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## Progressives and the Jewish Question

Jacqueline Kay  
jacquelinekaycessou@gmail.com

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In the mid-1990s a French historian, Pierre Birnbaum, took a chance on a first-year graduate student and gave me a chapter he had written on the history of Jews in France to translate into English. This 1995 work would join a collection of essays in *Paths of Emancipation, Jews, States, and Citizenship*, a panoramic review of the way European nations, by the 19<sup>th</sup> century, had finally granted Jews citizenship. It appeared that the 'Jewish Question' was being resolved, not least through the advent of capitalism which, as it permeated Western democracies, lifted the stigma on moneylending. This profession had been practiced by many Jews when Christian religious dogma admonished the very activity that would later be deemed the lifeblood of capitalism. Yet, despite promising efforts to confine anti-Semitism to history, something was amiss.

Working intimately on Birnbaum's text as I was translating it was disturbingly informative for me, a fifth-generation Ashkenazi Jewish American who had learned a lot more about France from Truffaut films than from accounts of Vichy collaboration or the Dreyfus Affair. Afraid of getting something wrong, I kept my French-English dictionary close to my side, double checking any word whose meaning I had the slightest doubt about.

Until I stumbled upon a word that did not appear in my Larousse: *youpin*. I could tell from the context that the word was pejorative, a terrible insult to Jews. Yet, as a young *Boston Jew* (or, rather, *Jewish Bostonian*: these are very different in their emphasis) I had never actually witnessed someone insulting a Jew.

And so, apolitical (or clueless) as I was, I would only grow concerned about anti-Semitism much later in life. I never looked for it, it just caught up with me in barely discernible pings of recognition that I largely ignored over a long period of time. Yet the discomfort began to grow and take shape in the late 2010s. I became increasingly aware of events that might have been expressions of anti-Semitism in Europe and North America and to read about their greater implications, to consider awkward or even taboo subjects such as Jews and money or Palestinians. And so, I gradually began to investigate the subject.

Among the works that particularly captures the insidious nature of current-day anti-Semitism is David Baddiel's *Jews Don't Count*. In this brief volume, Baddiel proceeds from the observation that, not only does anti-Semitism still exist today, it is surreptitiously increasing, not least through the activism of progressive forces

purportedly committed to the rooting out and rectifying of the wrongs inflicted upon all minority groups.

Except one.

The Left's trouble with anti-Semitism boiled to the surface during Jeremy Corbyn's tenure as party leader of the UK Labour Party between 2015 and 2020. In October 2020, the U.K.'s Equality and Human Rights Commission declared that the Labour Party was afflicted by a culture that tolerates, if not openly endorses, anti-Semitism.<sup>1</sup> While it might be argued that the accusation of anti-Semitism has been applied somewhat more selectively to the Labour party than to other parties, a more important question remains: Why is the 'Jewish question' still even a question? What accounts for its uncertain status within the emancipatory agenda of progressive politics? What 'kind' of minority are Jewish people and why is it so difficult for some people to see them as a race? Finally, what does this say about 'race' as a concept we deploy in struggles for justice?

The conundrum begins with the way Jewish people themselves relate to the problem. While traditional Jews are more likely to be the target of overt acts of anti-Semitism and are therefore well aware of the problem, it is assimilated Jews and non-Jews, particularly on the Left, who have yet to fully grasp the existence, much less the significance, of acts of anti-Semitism. It is the surreptitious nature of bigotry directed at Jews that is symptomatic of the larger riddle about racism in the age of progressive politics.

For me anti-Semitism had been so distant from my everyday existence while growing up that I did not even know how to translate the offensive French word, *youpin*, into English. Since a thorough internet search was still decades in the making at the time of my translation, I resorted to calling my father. When I asked him the *bad* word people used to describe Jews in English, I heard him draw his breath in quickly and then exhale into a chuckle. 'How wonderful,' he said, 'that you don't even know.'

