

# ***Un antisémitisme nouveau?* The debate about a ‘new antisemitism’ in France**

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**ABSTRACT** Nowhere has the debate about a ‘new antisemitism’ been as fierce and relevant as in France. In recent years this country has witnessed high recorded levels of antisemitism, prompting many commentators to claim that this constituted an *antisémitisme nouveau*. Something has indeed changed, at least in terms of the nature, frequency and perpetrators of antisemitic violence in France. Previously connected to the extreme right, it has now become associated with a group that is itself a victim of discrimination – Muslims living in the poor neighbourhoods (*banlieues*). Statistics produced by the French watchdog on racism and antisemitism are firstly discussed and explained as well as the effect of the Middle East conflict. The article then traces the debate on this ‘new antisemitism’ in the French context, contrasting the views of the label’s promoters and opponents. It is argued that while antisemitism has undoubtedly evolved, the ‘new’ label is effectively erroneous as it fuses supposedly leftist and ‘Muslim’ antisemitism into one entity when they are not necessarily linked. Vital clarifications on the distinction between anti-Zionism and antisemitism are also made along with suggestions for further research.

**KEYWORDS** antisemitism, new antisemitism, anti-Zionism, France, Islam, French Muslims, French Jews, European Left, Israel

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In the autumn of 2000, France witnessed an explosion of antisemitism, unprecedented since the Second World War. In that year alone, a total of 744 antisemitic incidents were recorded (520 in the month of October alone) compared to only 82 the previous year. This wave of anti-Jewish acts continued throughout the years that followed and peaked in 2002 and 2004, with 936 and 974 incidents respectively.<sup>1</sup> In 2006, the death of Ilan Halimi, a young Jewish man, shocked and repulsed the nation. Lured to a flat in the suburbs of Paris, he was subsequently tortured to death by his captors who, believing that Jews are wealthy, sought a financial ransom for his release. Antisemitism became the major form of racism in France, at least in terms of recorded violence, and anti-Jewish hatred is now, according to one prominent scholar, ‘a permanent feature of Jewish life’.<sup>2</sup> Often these incidents involve threats, insults and other forms of intimidation directed at members of the Jewish community - Europe’s largest. However, a large proportion also includes acts of violence such as personal assaults, vandalism and arson of synagogues, attacks on Jewish property such as vehicles, businesses, schools and cultural centres, as well as the desecration of Jewish cemeteries. Expressions of antisemitism in the public domain also became more frequent, notable examples being slogans and chants such as “*Mort aux Juifs*” (death to the Jews) emanating from certain groups of protestors at demonstrations against the actions of the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) and the U.S. led invasion of Iraq. The problem of antisemitism in schools was also highlighted with the publication of several articles and books<sup>3</sup> as well as some documentaries screened on national television which appeared to show growing tensions amongst pupils from different religious communities. Investigations found that antisemitism was also being propagated at certain universities.<sup>4</sup>

The French Jewish community has become increasingly concerned and fearful about this situation. Many Jewish parents have taken their children out of state schools as a result and an increasing number of French Jews have even left their country in recent years, many emigrating to the United States, Canada and Israel. The Israeli government itself has positively encouraged Jews to make their *aliyah*. In January 2002, the Israeli Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs Rabbi Michael Melchior described France as the worst Western country for antisemitism and in July 2004, then Prime Minister Ariel Sharon invited French Jews to move to Israel in order to escape this threat.<sup>5</sup> One of the most severe condemnations of the situation in France came from the American Jewish Congress (AJC) which called on Hollywood stars and producers to consider boycotting the 2002 Cannes film festival in protest. In the wake of such criticism and the indisputably high levels of anti-Jewish attacks, the French government launched a sustained campaign against antisemitism. Measures included the creation of a ministerial committee charged with tackling the problem, a massive urban regeneration programme and a substantial contribution towards the costs of increased

security at private Jewish schools. A series of new laws were also passed in order to improve the monitoring of antisemitism, institute severer punishments for hate crimes and increase the number of people convicted of such misdemeanours in order to send out a clear message. During his time as minister of the Interior, current president Nicolas Sarkozy issued numerous statements in order to reassure the French Jewish community and zealously pursued zero-tolerance measures concerning antisemitism. It should also be noted that the controversial law banning ‘ostentatious’ religious insignia and symbols in French state schools in 2004 was also, at least in part, a result of the concerns about antisemitism in France.<sup>6</sup>

This rise in antisemitic incidents in France since the year 2000 produced a steady stream of books, articles and reports dealing with the topic, both in France and internationally and launched the debate about the existence of a ‘new antisemitism’. The subject became entangled in some of the wider issues in French politics and society such as Foreign affairs, domestic security and criminality and concerns about immigration and integration. The debate found resonance outside the usual remit of scholars and academics on antisemitism to include journalists, lawyers, religious leaders and other opinion makers. Much of the discussion focused on who was committing these acts of antisemitism. Previously connected exclusively to the extreme right, antisemitism became commonly associated with a group that is itself a victim of prejudice and discrimination – ‘Arab-Muslims’.<sup>7</sup> Indeed the implication of France’s Muslims population was one of the most controversial issues in the whole debate, not least because it came at a time when much scrutiny was already being placed on them due to other national and international events.

## Gathering the statistics

The discussion about a ‘new antisemitism’ was in part propelled by the publication of statistics proving what many had already suspected, that there had been a huge increase in the number of recorded incidents since the year 2000. France has some of the most sophisticated methods for monitoring racist and antisemitic acts in the whole of the EU and the anti-racist law of 1990 (*loi Gayssot*) established the convention for the publication of an annual report on racism, antisemitism and xenophobia through the *Commission Nationale Consultative des Droits de l’Homme* (CNCDH).<sup>8</sup> Unofficial statistics on antisemitism are also produced by the *Service de protection de la communauté juive* (SPCJ),<sup>9</sup> although I will restrict my analysis here to the CNCDH reports which contain data gathered by the Interior, Justice and Education Ministries. The figures that most concern us here are those collected by the Interior Ministry which oversees the police and *gendarmerie*. Figures collected by these two organisations are passed on to the *Direction centrale du renseignement intérieur* (DCRI)<sup>10</sup> which collates, analyses and presents these statistics to the

CNCDH. The collection of this data and the exchange of information between the police and *gendarmerie* has been significantly improved in recent years.<sup>11</sup> Statistics on antisemitism gathered by the Interior Ministry are divided into two main categories; ‘threats’ (*menaces*) and ‘acts of violence’ (*actions violentes*). The former category includes graffiti, inflammatory literature (*tracts provocateurs*) including holocaust denial<sup>12</sup> and other kinds of written or verbal threatening behaviour (such as bomb threats). Violence includes physical assaults (*agressions*), arson attacks (*incendies*) and damage to property (*dégradtions*) including the desecration of cemeteries. The figures only take into account incidents which have been officially reported to the police.

