimer i Norge*, 7, 36.

58 Hoffmann and Moe, *Holdninger til jøder og muslimer i Norge*, 98–99.

59 Hoffmann, Moe, and Kopperud, *Antisemittisme i Norge?*, 71–73.

60 Hoffmann, Moe, and Kopperud, *Antisemittisme i Norge?*, 60; *Holdninger til jøder og muslimer i Norge*, 8.

61 Hoffmann and Moe, *Holdninger til jøder og muslimer i Norge*, 7.

62 Hoffmann and Moe, *Holdninger til jøder og muslimer i Norge*, 91–100.

The 2017 report also shows that antisemitic sentiments are overrepresented among the Muslim majority in Norway. While negative attitudes against Muslims were markedly less prevalent among Jewish respondents (14.7 per cent compared to 34.1 per cent), negative stereotypes of Jews were more common among Muslim respondents than within the majority of the population (28.9 per cent compared with 8.3 per cent). However, while stereotypical images of Jewish power are prevalent, the difference between the Muslim sample and the population sample regarding social distance and anti-Jewish sentiments is minimal.⁶³

A third study dealing with contemporary antisemitism, this time on a qualitative basis, is a report titled *Det som er jødisk*, written by researchers Alexa Døving and Vibeke Moe. The study is empirically based on interviews with thirty-three persons identifying themselves as Jewish, supplemented by interview material collected by *Det mosaiske trossamfunn* (the Jewish Religious Community in Norway). The project had three goals: to identify how Norwegian Jews perceived their own Jewish identity, to clarify the relationship between historical consciousness about the Holocaust and experiences of identity, and to analyse how antisemitism is interpreted and discussed by Jewish families.⁶⁴ The third question, which is discussed in the last section of the report, is most relevant to our context. A particularly interesting finding is the many examples of “everyday antisemitism” provided by the interviewees. As summarized in the report:

Altogether, the informants give the impression that it is part of their everyday experience for Norwegian Jews to be met with stereotypical sentiments. Which stereotypes are expressed depends on the context, the situational frame of the event, and who the performer is.⁶⁵

According to the informants, the Israel/Palestine conflict is of particular importance regarding antisemitism today. Nearly all informants described the debate about the conflict as being at times unpleasant.⁶⁶

One last work related to contemporary antisemitism is a pilot study of antisemitism in the media today, conducted by two researchers associated with the Norwegian Center for Holocaust and Minority Studies. The study is based on a limited number of strategically selected sources from the edited news media and the comment sections in online newspapers and on Facebook. The material was studied through a combination of quantitative content analysis and qualita-

⁶³ Hoffmann and Moe, *Holdninger til jøder og muslimer i Norge*, 8.

⁶⁴ Cora Alexa Døving and Vibeke Moe, “*Det som er jødisk*.” *Identiteter, historier og erfaringer med antisemittisme* (Oslo: The Norwegian Center for Holocaust and Minority Studies, 2014).

⁶⁵ Døving and Moe, “*Det som er jødisk*,” 88. Translation by Simonsen.

⁶⁶ Døving and Moe, “*Det som er jødisk*,” 89.

tive reviews. Also, 250 tweets with the hashtag “Jew” were included in the qualitative section. The study concludes that although the number of anti-Jewish stereotypes was relatively small they were still expressed both in readers’ comments and in the edited media. In the edited media, most problematic and antisemitic sentiments occurred in non-editorial texts. Furthermore, such sentiments were more widespread in comment sections than in articles. In the tweets, a kind of satirical antisemitism was identified. Here, the hashtag “Jew” was used as a synonym for negative behaviour associated with finance and profit.⁶⁷

Viewed as a whole, the scope and nature of antisemitism in Norway today have to some degree been exposed. However, more systematic qualitative analysis of representations of the Jew in contemporary mainstream discourse as well as in extremist circles is called for. Such research is being conducted at the moment through the “Shifting Boundaries” project, based at the Norwegian Center for Holocaust and Minority Studies in Oslo. Here, antisemitism – for instance, in new social media – will be researched in depth.⁶⁸

Conclusion

Until a few decades ago, antisemitism in Norway was thematized only to a limited extent by historians. Today, in contrast to this, our knowledge has grown considerably. Nonetheless, numerous topics, several of which are related to the postwar period, need to be explored further. As a conclusion to this article, I would like to point to some areas which in my view should be emphasized in further research.

We know from existing research that anti-Jewish expressions became taboo in Norway after 1945 and antisemitism as a worldview survived only on the fringe of society among marginal far-right groups. In this sense, postwar antisemitism in Norway can, to a large extent, be described as antisemitism “without anti-Semites.”⁶⁹ Still, little research focuses on how the anti-antisemitic norm has been maintained over time. On a general level, we know more about contemporary antisemitism than about the historical development of Norwegian antisem-

⁶⁷ See especially the summary in Lars Lien and Jan Alexander Brustad, *Medieanalyse av antisemittisme i dag* (Oslo: The Norwegian Center for Holocaust and Minority Studies, 2016), 9.

⁶⁸ See “Shifting Boundaries. Definitions, Expressions and Consequences of Antisemitism in Contemporary Norway,” < <https://www.hlsenteret.no/forskning/jodisk-historie-og-antisemittisme/shifting-boundaries-definitions-expressions-and/> >.

⁶⁹ The term is used in Bernd Marin, “A Post-Holocaust ‘Anti-Semitism without Anti-Semites’? Austria as a Case in Point,” *Political Psychology* 2, no. 2 (1980): 57–74.

itism from 1945 to the present. Thus, one priority should be to analyse the development of Norwegian postwar antisemitism on a broad historical basis. To what extent and how has postwar antisemitism changed over time? Which elements of antisemitism survived the experience of the Holocaust, which have been weakened, and which have faded away? How has antisemitism been expressed in a society where openly anti-Jewish statements have become taboo? In what kind of situations and contexts has antisemitism reoccurred, and have the anti-anti-semitic norms grown weaker or stronger over time?

Furthermore, an important subtopic is the scope and development of everyday Norwegian antisemitism, both as a discourse and as a form of practice. How has antisemitism been expressed outside the public sphere, and not least, how have such “everyday expressions” of antisemitism affected the Jewish minority? Such a focus would deepen our knowledge and allow us to understand Norwegian antisemitism on a more general level. It would also offer insight into the challenges facing minorities in modern Norway.