I had learned in school that bad things had happened to Jewish people. But I was certain that anti-Semitism existed only in old, ruined Europe, far away from my family. They had emigrated from Germany at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and enjoyed the fruits of The American Century, unlike their unfortunate distant cousins on the other side of the Atlantic. Or so the Jewish version of the American story we told ourselves went.

We were just beginning to study the Holocaust in our liberal school in suburban Boston in the late 1970s. The hushed shame of the survivors who had immigrated to our green town—those unsmiling people with heavily accented English whose tattooed numbers could sometimes be glimpsed on their ageing arms—was finally being addressed by the community at large. And so, twice a week in our eighth grade Social Studies class we heard about the unspeakable horror known as the Holocaust.

There were endless testimonials, books by the likes of Primo Levi and Eli Wiesel and, of course, the ‘inspiring’<sup>2</sup> story of Anne Frank. We saw photos of emaciated concentration camp prisoners looking out through barbed wire and, more chilling still, countless pictures of piles of confiscated shoes and clothes and rings, piles of items the Nazis confiscated from Jews before sending them to the gas chambers. That was history—and most of us American middle schoolers were too far removed from a war even our parents hadn’t fought in and living in a land unravaged by bombs and post-war poverty to understand it. So, we sat in the clean, bright classroom, gazing longingly through tall windows that overlooked a sprawling green playground. We duly looked and looked at those abysmal pictures and listened to our dull teacher who, at the close of every class said in a gravelly voice ‘if we do not remember the past, we are condemned to repeat it.’ But who was *we* exactly?

The Holocaust was a distant part of the Jews’ tragic past, and anti-Semitism, my father reassured me, was something Jews had moved beyond. We were safe in America (as were our Jewish Canadian neighbours up north, the ‘frozen chosen’) and had all the opportunities that the *goys* did. The Jewish quotas in American universities and the State Department of my father’s youth had long officially ended. What was left of anti-Semitism, said my father, was only found among the people he referred to as the *uneducated*—the bitter, the likes of whom would, many decades later, vote for a Zemmour or a Trump or for their noble nation to leave Europe. It had nothing to do with us. We were, to use a word that was several decades away from metamorphizing into an insult, privileged. *American* Jews no longer needed to worry about anti-Semitism.

When I married a Catholic Frenchman and moved to France, I finally heard first-hand the y-word, and the k-word, the implied insults, the unsaid and the dog whistles—though never to my face. My French husband was, it should be noted, determinedly atheistic and anti-church, the son of parents born during the war who,

like many French on the left had abandoned a church they associated with collaboration with the enemy government. And, as in the majority of mixed marriages, religion in my own family fell gradually by the wayside. It was clearly not a problem for my husband, nor his parents, that he had married *une juive*...just as long as I didn't mention it to his grandmother. When I heard, this, a tiny, barely discernible *ping* of discomfort resounded in me but it seemed like a very small price to pay to live in Paris with the love of my life.

These uncomfortable pings would re-emerge over the years as I integrated as best I could into secular, cosmopolitan Paris and became aware of subtle expressions of anti-Semitism even though I rarely considered what it meant to be Jewish. Except very occasionally, when I walked by bullet-studded facades of Paris' largest synagogue on rue Copernic or a popular deli in the Jewish quarter, or passed the smaller synagogues strewn throughout the city, unrecognizable but for the armed guards stationed in front before Friday night and Saturday morning services. It was wiser, it seemed at the time, to ignore the signs of pervasive antisemitism – a tactic my father's generation and those that followed had successfully deployed in order to enjoy the prized lifestyle of (quasi)cosmopolitan affluence.

Even at mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, as Dana Horn shows in *People Love Dead Jews*, American Jews ignored, and concealed from their children, the anti-Semitism that persisted in the United States. For example, many Jewish immigrants in the United States legally changed their names to a non-Jewish one, as mine did—from Kahn to Kay. However, they have very rarely told the truth about it, *even today*. These families, instead, claimed that it was the American immigration authorities who had either misunderstood the foreign sounding name or changed a complex name to a simpler, more Anglicized version.