The Justice Ministry provides information on court cases and convictions of hate crimes through information collected by the *Direction des affaires criminelles et des grâces* (DACG). Recent increases in the number of convictions do not translate into a rise in crimes of a racist or antisemitic nature but need to be understood in the context of new legal measures which started to have an effect in 2005.<sup>13</sup> It has been argued that these new laws have led to an over-reporting of the actual number incidents perpetrated,<sup>14</sup> although this is actually false because these laws have only had an effect on the Justice Ministry’s figures, not those provided by the Interior Ministry. Since 2004 the numbers of reported antisemitic incidents have generally decreased and the law passed on 9<sup>th</sup> March 2004 merely slightly increased the number of misdemeanours that could be potentially classed as antisemitic ‘threats’. These new legal guidelines have made no difference to the way antisemitic violence is recorded and it is naturally these figures which are of most concern. Indeed, despite the attempt of some authors to downplay the levels of antisemitism in France, or even portray it as a construction of the ‘Israeli lobby’<sup>15</sup>, the recorded levels of violent acts of antisemitism remain worryingly high when compared to the pre-2000 period.

The statistics provided by the Ministry of Education are also presented in the CNCDH reports. In 2001, French schools implemented the use of software (SIGNA) which recorded acts of violence, in particular those of a racist character. This system, unique in the EU, was introduced as a way of combating rising violence in French schools. It was replaced in 2007 by a supposedly improved software system - (SIVIS) after a boycott of the SIGNA system by headmasters in 2006.<sup>16</sup> Although the CNCDH reports on these figures, they must not be confused with those provided by the Interior Ministry which form the basis for the ‘official’ figures illustrated in fig. 1 (below).

*figure 1 here*

In fact, given the interruption in data collection in 2006-2007 and the introduction of the new system, information on antisemitism in schools was not even presented in the latest report published

by the CNCDH in 2008. It is misleading to insinuate that these statistics are contributing to the over-reporting of antisemitism<sup>17</sup> as the only incidents that are included are those that result in the lodging of an official complaint with the police, and therefore only those of a relatively serious nature.

A common assumption about antisemitism in France is that it is directly connected to events in the Middle East and must therefore be seen as ‘revenge for the Israeli oppression of their fellow Muslims’.<sup>18</sup> Although between 2000 and 2002 there did appear to be a clear link between antisemitism and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict (the initial wave of antisemitism occurred in September/October 2000 coinciding with the second *intifada*) there has subsequently been no overall correlation. In 2004 for example, the year which saw the highest figures of recorded antisemitism, there was no distinctive peak in antisemitic activity as could be observed in 2002 around the time of the IDF’s ‘Operation Defensive Shield’. The CNCDH itself acknowledges that there is now no observable link between events in the Middle East and acts of antisemitism. This further complicates any understanding of contemporary antisemitism in France. Indeed, events closer to home may also play their part, a partial rise in antisemitism in February and March 2006 for example was attributed to the effect of the media coverage of the murder of Ilan Halimi.

Central to the debate about whether a ‘new antisemitism’ exists in France is the question of who is committing these acts, particularly those classed as violent. The CNCDH reports contain information about the perpetrators (or ‘vectors’) of antisemitic threats and violence and highlights in particular those which can be attributed to the extreme-right (*milieux extrémistes de droite*) and ‘Arab-Muslims’ (*les milieux arabo-musulmans*). The fact that information about ethnic or religious affiliation is recorded in this manner is actually an anomaly within the French legal system.<sup>19</sup> For the years 2000-2003 the reports did not include these figures and merely stated that many of the perpetrators were the children of North African immigrants from the ‘difficult neighbourhoods’ (*quartiers dits « sensibles »*) and that the involvement of the extreme right was on the wane. It was not until the report for 2004 that they released any actual figures about how many antisemitic acts were associated with either the extreme right or ‘Arab-Muslims’. These figures revealed that since the year 2000, ‘Arab-Muslims’ had overtaken the extreme right in terms of antisemitic threats and violence (see fig. 2).

*figure 2 here*

However, given that on average 50% of antisemitic acts are not attributed to any particular group, deciphering who is responsible is complicated even further. The only certainty is that ‘Arab-Muslims’ are now often implicated in acts of antisemitism which did not appear to be the case

before the year 2000. However, the motivation for such acts remains unclear and under researched. Studies have demonstrated that antisemitic prejudice amongst young people in the *banlieues* is certainly very prevalent<sup>20</sup> and one recent survey also revealed that antisemitism was more frequent amongst those who professed Islam as their faith.<sup>21</sup> However, there is no evidence linking Islamic religiosity, acts of antisemitism and the motivation behind them. Therefore, some have suggested that the problem of antisemitism amongst Muslims is likely to be ‘more cultural than religious’,<sup>22</sup> in other words just as likely to be found amongst non-Muslim residents of the *banlieues* and more connected to non-practicing Muslims than those who are pious or involved in a particular Islamic organisation. Michel Wieviorka, one of the foremost experts on antisemitism in France concurs:

On the whole, it does seem that the majority of violent antisemitic acts at the beginning of the decade were committed by young people of ‘Maghrebi immigrant origin’. Yet this was entirely disconnected to any organisation or collective structure and was in no way related to activists engaged in either pro-Palestinian or Islamist movements.<sup>23</sup>

## The intellectual debate

The situation that developed in France led to the publishing of numerous works on the subject, some advancing the case of a supposed ‘new antisemitism’ distinct from its traditional form<sup>24</sup> and others proposing a ‘new face’ or return of antisemitism.<sup>25</sup> On the other hand there were those who argued categorically against the existence of a ‘new antisemitism’ or even using the word ‘antisemitism’ when referring to hostility connected to the State of Israel.<sup>26</sup> Some even implied that the use of such a term was a means of alighting an existing climate of Islamophobia in France.<sup>27</sup> The discussion of this phenomenon first intensified around the beginning of 2002 with the publication of Pierre-André Taguieff’s *La Nouvelle Judéophobie*<sup>28</sup> and the term ‘new antisemitism’ eventually gained wide currency, even being referred to in official reports written for the French government.<sup>29</sup> Some authors blamed the state and other institutions of being complicit in the rise of this antisemitism and claimed that the French media was also somehow responsible for the rise in anti-Jewish attacks, particularly the way in which it presented the Middle East conflict.<sup>30</sup> Others asserted that after the outbreak of antisemitic violence in 2000, the press remained silent or did not sufficiently report these acts.<sup>31</sup> The allegation of media silence is surprising as there has actually been extensive coverage in the French press of the attacks suffered by the French Jewish community in recent years.<sup>32</sup>

The drive to sell the ‘new antisemitism’ theory was perceived by a number of scholars, including many Jewish ones, as a kind of propaganda campaign, waged against journalists and

academics who are critical of Israel - what one critic labelled an 'ideological counter-*intifada* by the unconditional supporters of Israel'.<sup>33</sup> Consequently the 'new antisemitism' label was seen by many as merely a method for equating either criticism of Israel or anti-Zionism with antisemitism. Indeed a number of high profile court cases were brought against people who had been critical of Israel such as the journalist Daniel Mermet and the sociologist Edgar Morin (himself Jewish), who were accused of inciting racial hatred against Jews.<sup>34</sup> According to Gilles William Goldnadel, the lawyer responsible for bringing many of these cases before the judges, 'the case which is being brought against Daniel Mermet is that of new-look antisemitism'.<sup>35</sup> Regrettably, the effect of such actions was to stifle any serious debate about antisemitism in France and the two camps remained entrenched in their respective positions. Indeed much of the literature dealing with this topic in France remained extremely partisan and polemical in its nature. Those supporting the 'new antisemitism' hypothesis could generally be classified as supporting a generally pro-Israeli position and those with pro-Palestinian sympathies argued against it.

