

Redemption Online

Antisemitism and Anti-Americanism on the Internet

Manuscript for presentation to be delivered at the panel “Internet and Antisemitism” at the Conference “An End to Antisemitism” (18th February 2017 – 22nd February 2017, Vienna)

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0. Introduction

[Slide1] Dear chair, Prof. Schwarz-Friesel, dear colleagues, dear ladies and gentlemen, thank you for inviting me to this panel to speak about the topic “Antisemitism and anti-Americanism on the Internet.” The previous presentation has shown that fantasies of Jewish world rule remain a staple of antisemitism. However, it appears that America has turned into a synonym for the same hallucinated world controlling elite that in antisemitic worldviews has traditionally been identified with the “Elders of Zion,” “World-finance-Jewry” or similar concepts. The late Robert Wistrich wrote that when people “evoke America, nowadays they often mean ‘Jewish power’ – ‘domination’ of Hollywood, the media, high finance, the Congress, the Pentagon, and the White House by American Jewry.”¹ Prof. Schwarz-Friesel has noted as well that America plays a major role in the construction of pejorative implications that are interpreted as significations of a conspiratorial Jewish world rule. Tropes such as “Jewish Bankers determine American election campaigns”

¹ Wistrich, R. S. *From Ambivalence to Betrayal: The Left, the Jews, and Israel*. Jerusalem: Vidal Sassoon International Center for the Study of Antisemitism, 2012.

recode the antisemitic paranoia that Jews have too much influence.² I would like to show in this presentation that antisemitism and anti-Americanism coincide to form the fundament of a conspiratorial worldview that sees the internet – cynically – as a central tool in a quest for the enlightenment and redemption of humanity. The social media platform You Tube on which I have been focusing my recent research offers a large number of often very professionally edited videos that promote this belief. I am going to show you some examples presently. But we are also going to look at the comments that viewers write in response to these video clips in order to see, how people actually interpret what they see in them.

1. The intersection of antisemitism and anti-Americanism

Let me begin with a few words about the intersection of antisemitism and anti-Americanism as a phenomenon in general, before I will talk more specifically about the role of the internet in this context. For the matter of conceptual clarifications it should be said that the term anti-Americanism is used in the literature to refer to a way of bashing and demonizing America that cannot be explained sufficiently by disagreement with American policies and that, as has been noted by Paul Hollander, bears some kind of family resemblance with attitudes such as “racism, sexism, or anti-Semitism.”³ Authors such as Andy Markovits⁴ , Brendon O’Connor⁵ or Barry

² Schwarz-Friesel, M. „Hass via Internet.“ In: Marx, K./Schwarz-Friesel M., *Sprache und Kommunikation im technischen Zeitalter: Wieviel Internet (v)erträgt unsere Gesellschaft?* Berlin [u. a.]: de Gruyter, 2013.

³ Hollander, P. *Understanding Anti-Americanism: Its Orgins and Impact at Home and Abroad*. Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2004.

⁴ Markovits, A. *S. Uncouth Nation: Why Europe Dislikes America* . Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007.

⁵ O’Connor, B. *Anti-Americanism: History, Causes and Themes*, vol.1: Causes and Sources. Oxford/Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood World Publishing, 2007.

Rubin⁶, have noted that anti-Americanism expresses itself amongst others in the reduction of America to a set of negative stereotypes, the scapegoating of America for all kind of social, cultural or political problems, one-sided and unbalanced condemnations of the United States and a remarkable lust for and popularity of criticizing it. It's similarities with antisemitism, however, go beyond these conceptual characteristics⁷ and can for example be seen in the fact that like Israel in antisemitic discourse, America is portrayed as a main-culprit for war and suffering in the world. We remember the 2003 Eurobarometer poll, in which Israel topped the list of countries seen by European citizens as a threat to world peace. 59 percent of respondents in this survey indicated that they see Israel is a threat. The second place in this ranking, however, was shared by North Korea and Iran with the United States of America.⁸ In the globally conducted WIN-Gallup 2013 "End of year survey," it was the United States that headed the list of the countries that were seen as the biggest threat to world peace by a large margin. 24% of the respondents in this poll believed that the USA was the most dangerous country, only distantly followed by Pakistan that was seen in such a way by merely 8 % of respondents. China came in third with 6 percent and place number four was shared by North Korea, Iran and Israel, with 5

⁶ Rubin, B. Colp Rubin, J. *Hating America: A History*. Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2004.

⁷ There is a spectrum of connecting points between antisemitism and anti-americanism that can't be covered here. One aspect I would like to point out, however, because it has been the focus of my previous research is that both Jews and America are frequently framed as outgroups in distinction to which in-group identities are being conceptualized. See: Neugröschel, M. *Anti-Semitism, Anti-Americanism and the European Quest for Identity*, Jerusalem: Helmut Kohl Institute for European Studies, Konrad Adenauer Foundation, 2015.