However, as Horn demonstrates, immigration officials were, in fact, highly trained, multi-lingual state officials who scrutinized each applicant before awarding him or her permission to live in the US. In this way, Horn writes, 'we witness American Jews in the debasing act of succumbing to discrimination instead of fighting it.' To what extent are Jews still complicit in concealing acts of anti-Semitism *today*? As Horn would have it, in speaking of American Jews 'the lethal attacks on American Jews in recent years have been so shocking and disorienting not merely because of their sheer violent horror, but because they contradict the story American Jews have told themselves for generations, which is that America has never been a

place where anti-Semitism affected anyone's life.<sup>3</sup> I wonder whether the new generation of assimilated European Jews is now telling itself the same story?

There were, of course, overt acts of violence against Jews in France and elsewhere throughout the 1990s and 2000s, and even the 2010s—attacks on schools, vandalism, arson, desecrated buildings or even cemeteries, more widely reported in the *New York Times* than in the French press, it sometimes seemed. But the acts only affected me directly as a *Parisian*, like the Bataclan terrorist attacks in November 2015. I was certain that they were never targeting me, a (lapsed) Jew.

But...when I was invited to dinner I was always asked if I ate pork. I was constantly told, as I never had been in the US, that I looked exactly like Barbara Streisand...or, in graduate school, like Hannah Arendt. It would have been odd of me to make a big thing about it, yet the pings continued.

This discomfort came whenever I received phone calls from Jewish families I'd never even met, inviting us to events: how did they even know I was Jewish? I wondered. *Ping*. Off-hand remarks—a Congolese friend, complaining that her son was not accepted into a prestigious non-sectarian private school because 'the school only takes Jews.' *Ping*. A British friend who refused to have her child apply to this same school because 'we're already not French, so a place with so many Jews would make us all that much more foreign.' *Ping*. An Italian friend whose son was dating an Italian-born Jewish girl: how would her son adapt to a 'foreign' culture, she sobbed to me, her *Jewish* friend. *Ping. Ping*.

Oblivious to anti-Semitism, I could still feel something simmering very subtly under the surface. But was it really worth complaining about? It seemed to me that when I bothered to bring up anti-Semitism on *either* side of the Atlantic, I received four different type of dismissals: *It's all in your imagination; it could be worse; what about other peoples' suffering* (you've had your turn!)? And, of course, *what about the Palestinians?* I began to wonder how many other Jews shared these sentiments.

*It was all in my imagination*. I was gently chided for being *paranoid*. Judaism, I was told, has nothing to do with it. This is a response Jews often hear when they point out an apparently anti-Semitic remark. Consider Woody Allen's Jewish character Alvie in *Annie Hall*. Alvie recounts how he is utterly convinced that his tennis partner is not asking him 'did *you* eat yet' but, actually, 'did *Jew* eat yet,' and that the 'big, tall, blonde crew-cutted' salesman is deliberately telling Woody Allen's character about a sale of Wagner albums 'for a reason.' It's hard not to laugh along

with the friend as he listens to his Alvie's rant and then tells him he's being 'paranoid' and that he can 'see conspiracies in everything.' And I joined in mirthfully, mocking both the 'paranoid Jews' or as well as anyone who might actually still believe that a Jewish conspiracy still existed: 'did you know that the Jews were the ones who sank the Titanic?' 'How do you know that?' 'They ran into an Iceberg.'

The denial, wilful or not, of the existence of anti-Semitism is nearly as old as anti-Semitism itself. Yet though acts of anti-Semitism abound, they are rarely recognized as such. Instead, they are most often perceived by the public—non-Jews and assimilated Jews alike— or the State to be acts of a 'lone wolf' as in, for example, the attack on the Jewish school in Toulouse in 2012 as Marc Weitzman shows in *Hate*, an account of anti-Semitism in France in recent times.