## Defining the new antisemitism in France

The use of the 'new' prefix is complicated by the fact that it is not always clear what this refers to. Amongst proponents of its usage, a consensus on its definition is currently lacking. Commentators have not only been unable to agree on this, but the descriptions that have been proposed often differ quite starkly from each other. Surveying the literature, it is indeed possible to identify three basic components of what may constitute *antisémitisme nouveau*. The first and most prominent, common to many definitions, is that the state of Israel and/or Zionism, has replaced 'the Jew' as the object of antipathy in the eyes of antisemites. Therefore Jews are targeted, not as individuals, but as a people and/or nation. In other words, Israel has become, in the words of Brian Klug, the 'collective Jew'.<sup>36</sup> The journalist Sylvain Attal summarised this as the 'detestation and criminalisation of Israel. Not as a government, as a state like many others, but as a symbol of something whose very right to exist is even questioned.'<sup>37</sup> This assessment therefore argues that the internal nature of antisemitism has changed because 'the Jew' has been redefined. This antipathy towards Israel would thus account for the excessive criticism and blame for the world's troubles often levelled at the Jewish state and its relative pariah status. It is argued thus that antisemitism implicitly informs the disproportionate criticism that Israel receives and would therefore explain why antisemitic attacks often coincide with events in the Middle East with Jews supposedly pay the price for this (antisemitic) hatred of

Israel. Taguieff's reading of the phenomenon adds that this hatred coalesces around a representation of Zionism as the incarnation of absolute evil and the belief that every Jew is a 'Zionist'.<sup>38</sup>

The second aspect that designates antisemitism as new is its association with the Left which would distinguish it from supposedly 'older' forms. This 'classic' version of antisemitism refers to that which generally derived from the extreme right, motivated by ethnocentric/biological racism, nationalist chauvinism or religious bigotry. The political Left in France, broadly sympathetic to Israel in the early years of its existence, turned against her after the occupation of the territories captured during the Six-Day war. Henceforth Israel was largely depicted as a colonialist power with imperialist ambitions and anti-Zionism became ingrained within the discourse of the Left, particularly those who identified themselves as members of the so-called New Left.<sup>39</sup> The mainstream left in France incarnated by the Socialist Party (PS) has always been split on the issue of Zionism and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict; however its leadership has generally supported the Israeli labour party and the two-state solution. Therefore the 'new antisemitism' of the Left is uniquely associated with the extreme left (including the Green Party - *Les Verts*) and causes such as anti-racism, anti-imperialism, human rights, support for the Palestinian cause, and opposition to Islamophobia. This has been sarcastically referred to by some commentators as *Islamogauchisme* or *la gauche obscurantiste*.<sup>40</sup> According to this theory, 'new antisemitism' acquires a paradoxical quality because it is supposedly perpetrated in the name of just causes. However, rather than those on the left being directly associated with acts of antisemitism, they are accused of promoting 'antisemitism by proxy' (*antisémitisme par procuration*) through their anti-Zionist discourse.<sup>41</sup> This phenomenon associated with the left-wing intelligentsia is described by Taguieff as the 'ideological metamorphosis of antisemitism from an explicit to an implicit anti-Jewish racism'.<sup>42</sup>

Thirdly and finally, no doubt the most controversial element attributed to definitions of the 'new antisemitism' is that it has a direct connection with cultural and religious origins, namely Islam. Some scholars do not hesitate to refer to 'Muslim antisemitism' and argue that the rhetoric of radical Islamists has influenced perceptions of Jews in France.<sup>43</sup> Taguieff suggests that antisemitism is undergoing a process of *Islamisation* and that the leaders of radical Islam have reformulated the classic antisemitic allegation of a Jewish conspiracy as a Zionist and/or Western plot against Islam.<sup>44</sup> This would explain why antisemitic sentiments are particularly prevalent amongst young French Muslims, sensitive to events in the Middle East. This view is synthesised by Eli Barnavi, former Israeli Ambassador to France:

Previously exported from the West towards the East, antisemitism is now coming back the other way. It has since become an antisemitism of importation, which has mostly settled amongst those of a Muslim background, even though it is encouraged by irresponsible leftists....It is these Palestinians by proxy who are responsible for the antisemitic acts which have multiplied in France in recent



years, who find in these far away events, of which they fail to grasp the complexity, an easy outlet for their resentment and frustration.<sup>45</sup>

The involvement of the Left and Muslims is consistently evoked, as Klug has noted ‘when people speak of a new antisemitism, they point an accusing finger at these two groups in particular’.<sup>46</sup> Yet it is rarely stated how the two strands are related (apart from opposition to Israel). This, as we shall see, creates a number of problems.

Firstly, one difficulty of defining this phenomenon as ‘new’ is dating its starting point. In France, ‘new antisemitism’ is normally used to denote that which became apparent since the year 2000. Indeed, many commentators saw it as something which evolved after the outbreak of the second Palestinian *intifada*. However, if ‘new antisemitism’ also refers to that from the Left, dating this phenomenon from such a recent period must be seriously questioned. Ignoring the fact that antisemitism on the French left (including figures such as Alphonse Toussenel and Pierre-Joseph Proudhon) actually has a long history, it would be more accurate to date this to 1967, since this is the period when hostility to Israel emerged from within the Left in France (and much of Western Europe). Consequently, the rise in antisemitism from the year 2000 onwards could not be the result of an entirely new phenomenon, but rather a new (and more violent) wave of an existing one. Indeed, it has been argued by Taguieff that what France has been facing is in fact the second wave of the ‘new antisemitism’.<sup>47</sup>

The more pressing problem however regarding the ‘new antisemitism’ terminology is that it fuses supposedly leftist and ‘Muslim’ antisemitism into one entity when they are not necessarily linked. Taguieff for example states that today’s anti-Jewish current emanates principally from radical Islamists, Christian humanitarians, anti-imperialists, ‘Third Worldists’ (*tiermondistes*), ‘certain elites’, anarcho-Trotskyites, anti-globalists and various regimes in the Arab world. Despite all these groups having in common either a relationship with the Left or Islam, it appears to be an impossibly long list which does not include any distinctions whatsoever. The pluralistic nature that Taguieff ascribes to the ‘new antisemitism’ must indeed be questioned as it is unrealistic to compare and merge the ideas of radical Islamists with pacifist Christian humanitarians! The assertion that the ‘new antisemitism’ is composed of such an impossibly wide array of protagonists appears disingenuous, as the only common denominator between these groups is their critical position vis-à-vis Israel, whether it be extreme or moderate. This has the effect of associating certain opinions or political positions with acts of antisemitic violence which can only lead to confusion.