⁸ Ridderbusch, K. "Laut Umfrage sehen EU-Bürger in Israel die größte Gefahr für den Weltfrieden." *Die Welt*, November 4, 2003. <https://www.welt.de/print-welt/article270732/Laut-Umfrage-sehen-EU-Buerger-in-Israel-die-groesste-Gefahr-fuer-den-Weltfrieden.html>.

percent each.⁹ Reflecting these views, German philosopher Peter Sloterdijk contended in 2002 that “the two rogue states of contemporary world politics are (...) the USA and Israel.”¹⁰

Such opinions are closely related to the belief that all kind of conflicts and upheavals in the world have intentionally been started by America or by the Jews. While Jews, in traditional antisemitic narratives, were made responsible for the French revolution, the evolution of capitalism and the rise of communism at the same time, World War I, even World War II and actually for all the ills of modernity, there is the idea that current political conflicts have deliberately been brought about by America as part of an imperialist plot to consolidate US-world-hegemony. This idea is expressed quite bluntly in this You Tube music video clip, from which I will show you a sequence. (The vocals are in German but I added English subtitles). [Slide 2.] We see how America is portrayed as an intentional instigator of political conflict in a way very much reminiscent of the conspiratorial role attributed to the “Elders of Zion” or “World-Financial-Jewry” in traditional antisemitic narratives. That such a parallel is not just an abstract theoretical construction but actually concurs with viewer interpretations of this video, can be seen when we take a look at the comments that viewers write in response to this video: [slide3]. Here we see the comment: “Who pulls the strings in world politics? Jewish Zionist banksters and their Freemason servants.” [slide 4] Instructive of the worldview that is being promoted here is also this picture from the Facebook fan page of the creator of this video, an

⁹ WIN/Gallup International (public announcement). “WIN/Gallup International’s annual global End of Year survey shows a brighter outlook for 2014,” November 30, 2013. <http://www.wingia.com/web/files/services/33/file/33.pdf?1508771082>.

¹⁰ Gächter S. „Kohls Erbe wirkt bis heute nach“ (Interview with Peter Sloterdijk). Profil, September 23, 2002.

artist who, invoking the Persian king, calls himself “Shah Reza.” The comment here says “the truth is ugly,” and the following comment responds “yes, it is indeed,” meaning in other words that in the eyes of the artists and his fans this is what the truth looks like. I also would like to refer your attention to this image that we just saw in the sequence [slide5], a scene from the movie the Matrix. I would like to ask you to keep that in mind, because this is a very frequently reoccurring image in representations of antisemitic and anti-American conspiracy theory. I will come back to this a later.

[Slide 6]. The web is rife with representations of an alleged Jewish-American plot to dominate humanity, as for example this image here. [Slide 7] A comment on this video reads “the zionjewmerican empire attacking north korea for financial take over of the entire world by the israeli rothschilds banksters.”¹¹ [Slide 8] Remarkable is also the word construction “USRAEL” that we find here in viewer comments on two other You Tube videos. “FUCK USRAEL!!! WARMONGER MURDERER THIEVES NO. 1 ON THIS WORLD.”¹² [Slide 9] And here: “USRAEL has been worse than Hitler.”¹³

Ideas of Jewish and American domination are often embedded in metaphysical concepts. [Slide 10] The following video is from a You Tube Channel that, according to its own description is dedicated to the exposure of “the new age of anti-Christ.” It features, amongst others, imagery of a hexagonal cloud pattern over Saturn that,

¹¹ hal us, “the zionjewmerican empire attacking north korea for financial take over of the entire world by the israeli rothschilds banksters,” viewer comment on You Tube, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iArfJdea0Wk>, accessed: November 29, 2017.

¹² Jay Jbg, “Fuck USRAEL!!! KRIEGSTREIBER MÖRDER DIEBE NR.1 AUF DIESER WELT!!!,” viewer comment on You Tube, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ln0dNikwJhA&t=11>, accessed: October 27, 2017.

¹³ Jay Jbg, “ +The Codex wo gehobelt wird fallen bekanntlicherweise leider auch Späne, dennoch ist USRAEL schlimmer gewesen als Hitler...und die sind es auch heute noch. Oder hat sich nach 45....“ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=23A1S8fxhSw>, accessed: October 16, 2017

since it has been discovered by satellites, became the object of wild conspiratorial fantasies. [Slide 11] Conspiracy theorists believe that this pattern – that we can see here on an image from the NASA web site – is an intelligent design, somehow symbolizing a metaphysical force that rules humanity. The upcoming video appears to suggest that Jews and America are somehow mysteriously involved with this force. [Slide 12]. The scenes that you just saw were cut together from a 15 Minutes video, which tries to associate America, the Star of David and the Cloud pattern over Saturn, which is presented as the expression of a satanic metaphysical force.