Why, asks *New York Times* Columnist Brett Stephens just after the most recent terrorist attack against Jews, in Texas, did it take the FBI several days to acknowledge that the attack specifically targeted Jews? The would-be murderer was reported to have said that 'America only cares about Jewish lives' yet even the US government, like the French, did not consider the violence to be 'anti-Semitic.' In this way, Jews were 'twice victimized': as targets of violence simply for being Jewish and, then, 'begrudged the universal recognition' that they were 'morally targeted, too.' In other words, Jews would be attacked for being Jewish, but no one would recognize the problem that for what it was, or only reluctantly. It was all in their imagination.

*It could be worse*, as for Jews in the past, or for *other* minorities today. Look at how poorly the blacks and Arabs in many Western countries fare today, people say. Why bother complaining about the occasional 'awkward' comment when the Shoah had ended more than 70 years ago?

It might be noted, however, that this argument far preceded the 20th century.

When the Jewish Belorussian painter Marc Chagall announced his plans to immigrate to France in 1910, his father implored him to reconsider: why would a Jew want to live in the country in which the Dreyfus Affair had taken place not so long ago? 'Father,' Chagall was said to respond, 'at least they argued about it.'

Nearly anyone who attends the Paris Opera Garnier is dazzled by the magical mural Chagall painted on the gilded ceiling above. So why be a killjoy and point out to my friends that in the 1960s the management of the Opera hesitated to hire a Russian Jew to decorate this majestic building? And that just decades before *that*, after settling in France and becoming one of the 20<sup>th</sup> century's greatest artists,

Chagall had been forced to flee yet again, this time to the US until the end of the War. It all worked out, they would no doubt respond. *Stop harping on about it. Think about how much worse it could have been.*

‘We need to get past this,’ said a friend from Berlin as, in the early 2000s we walked among the newly-erected monuments and memorials to the Holocaust in his city. ‘People are now complaining that most of the city’s resources are being devoted to the Jews and there’s nothing left for other cultural or historical projects.’ You’ve had your moment, he seemed to be saying to me; let’s give someone else a turn. *Ping*: Had Jews taken more than their fair share? As Delphine Horvilleur suggests in *Anti-Semitism Revisited*, ‘what seems to be going on before our eyes is a morbid race for trauma, in which some tell the Jews: “You’re not the only ones! What about the pain we suffered...and suffered before you.”’

*What about other people’s suffering?* (‘Whataboutism’) It is true that the victims of the Rwandan Genocide in the mid 1990s or the millions of Armenians killed under the Ottoman empire, sadly, spring less easily to the mind than the tragedy of the Jews. But this gives rise to another question: why the competition? Why has recognition for suffering been reduced to a one-minority-takes-all Hunger Games? As Albena Azmanova has noted, ‘neoliberal progressivism’ has created a situation of ‘minority groups competing for victimhood in an increasingly unfavorable environment, in which free-market capitalism increases the competitive pressures on all.’<sup>4</sup>

*How can the Jews claim to suffer—or claim any rights at all, for that matter—when the Palestinians have endured so much more at the hands of the Israeli army?* The question that Baddiel poses, but does not address is: What about the Palestinians? (Or, as his hashtag puts it more colourfully: #BringIsraelPalestineIntoItSomeFuckingHowAward). As events unfolded—or unravelled—in the Middle East, I saw another category of responses to ordinary acts of anti-Semitism emerge. According to this line of reasoning, Jews had not only depleted their supply of suffering capital, they were currently operating at a deficit. Because the *Israelis* had behaved badly towards the Palestinians, *Jewish people* might no longer be entitled to any recognition for past wrongs inflicted upon the *Jews*.