Therefore, if such a term were to be used, one would have to see the ‘new antisemitism’ as constituting two strains, one which is supposedly propagated from within the Left and another that

is either inspired by interpretations of Islam, or is at least a cultural phenomenon that seems prevalent amongst Muslims. These strains would thus be connected by their rejection of Zionism but separate in the way they manifest themselves. Due to these evident complexities, some have avoided the ‘new’ terminology and have instead promulgated several other appellations in order to specify the type of antisemitism associated with ‘Arab-Muslims’ in France such as ‘*banlieue*’,<sup>48</sup> ‘ghetto’<sup>49</sup> or ‘pro-Palestinian’<sup>50</sup> antisemitism. In the French debate, a common complaint about this phenomenon was its supposed respectability and immunity to criticism, especially as it relates to those on the Left and their response to it. Thus the widely respected historian Michel Winock lamented that:

When the enemy is fascism, when antisemitism has the name of Le Pen, everything is clear. When the most abusive antisemitic insults and the most blatant acts of antisemitism can be traced to those in France whose origins are in the Third World, antisemitism becomes rather less important, respectable even.<sup>51</sup>

At the heart of the argument advanced by proponents of the ‘new antisemitism’ label is that the line distinguishing anti-Zionism and criticism of Israel from antisemitism has become increasingly blurred. Many present anti-Zionism as forming the ideological core of ‘new antisemitism’ and some have even claimed that anti-Zionism is inherently antisemitic and that the two concepts are essentially ‘Siamese twins’.<sup>52</sup> Taguieff introduces a certain amount of confusion into his own argument by identifying two types of anti-Zionism, the first involving the ‘critique of Israeli policy’ and the second characterised by ‘bringing into question Israel’s right to exist’.<sup>53</sup> Only the second type can of course actually be considered as anti-Zionism. Such critiques of anti-Zionism and are not only erroneous but also unhelpful when trying to analytically entangle these two concepts. They must be treated separately as it should be conceivable that someone could oppose the existence of Israel and not bear any prejudice against Jews, just as one could hate Jews but still (paradoxically) be a fervent supporter of the Zionist cause.<sup>54</sup> Further proof of this argument is the existence of significant Jewish opposition to Zionism or what David Myers calls ‘principled anti-Zionism’.<sup>55</sup> Unless we accept the idea that these individuals are merely all ‘self-hating Jews’, it becomes evident that their opposition must be based on something more than antisemitism (even though technically it would not be impossible to be both Jewish and antisemitic). Equally, the fact that anti-Zionism and antisemitism are not interchangeable does not mean that anti-Zionism or anti-Zionists cannot be antisemitic. As the late French philosopher and prominent scholar of racism Christian Delacampagne once noted, ‘even if anti-Zionism is not automatically intrinsic to hostility towards Jews, one cannot deny that it has often served, since 1967, as an alibi for antisemitism that has not only come from the Right but equally from the Left’.<sup>56</sup> Such would be the case where the

term ‘Zionist’ becomes merely a euphemism for ‘Jew’ such as the idea of a ‘Zionist conspiracy’.<sup>57</sup> In most cases though is of course impossible to know whether an anti-Zionist statement is actually motivated by antisemitism.

The European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA) has attempted to address the thorny issue of when antisemitism may manifest itself with regard to the state of Israel. According to its working definition of antisemitism, this includes claiming that Israel is a racist endeavour, using classic antisemitic symbols to characterise the country, making comparisons with Israeli and Nazi policy and holding Jews as collectively responsible for the actions of the state of Israel.<sup>58</sup> This endeavour is also limited though as it often just identifies when criticism crosses the line from fair to foul rather than providing a set of criteria that would help to distinguish when something becomes antisemitic, or in other words, the construction of Israel as ‘the Jew’. Some have also argued that this definition merely serves to uphold a new orthodoxy that anti-Zionism can be equated with antisemitism.<sup>59</sup> There are still a variety of nebulous areas that the definition does not address. If, for example, it is antisemitic to compare Israel’s actions to Nazi atrocities, is it antisemitic to compare Israel to Apartheid South Africa?<sup>60</sup> It is inevitable that any discussion of these factors will remain subjective and the fact that Israel is a state essentially governed by Jews will perhaps inevitably interfere with the way people criticise its policies.<sup>61</sup> For this reason alone, the suspicion that criticism of Israel represents a thinly veiled cover for antisemitism will probably continue to persist, even if this is probably rarely the case.

## Is it really new?

The contemporary debate about a ‘new antisemitism’, both in France and internationally, repeats much of the discussion that developed in the 1980s focusing on whether critical attitudes towards Zionism or opposition to the State of Israel and its policies had given a new impetus to or constituted a new form of antisemitism.<sup>62</sup> The use of such a term is essentially problematic as it would imply that the internal nature of antisemitism has changed so as to be quantifiably different from forms of antisemitism which preceded it (or continue to exist along side it). Approaches that distinguish ‘new’ from ‘old’ and ‘classic’ from ‘modern’ seem to ignore the essential continuity of antisemitism throughout history and the fact that many aspects of antisemitism we see today can be traced back to stereotypes that have existed for hundreds, if not thousands of years. As Yehuda Bauer once noted regarding the supposed differences between newer and older forms of antisemitism:

Antisemitism in the post-Holocaust world is, in principle, not that different from the pre-1939 variety, similarly combining continuity and new developments. The terminology used by some commentators, which tries to differentiate between ‘classical’ and ‘modern’ (or racist) antisemitism is much too rigid. We have already seen how the Nazis adapted old concepts to fit new realities. Hence, to differentiate ‘classical’ antisemitism from new versions is a dangerous and potentially misleading exercise.<sup>63</sup>

The assessment that Israel has replaced ‘the Jew’ is equally hard to establish despite the fact that that there *are* new groups of antisemites and the nature, frequency and perpetrators of antisemitic acts in France has changed. Perhaps the key problem with the ‘new antisemitism’ terminology is that it refers to two aspects which may not necessarily be related, or at least emanate from entirely distinct ideological perspectives. As Paul Thibaud notes, the use of an expression such as *nouvel antisémitisme* is questionable as it ‘affirms that there is a link and even a continuity between, on the one hand, antisemitic harassment in certain *banlieues*, and on the other hand, the hostility towards Israel shared by the vast majority of public opinion.’<sup>64</sup> The only common reference point of this ‘new antisemitism’ is Israel; however hostility towards Israel or anti-Zionism cannot of course always be traced to a hatred of Jews. In fact, the greatest problem facing scholars of this subject is assessing the motives for antisemitic attacks. Just as we are unable to always know whether criticism of Israel is motivated by anti-Jewish prejudice, we cannot easily assess whether an attack on a synagogue is driven by the hatred of Jews as ‘Israeli fellow travellers’<sup>65</sup>, the construction of Israel as ‘the Jew’ in the antisemitic world-view or as something completely disconnected from the situation in the Middle East. Antisemites themselves have understood this quandary perfectly and hence it is increasingly rare that one finds an outright condemnation of ‘the Jews’, except in the most extreme and marginalised circles. Therefore, it is increasingly the term ‘Zionists’ that is used, making anti-Zionism the ‘lingua franca of many modern day antisemites’.<sup>66</sup> The task of identifying when anti-Zionism is antisemitic is both a thankless and futile one.