So how do we explain that America and Judaism both attract projections of such conspiratorial fantasies? Irwin M. Wall points out that while in the 19th and 20th century Jews were scapegoated for the ills of the modern age, America turned into the actual embodiment of modernity: “Jews,” Wall writes “historically were associated with modernization and anti-Semitism in Europe in the nineteenth century frequently focused on Jews as bankers, industrialists and capitalists. In the twentieth century, American capitalism could easily be pictured as a triumph of Jewish values and Jewish power, and anti-Semitic tropes, building on the famous Protocols of the Elders of Zion, saw a Jewish conspiracy behind Wall Street capitalists and Soviet Marxists both.”¹⁴ [Slide 13] Consistent with this idea, this image illustrates the theory that Jews own America’s Federal Reserve, which in turn rules the world by controlling the international flow of money. Similarly former BBC sports reporter turned public speaker and conspiracy theorist David Icke portrays the USA as a tool in the palm of what he calls “Rothschild Zionists.” [Slide 14]. [Slide 15] As the

¹⁴ Wall, I. M. “Anti-Americanism in France and the Crisis over Iraq.” *Anti-Americanism: History, Causes, Themes*, vol. 4, *In the 21st Century*, ed. O’Connor, B. and Griffiths, Oxford, Westport, CT: Greenwood World Publishing, 2007.

superpower of our age, the United States of America are understandably a convenient scapegoat for everything that is wrong in the world and an attractive target for conspiracy theorists that wish to find the one power that is to blame for everything that is wrong. Hence, there is a functional equivalency between attempts to blame Jews and to blame America for the ills of the world that leads to a frequent interconnection between these two phenomena.

2. The internet as a tool in an antisemitic and anti-American struggle for humanity's redemption

Let's return to the scene from the movie "the Matrix" that we saw in the first video. [Slide 6]. As mentioned, this is a quite frequently recurring motif in the representation of antisemitic and anti-American conspiracy views. It is the famous "blue-pill-red-pill-scene" in which Neo, the hero of the movie, is offered the choice between a blue pill, representing the decision to remain in an illusionary dream world, a convenient but false state of awareness and a red pill, standing for the readiness to be enlightened and to discover the truth. We learn that the Matrix manipulates the awareness of people in order to conceal a terrifying reality in which humans are slaves of some extraterrestrial beings. And Neo is given the assignment to emancipate humanity from this slavery and false awareness. Remarkably, this theme reflects a major pattern of Gnosticism, namely the aspiration to redeem humanity from the oppression of a metaphysical evil by unveiling a hidden truth. Micha Brumlik has shown that this gnostic pattern has found a revival in traditional

antisemitism.¹⁵ Indeed, antisemitism, cynically, has always been an emancipatory worldview. Antisemites from Wilhelm Marr, over Eugen Dühring and Richard Wagner up to Adolf Hitler wanted to heal the world and emancipate humanity by neutralizing the alleged omnipotent but clandestine control of “World-Finance-Jewry”. Likewise anti-American and anti-Semitic conspiracy theory typically presents itself as an enlightening aspiration that tries to redeem people from a state of naïve ignorance, by unveiling the dark forces that allegedly control the world. Thereby it wants to emancipate humanity from its enslavement by a Jewish-American despotic world-elite. The following music video by a rapper called “Ukvali” illustrates this aptly. [Slide 16].

[Slide 17] Conspiracy theorists like to portray themselves as free and independent thinkers who have the courage to depart from the mainstream in order to unveil the truth that the system is trying to conceal. [Slide18] Respective contents on the web are full with expressions such as “Audiatur et altera pars” (let the other side be heard as well) or “If you want to know who controls you, look who you are not allowed to criticize” (often, as in this tweet as well, falsely attributed to Voltaire).¹⁶ On their quest to enlighten humanity, conspiracy theorists see the internet as a tool to outmaneuver the mainstream media that, consistent with traditional antisemitic ideas of Jewish media-control, is allegedly censored by the ruling elite. They therefore call explicitly on people to shun TV and Newspapers and to educate themselves, using “alternative media” sic. the internet, instead. [Slide 19]

¹⁵ Brumlik, M. Die Gnostiker: Der Traum von der Selbsterlösung des Menschen. Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 2016.

¹⁶ According to Wikipedia, the expression is by American white nationalist, neo-Nazi, Holocaust denier and white separatist Kevin Alfred Strom and is falsely being attributed to the French enlightenment writer Voltaire. See “Kevin Alfred Strom” (Wikipedia article). https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kevin_Alfred_Strom, accessed: 30 November 2017.

To conclude: Conspiracy theorists see the internet as a major tool in their anti-American and antisemitic struggle for humanity's redemption as it helps them to outmaneuver an alleged Jewish-American media cartel.

It is a bitter irony that honorable ideals such as free speech, independent thinking and emancipation are hijacked to legitimize antisemitic and anti-American hate speech. But yet, as mentioned before, the quest for emancipation and redemption, cynically, has always been a cornerstone of antisemitic worldviews. Hence, if we are serious in our wish to fight antisemitism and other related forms of defamation, discrimination and hatred we have to stop to simplistically look at antisemitism as an authoritarian and conformist worldview against which everybody who professes to modern humanist values is immune.

Thank you very much!

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