

JUDAISM 3.0  
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# This generation's existential threat

Applying Herzl's thinking to counter Israel-bashing

**A**t the Seder, Jews around the world were reminded that "in every generation someone is rising to destroy us." The threat changes from generation to generation. Last week we marked the last generation's attempt – the Holocaust.

Fifty years prior, in the 1890s, a lone alarmist, Theodor Herzl, warned that Europe was heading in that direction. During his time, the conventional wisdom was that with the secularization of the Christian population in Europe, age-old Jew-hatred was over.

Herzl, who perhaps held similar utopian views at first, quickly came to the conclusion that European opposition to Judaism is chronic and evolves as European and Jewish circumstances change.

Indeed, during his time, the emancipation of Western European Jews created new circumstances: Jews suddenly had rights, were competing with Europeans for jobs and amassing wealth. Reaffirming the Passover mantra, secular Europeans developed a new form of opposition to Judaism – national hatred. Toward the end of the 19th century this form of opposition was given a new name: antisemitism.

Some antisemites claimed that they were not Jew-haters and merely wished to reform the Jews. Some Jews, including Herzl, engaged with antisemites. Yet, as the 20th century progressed, antisemitism became so deeply ingrained in mainstream European consciousness that it was used as the ideology for the genocide of European Jewry.

Today, antisemitism is no longer an existential threat to Judaism. There is no institutional, state-sponsored attempts to kill Jews as there were throughout history, and the antisemitic populace, such as those marchers in Charlottesville yelling "Jews will not replace us," do not have the destruction mechanism. They might pose a threat to individual Jews, but not to the survival of Judaism.

Yet, just as the Passover text predicted, a new existential threat to Judaism arose – Israel-bashing. Like the threats of previous generations, Israel-bashing has both retail populous support and the institutional destruction mechanism.

## Populace component: occupationalism

Israel-bashing is empowered by occupationalism – Westerners hijacking the Palestinian plight and turning it into what has become an autonomous movement with no consideration to Palestinian interests. As discussed in last week's *Magazine*, occupationalism has turned into a populous movement that is deeply entrenched in Western society.

The occupationalist populace is armed with a perceived "license to hate" by credible organizations: the UN, Amnesty International and media outlets, which "certify" the facade that the opposition is merely to Israel's policies or to Zionism, and not to Judaism.

While the retail component of Israel-bashing is dogmatic, it is actually the institutional component of Israel-bashing that houses this generation's destruction mechanism of Judaism.

## Institutional component: The mechanism to eradicate Judaism

The same European governments that for gener-



THE ICONIC photo of Zionist visionary Theodor Herzl leaning over a hotel balcony in Basel, Switzerland, during a Zionist Congress, early 1900s. (Wikimedia Commons)

ations engaged in campaigns to eradicate Judaism – from deportations from England and France to liquidation in Spain – are in this generation strong allies of the Jewish state.

But at the same time those governments have empowered multinational organizations, and those now have lethal mechanisms that could be deployed toward the destruction of Judaism.

For example, the International Criminal Court, heavily funded by Europe and housed in Europe, has the capability to deliver paralyzing blows to Israel's security, economy and society, such as by threatening to arrest Israeli government officials, military personnel, settlers – in short, all Israelis.

Other multinational organizations – from the UN to ad-hoc coalitions – have other capabilities such as boycotts, divestments and sanctions. Such mechanisms were instrumental in eliminating other pariah states such as South Africa and Ba'athist Iraq, and could in theory be deployed against the Jewish state, which, after all, is deemed by credible organizations as an apartheid state that commits war crimes and crimes against humanity.

At this point in 2022, the danger of Israel-bashing becoming the ideology for the political destruction of the Jewish state seems as absurd as the threat of antisemitism becoming the ideology for genocide of European Jews was in the 1890s during Herzl's time. Friendly governments would not fulfill the threat.

But as Herzl argued, governments are subject to the will of the people, and those people today are indoctrinated with occupationalism and Israel-bashing. "Even if we were as near to the hearts of princes... they could not protect us. They would only feel popular hatred by showing us too much favor," Herzl wrote.

Moreover, political situations can change. One of the lessons of the 1973 Yom Kippur War is to threat-analyze capabilities, not just intentions. Indeed, the capabilities to eradicate Judaism are now in place.

So how to deal with it? Indeed, look to Herzl.

**Applying Herzl's approach: The return to Judaism**  
Until now, the primary response to Israel-bashing has been *hasbara* (public diplomacy). Herzl mocked such efforts.

In his time, *hasbara* was done through "committees against antisemitism." Herzl argued that they are futile since one cannot convince people who use dogmatic thinking. Hence, a radical solution was needed – the establishment of a Jewish state.

Today, Israel-bashing is too dogmatic in mainstream Western societies for rational arguments to be effective. Once again, a radical approach is needed to deal with this threat: the change of global consciousness of what is Judaism. As discussed in this column, Zionism is becoming the primary conduit through which both Jews and non-Jews relate to Judaism – through positive and negative connections alike.

Once there is a broad recognition that Judaism has transformed and Zionism is now its organizing principle, then Israel-bashing becomes Jew-bashing, and this in-turn dramatically alters the nature of the existential threat to Judaism of our generation. ■

*The writer is the author of the newly released book, Judaism 3.0 – Judaism's Transformation to Zionism (Judaism-Zionism.com). For more of his geopolitical articles: EuropeAndJerusalem.com*

## Herzl Forum inaugurated

*The Jerusalem Post* in 2019 instilled some Herzl awareness to its readers in its special issue Herzl-2019, and in dozens of Herzl articles since. "Herzl is our modern Moses," then prime-minister Benjamin Netanyahu told the *Magazine* in his introductory remarks for that issue. Indeed, Herzl has not only led the Jews' ascension back to the Promised Land, but, like Moses, also gave us tools to preserve it.

In particular, he understood the evolving nature of opposition to Judaism: "They will not leave us in peace. For a little period they manage to tolerate us, and then their hostility breaks out again and again." Hence, studying Herzl's vision is not just a matter of history and self-awareness, it is also a tool to counter contemporary threats to Judaism.

Yet not only is there no study of Herzl's philosophy in universities, yeshivot and think tanks, there is not even basic awareness of Herzl the man. Research commissioned by Aliza Lavie, when she was chairwoman of the Herzl Center, showed that much of the public simply does not know who Herzl is.

To address this, the World Zionist Organization inaugurated the Herzl Forum under the leadership of Yaakov Hagoel, chairman of WZO – a position once held by Herzl himself. The forum, which includes Zionist leaders and Herzl scholars, kicked off its activities through a tour of places Herzl visited in his 1898 trip. Hagoel, who is also acting chairman of the Jewish Agency, said that through following Herzl's footsteps in the Land of Israel, "we can learn about how the visit influenced his vision for the Jewish state."  
– G.K.