Neither antisemitism which emanates from the Left nor that of Muslims can be described as a particularly recent occurrence. Antisemitism on the Left in France has a long history and, in terms of opposition to Israel, can at least be traced back to the 1960s. Neither has Muslim hostility towards Jews developed within the last few years. Antisemitism associated with Muslims in Europe is naturally a controversial issue, but perhaps one that needs to be researched most urgently.<sup>67</sup> The two vectors of ‘new antisemitism’ are not only old; they also need to be separated from each other in order to be rationally analysed. The accusation of a genuine leftist antisemitism, which could be compared to that of the extreme right, is, at any rate, extremely disingenuous. First, there is so far no evidence that shows that people identifying themselves with the Left in France are involved in acts of antisemitism and no major leader of the Left in France has made comments which could be described as antisemitic. The majority of those on the Left in France are, given that they support a

two-state solution, not even anti-Zionists let alone antisemitic. The only possible criticism that could be levelled against members of the left is that their stance against Israel might inadvertently encourage antisemitism by proxy, something which of course can be neither proven nor measured. Shulamit Volkov has asked ‘whether the position towards Israel today, which has become a central issue for the European Left, can still be considered a cultural code or whether it rather indicates a more direct anti-Jewish attack’.<sup>68</sup> There appears to be little evidence for the latter in the case of France and the extreme right still poses more of a threat to Jews than the extreme left. This form of antisemitism can hardly be described as ‘old’, especially as the classic antisemitic texts such as ‘The Protocols of the Elders of Zion’ may inspire many of the ‘new’ antisemites. What we have witnessed in recent years in France appears to be simply a new face of an old hatred, a continuation of a phenomenon that has existed for centuries, always evolving, but essentially remaining the same. As *Le Monde* journalist Nicolas Weill correctly pointed out: ‘There can be no question that the perpetrators of antisemitism have changed or rather diversified. But the idioms through which this ‘new antisemitism’ expresses itself, sadly re-emerge from a rather ‘classical’ register’.<sup>69</sup>

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Figure 1 should be a line graph entitled ‘Recorded levels of antisemitism in France’ which incorporates the following statistics:

Year	Antisemitic threats	Antisemitic violence	Combined antisemitic incidents
1997	90	3	93
1998	80	1	81
1999	70	12	82
2000	625	119	744
2001	187	32	219
2002	739	197	936
2003	474	127	601
2004	774	200	974
2005	409	99	508
2006	434	137	571
2007	280	106	386
2008	297	100	397

The two graphs below give an indication of how fig. 1 should be presented. If there is enough space in the article, these graphs themselves could perhaps also be included.

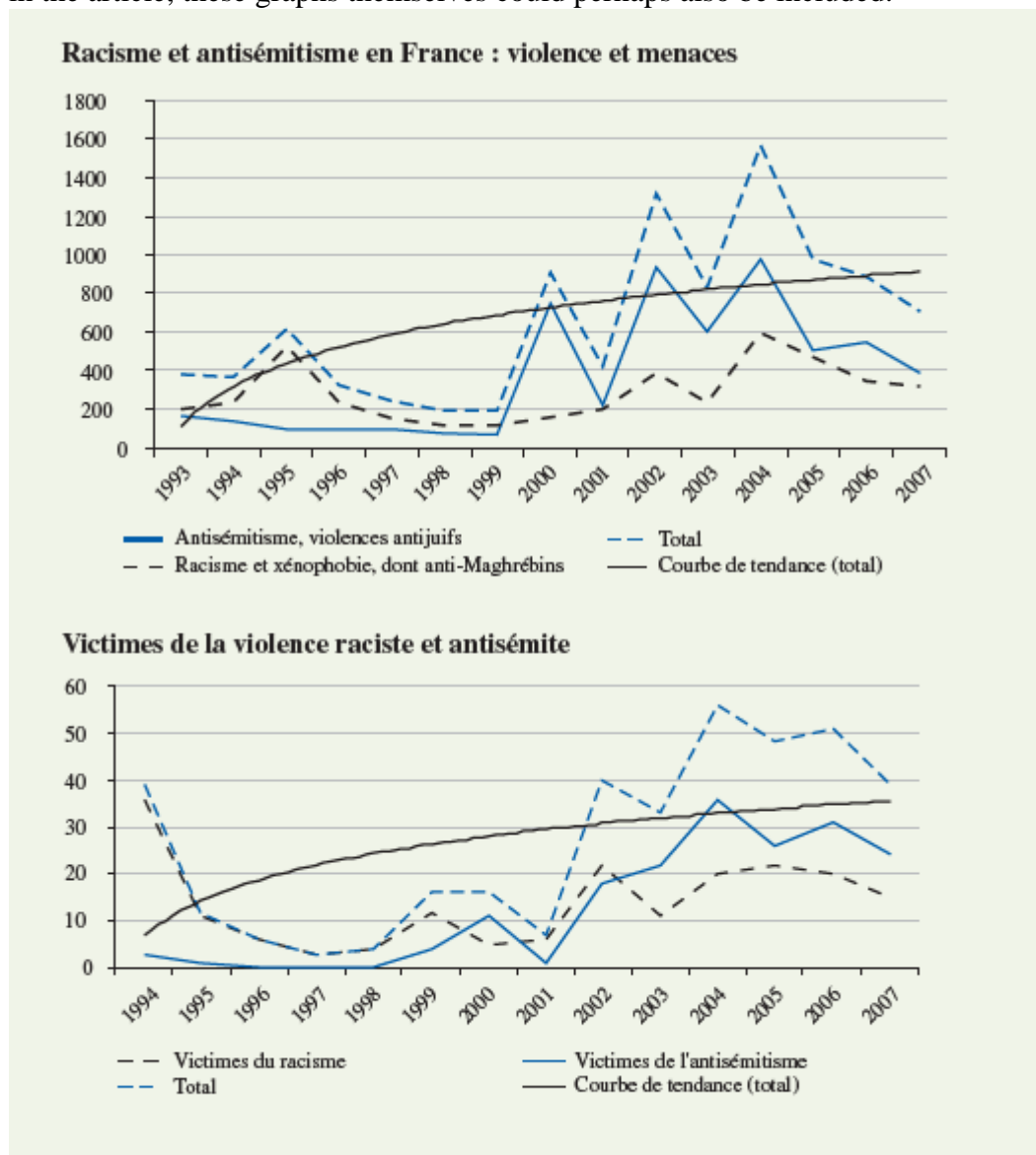
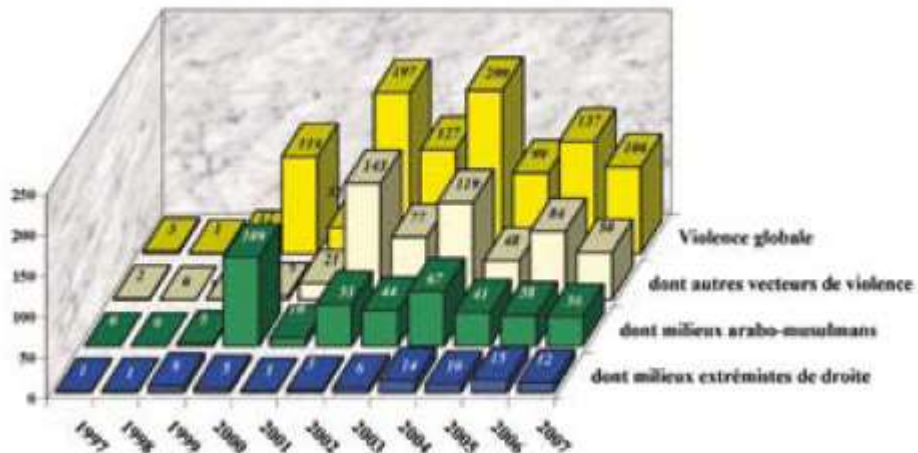


Figure 2 should be a column graph entitled ‘Perpetrators of antisemitic violence in France’ based on the image below

Vecteurs de la violence antisémite depuis 1997



As the numbers are difficult to read, here are the relevant statistics

Year	Extreme right	'Arab-Muslims'	Other	Overall
1997	1	0	2	3
1998	1	0	0	1
1999	8	3	1	12
2000	5	109	5	119
2001	1	10	21	32
2002	3	51	143	197
2003	6	44	77	127
2004	14	67	119	200
2005	10	41	48	99
2006	15	38	84	137
2007	12	36	58	106

Source: *Commission Nationale Consultative des Droits de l'Homme* (2008)

The source for all these statistics is *Commission Nationale Consultative des Droits de l'Homme, La lutte contre le racisme, l'antisémitisme et la xénophobie. Année 2007.* (Paris: La documentation Française 2008). Permission may have to be sought from the CNCDH.

## Endnotes

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<sup>1</sup> These figures refer to the combined total of antisemitic threats and acts of violence, see figure 1.

<sup>2</sup> Jean-Yves Camus, 'Jenseits des republikanischen Modells : Antisemitismus in Frankreich' in Lars Rensmann and Julius Schoeps (eds.) *Feindbild Judentum. Antisemitismus in Europa* (Berlin: Verlag für Berlin-Brandenburg 2008), 44.

<sup>3</sup> Emmanuel Brenner, *Les Territoires perdus de la République* (Paris: Mille et une nuits 2002) was the most notorious. It consists of a series of testimonies of teachers of the difficulties they faced trying to conduct their classes, specifically in the poorer suburbs. It was a publishing phenomenon and was said to have influenced Jacques Chirac's decision to appoint the Stasi commission (which led to then ban on religious insignia in schools in 2004). It was however criticised by some for unjustly portraying young French people of North African origin as being inherently sexist, antisemitic and disrespectful towards authority figures. Brenner, a pseudonym of Georges Bensoussan, is a historian specialising in the Holocaust.

<sup>4</sup> Michel Wieviorka (ed.), *La Tentation antisémite : haine des juifs dans la France d'aujourd'hui* (Paris: Robert Laffont 2005), 337-380. Similar problems in the UK prompted the government to implement measures to tackle antisemitism in British universities. Isabel Oakeshott and Chris Gourlay, 'Anti-semitism rules come in at universities', *The Times*, 25 March 2007.

<sup>5</sup> For an account of this 'exodus' of the Jewish community to Israel and in particular operation *Sarcelles d'abord* mounted by the Jewish Agency for Israel, see Cécilia Gabizon and Johan Weisz, *OPA sur les juifs de France : enquête sur un exode programmé (2000-2005)* (Paris: Grasset 2006).

<sup>6</sup> Many of those interviewed by the Stasi commission mentioned the problem of antisemitism in their testimonies. Ironically many Jewish figures rallied in favour of the ban even though it of course meant that the kippa would also be banned. For more details on the reasons for the implementation of this law see John Bowen, *Why the French Don't Like Headscarves: Islam, the State, and Public Space* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press 2007).

<sup>7</sup> It is to some extent problematic to simply label these actors as 'Muslims' and I utilise this particular terminology (*arabo-musulmans*) as it is that which appears in the reports by the CNCNDH. On the racialisation of North African immigrants and their children as 'Muslims' see Paul A. Silverstein, 'The context of antisemitism and Islamophobia in France', *Patterns of Prejudice*, vol. 42, no. 1, February 2008.

<sup>8</sup> These annual reports entitled *La lutte contre le racisme, l'antisémitisme et la xénophobie* are published on 21<sup>st</sup> March (The UN's International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination) and are available to download from <http://www.cncdh.fr>

<sup>9</sup> Created by the *Conseil Représentatif des Institutions juives de France* (CRIF), the *Consistoires* and the *Fonds Social Juif Unifié* (FSJU) in 1980 in the wake of the bombing of the rue Copernic synagogue in Paris. It performs a similar function to the CST in the UK and works in close collaboration with the ministry of the interior. To view their figures see <http://www.spcj.org>

<sup>10</sup> Formerly the *Direction centrale des renseignements généraux* (DCRG) which in July 2008 was merged with the *Direction de la surveillance du territoire* (DST) to form the new body. This is a three step process, local police or *gendarmerie* forces gather information which is then collected by the *direction générale* of each organisation which in turn sends these figures to the DCRI at the end of the year.

<sup>11</sup> Since late 2005, the *Direction générale de la police nationale* (DGPN) has been using a system named STIC (*système de traitement des infractions constatées*) in order to produce its statistical data relating to crimes of racism and antisemitism. This is due to be connected to Judex, the equivalent system used by the *Direction générale de la gendarmerie nationale* (DGGN) to form a new catalogue (*fichier*) named Ariane. This will allow for a more systematic exchange of information between the DGPN and DGGN and is due to be implemented in 2009.

<sup>12</sup> The 1990 law (n° 90-615) also made holocaust denial a punishable crime.

<sup>13</sup> These new laws that were passed in response to the increase in antisemitism include n° 2003-88 (*loi Lellouche*), n° 2004-204 and n° 2004-1486 as well as the circular of 13<sup>th</sup> August 2004.

<sup>14</sup> Paul A. Silverstein, 'The context of antisemitism and Islamophobia in France', 23.

<sup>15</sup> John Mearsheimer and Stephen Walt, 'The Israeli Lobby', *London Review of Books*, vol. 28, no. 6, March 2006.

<sup>16</sup> This was in response to an article published in *Le Point* detailing a league table of the 'most violent schools' using the SIGNA data.

<sup>17</sup> Paul A. Silverstein, *op.cit*

<sup>18</sup> 'In Zion's hall of mirrors: a comment on *Neur Antisemitismus*', *Patterns of Prejudice*, vol. 41, no.2, May 2007, 223.

<sup>19</sup> As is well known, the first article of the French constitution promises equality for all citizens 'irrespective of origin, race or religion'. This understanding has meant the collection of such data remains officially illegal. Nevertheless, the Ministry of Justice passes these statistics over to the CNCNDH for its annual reports despite refusing to specify what this category actually means and how these figures are obtained.

<sup>20</sup> Referred to as 'ghetto antisemitism' in Michel Wieviorka, *La Tentation anti-Semite*. This is the best study of contemporary antisemitism in France, avoiding the partisan and polemical nature of much of the other work that has



been dedicated to this subject. It has been translated into English as *The lure of anti-semitism: hatred of Jews in present-day France* (Leiden: Brill 2007).

<sup>21</sup> Sylvain Broard and Vincent Tiberj, *Français comme les autres? Enquête sur les citoyens d'origine maghrébine, africaine et turque* (Paris : Presses de Science Po 2005), 108. According to the statistics gathered in this study, 46% of practising Muslims in France were classed as being 'intolerant' towards Jews.

<sup>22</sup> Jonathan Laurence and Justin Vaisse, *Integrating Islam: Political and Religious Challenges in Contemporary France* (Washington D.C: Brookings Institution Press 2006), 241.

<sup>23</sup> Michel Wieviorka, *L'antisémitisme est-il de retour?* (Paris : Larousse 2008), 30. Wieviorka was one of the first to use the term 'new antisemitism' to refer to this phenomenon. Michel Wieviorka, 'Crise au Proche Orient. Un nouvel antisémitisme', *La Croix*, 20 October 2000.

<sup>24</sup> Raphaël Draï, *Sous le signe de Sion : l'antisémitisme nouveau est arrivé* (Paris: Michalon 2002), Pierre-André Taguieff, *La Nouvelle judéophobie* (Paris: Mille et une nuits. 2002), Sylvain Attal, *La Plaie : enquête sur le nouvel antisémitisme* (Paris: Denoël 2004), Paul Giniewski, *Antisionisme : le nouvel antisémitisme* (Le Coudray-Macouard: Cheminements 2005).

<sup>25</sup> Gilles William Goldnadel, *Le Nouveau bréviaire de la haine : antisémitisme et antisionisme* (Paris: Ramsay 2001), Jean-Pierre Allali, *Les Habits neufs de l'antisémitisme : anatomie d'une angoisse* (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer 2002), Alain Finkielkraut, *Au Nom de l'autre : réflexions sur l'antisémitisme qui vient* (Paris: Gallimard 2003), Alexis Lacroix, *Le Socialisme des imbéciles: quand l'antisémitisme redevient de gauche* (Paris: Table Ronde 2005).

<sup>26</sup> Etienne Balibar et al, *Antisémitisme: l'intolérable chantage. Israël-Palestine, une affaire française?* (Paris: La Découverte 2003), Pascal Boniface, *Est-il permis de critiquer Israël ?* (Paris: Robert Laffont 2003), Guillaume Weill-Raynal, *Une Haine imaginaire?: contre-enquête sur le « nouvel antisémitisme »* (Paris: Armand Colin 2005).

<sup>27</sup> Vincent Geisser, *La Nouvelle islamophobie* (Paris : La Découverte 2003), Thomas Deltombe, *Islam imaginaire : La construction médiatique de l'islamophobie en France, 1975-2005* (Paris : La Découverte 2005), Vincent Geisser and Aziz Zemouri, *Marianne et Allah* (Paris : La Découverte 2007).

<sup>28</sup> Since it was published, this book has achieved a certain level of notoriety in intellectual circles but has become the text of reference for many in the French Jewish community on this subject. Its success can be seen by the publication of two other books which paraphrase its title, Geisser's *La Nouvelle islamophobie* and René Rémond, *Le nouvel antichristianisme* (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer 2005). An abridged translation in English also exists *Rising from the muck: the new anti-semitism in Europe* (Chicago : Ivan R. Dee 2004).

<sup>29</sup> Most notably the report of the Stasi commission *Laïcité et République: commission de réflexion sur l'application du principe de laïcité dans la République* (Paris : La documentation Française 2004) which led to the controversial law banning religious symbols in state schools, but also the Rufin report *Chantier sur la lutte contre le racisme et l'antisémitisme* (Paris : La documentation Française 2004) which was commissioned by then minister of the interior Dominique de Villepin.

<sup>30</sup> Paul Foster, 'Les Médias français seraient-ils devenus antisémites?' in Alexandre Feigenbaum, Jacqueline Rebibo, and Monique Sander (eds) *[Nouveaux visages] de l'antisémitisme: haine-passion ou haine-historique?* (Paris: NM7 2001), 221-228.

<sup>31</sup> Shmuel Trigano, *La Démission de la République: juifs et musulmans en France* (Paris : Presses Universitaires de France 2003). Ironically, others even accused the French media of reporting too many antisemitic incidents therefore increasing the risk of inspiring copycat acts, Jonathan Laurence and Justin Vaisse, *Integrating Islam*, 229.

<sup>32</sup> Guillaume Weill-Raynal for example has systematically countered this assertion and accused proponents of the concept of a 'new antisemitism' such as Alain Finkielkraut, Gilles William Goldnadel, Pierre-André Taguieff, Jacques Tarnero and Shmuel Trigano of basing their theories on speculation rather than any actual evidence.

<sup>33</sup> Dominique Vidal, *Le Mal-être juif : entre repli, assimilation & manipulations* (Marseille: Agone 2003), 71.

<sup>34</sup> Daniel Mermet hosts a popular radio show *Là bas si j'y suis* on the *France Inter* station and was accused of airing defamatory remarks by listeners concerning a report from Gaza. Edgar Morin was indicted along with his co-authors former Euro MP Sami Naïr and writer Danièle Sallenave after they published an article critical of Israel in the 4 June 2002 edition of *Le Monde* entitled 'Israel-Palestine: the cancer'. Mermet won his case but, after originally being cleared, Morin was found guilty by the court of appeal. This despite an organised campaign of support led by some of France's leading intellectuals.

<sup>35</sup> Marie-Amélie Lombard, 'Les tribunaux français face au conflit israélo-palestinien', *Le Figaro*, 19 June 2002.

<sup>36</sup> Brian Klug 'The collective Jew: Israel and the new antisemitism', *Patterns of Prejudice*, vol. 37, no. 2, June 2003, 117-138.

<sup>37</sup> Sylvain Attal, *La Plaie*, 19.

<sup>38</sup> Taguieff, *La Nouvelle judéophobie*

<sup>39</sup> Shulamit Volkov, 'Readjusting cultural codes: reflections on anti-Semitism and anti-Zionism', *The Journal of Israeli History*, vol. 25, no. 1, March 2006, 51-62.

<sup>40</sup> Caroline Fourest, *La tentation obscurantiste* (Paris: Grasset 2005).

<sup>41</sup> 'Facilitators of antisemitism who by their opinions, or through their silence, legitimise such acts', Jean-Christophe Rufin, *Chantier sur la lutte contre le racisme et l'antisémitisme*, 15.

- <sup>42</sup> Pierre-André Taguieff, *Prêcheurs de haine : traversée de la judéophobie planétaire* (Paris: Mille et une nuits 2004), 17.
- <sup>43</sup> This is not unique to France of course. The report by the British All-Party Parliamentary Group against Antisemitism, also refers to 'islamist antisemitism' *All-Party Parliamentary Inquiry into Antisemitism* (London: The Stationery Office 2006), 26.
- <sup>44</sup> Taguieff, *La Nouvelle judéophobie*, 128.
- <sup>45</sup> Eli Barnavi, 'Où en est Israël?' *Le Débat*, no. 128, January 2004, 19.
- <sup>46</sup> Brian Klug, 'Is Europe a lost cause? The European debate on antisemitism and the Middle East conflict', *Patterns of Prejudice*, vol. 39, no. 1, March 2005, 57.
- <sup>47</sup> He first developed the notion of *la nouvelle judéophobie* back in 1989, Pierre-André Taguieff, 'La nouvelle judéophobie. Antisionisme, antiracisme, anti-impérialisme', *Les Temps Modernes*, no. 520, November 1989, 1-80.
- <sup>48</sup> Benoît Rayski, *Jours tranquilles à Créteil : voyage au bout d'une haine ordinaire* (Paris: Ramsay 2004).
- <sup>49</sup> Michel Wieviorka, *La Tentation anti-Semite*.
- <sup>50</sup> Michel Winock, *La France et les juifs : de 1789 à nos jours* (Paris: Editions du Seuil 2004).
- <sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 363.
- <sup>52</sup> Raphaël Draï, *Sous le signe de Sion*, 18.
- <sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 21.
- <sup>54</sup> Certain elements of the French extreme right could be considered as antisemitic Zionists because they would rather see Jews in Israel than in France, Pascal Boniface, 'L'antisémitisme et la France' in Alain Houziaux (ed.) *Israël, les juifs, l'antisémitisme* (Paris: Editions de l'atelier 2005), 37.
- <sup>55</sup> David Myers, 'Can there be a principled anti-Zionism? On the nexus between anti-historicism and anti-Zionism in modern Jewish thought', *The Journal of Israeli History*, vol. 25, no. 1, March 2006, 33-50.
- <sup>56</sup> Christian Delacampagne, 'L'Antisémitisme en France (1945-1993)' in Léon Poliakov, (ed.) *Histoire de l'antisémitisme, 1945-1993* (Paris: Editions du Seuil 1994), 140. Here one would immediately think of the Soviet Union whose state-sponsored antisemitism was often propagated under the pretence of 'anti-Zionism' as well as the organised 'anti-Zionist' campaign of 1968 in Poland. Many believed that the September 2001 World Conference against Racism (WCAR) in Durban was used to disseminate antisemitism under the banner of anti-Zionism.
- <sup>57</sup> Conspiracy theories about the involvement of Jews/Zionists in 9/11 are prevalent amongst youths in the French *banlieues*. Michel Wieviorka, *La Tentation anti-Semite*, 194.
- <sup>58</sup> FRA working definition of Antisemitism - <http://fra.europa.eu/fra/material/pub/AS/AS-WorkingDefinition-draft.pdf> (viewed 15 August 2007). For an account of how this definition was formulated see Dina Porat, 'The Road that Led to an Internationally Accepted Definition of Antisemitism', *Jahrbuch für Antisemitismusforschung*, vol. 16, 2007, 117-137. This agency was formerly known as the European Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia (EUMC) and has published several reports on antisemitism.
- <sup>59</sup> Antony Lerman, 'Jews attacking Jews', *Haaretz*, 12 September 2008.
- <sup>60</sup> Myers tries to clear up this ambiguity, by pointing to 'group stigmatisation' as the defining criteria of criticism of Israel as antisemitism. Therefore, when the target of this criticism is the supposed nature of the Jews themselves, whether in Israel or in the Diaspora, it crosses the red line and becomes antisemitic. David Myers, 'Can there be a principled anti-Zionism?' The most emblematic example of such stigmatisation in the French context would be Charles de Gaulle's comments in November 1967 about Jews being 'an elitist people, sure of themselves, and with a tendency for domination'. The ex-president of the CRIF paraphrased this remark for the title of his book in which he reveals how he brought pressure to bear on government leaders to act against antisemitism. Roger Cukierman, *Ni fiers ni dominateurs* (Paris: Editions du Moment 2008).
- <sup>61</sup> Alain Houziaux, *Israël, les juifs, l'antisémitisme*, 17.
- <sup>62</sup> See the contributions to Michael Curtis (ed.) *Antisemitism in the Contemporary World* (Boulder: Westview Press 1986). Israeli Historian Jacob Talmon published an article on 'The New Antisemitism' as early as 1976 as a response to the 1975 UN resolution equating Zionism with racism.
- <sup>63</sup> Yehuda Bauer, 'Antisemitism and anti-Zionism – new and old' in Robert Wistrich, (ed.) *Anti-Zionism and Antisemitism in the Contemporary World* (Basingstoke: Macmillan 1990), 198.
- <sup>64</sup> Paul Thibaud, 'La Question juive et la crise française', *Le Débat*, no. 131, September 2004, 48.
- <sup>65</sup> Brian Klug, 'Is Europe a lost cause?', 58.
- <sup>66</sup> All-Party Parliamentary Group against Antisemitism, *All-Party Parliamentary Inquiry into Antisemitism*, 17.
- <sup>67</sup> See for example Günter Jikeli, 'Antisemitismus unter männlichen Jugendlichen mit palästinensischem und libanesischem Hintergrund – eine Fallstudie in Berlin-Kreuzberg', *Jahrbuch für Antisemitismusforschung*, vol. 17, 2008.
- <sup>68</sup> Shulamit Volkov, 'Readjusting cultural codes', 51.
- <sup>69</sup> Nicolas Weill, *La République et les antisémites* (Paris: Grasset 2004), 24.