The question *Can you be anti-Zionist without being Anti-Semitic?* is a debate whose complexity is worthy of Talmudic scholars—even if the answer seems so clear for so many Masters of the Twitter Universe. One would hope they might also

question why when the Israeli government commits atrocities the very legitimacy of the Israeli *state* is challenged. After all, we no longer equate Nazi Germany with the Germans. Why do we not separate the issues of Israel under xenophobic governments from those of the Jewish people? How have the Israelis come to incarnate nearly exclusively white oppression for so many progressives today?

*Whataboutism*: More moments in my everyday life: when I ‘liked,’ and commented, on my appreciation for a short story by the *Israeli* writer Etgar Keret, on Facebook. The story was a timely and eloquent account of a man purchasing olives in a sparsely supplied supermarket in a Tel Aviv during the Pandemic and finds his cashier in tears over the new grandson overseas she won’t get to see.<sup>5</sup> The author, in an attempt to console her, offers her cash, which she refuses indignantly, saying that what she really wants is a *hug*. And so he takes the unknown cashier in his arms and, ‘trying to squeeze the heartbreak out of her, he tried to be small, to be warmer than I really am. I tried to smell like I’d only just been born.’ After reading a story that said so much about the importance of treating individuals decently, I decided to share the story with friends, and Friends, too. I wanted to engage.

I had no idea that I was about to walk into a lion’s den.

It was midnight in Paris yet a response from somewhere in the world arrived within minutes: ‘Perhaps, said my would-be adversary, ‘an Israeli writer ... could use his privilege to write less pointless olive stories, stories closer to home about things like settler passion for uprooting and burning Palestinian olive trees for decades.’ This time the ping had now given way to a deafening cymbal as my interlocuter piled vitriolic insults upon me. Even a short story about universal human values, it seems, did not deserve to be read as long as its writer held an Israeli passport. You could not, my interlocuter told me, put politics aside when it came to Israel; that was a ‘fantasy of objectivity of interpretation entertained by those who’ve inherited nothing but privilege for generations and don’t know it.’ Ping.

If anti-Semitism ever existed, the reasoning goes, the time has come to give way to those who suffer more. Anti-Semitism has become a second-class racism. Consider, for example, what happened when Baddiel and his brother attended a football match to support their team, the Spurs, from a predominantly Jewish part of London, Tottenham. At a particularly heated match, the English football fans, as they will, whipped themselves into a heated frenzy as their team began to beat their opponent. And what were the chants of the Spurs opponents? ‘Yids’!, ‘Spurs are on

their way to Auschwitz,' 'Yiddo' and 'Fuck the fucking Jews.' Yet what is most shocking is the fact that though other racist language was banished, this sort of insult against the Jews was never condemned. There were no movements to end such slurs. The world had 'forgot' the Jews: 'it had left one racism behind.' Jews have been 'left out' of the progressives' condemnation of racist speech.

Is there so little 'empathy' available to begin with? The question may not be *whether* the Jews deserve our sympathy but, rather, why identity politics by definition creates clear winners and losers. Does what Jerry Muller says in *Capitalism and the Jews* in long ago pre-Revolutionary Russia hold true today? 'When economic life was conceived of as a zero-sum-game, in which the gains of some could only come at the expense of others, the gains of the Jews were made responsible for the psychic or material pains of the "authentic" members of the nation.'

Are we progressives, being forced, yet again into making a 21<sup>st</sup> century Sophie's Choice? We might, instead, question why is there not room for all minorities' claims for suffered injustice? Why must Jews be left behind in order for other minority groups to achieve the recognition they deserve?

Why has recognition of wrongdoing to minorities become a competitive and zero-sum-game, and why do Jews keep losing? As Baddiel demonstrates, whilst there is careful attention paid to an authentic representation of minorities — forbidding, for example, blackface, or cisgenders taking on transgender roles — no one minds that non-Jews portray Jews. Why would the public tolerate such an inconsistency? Why would they allow homophobic comments not to pass whilst anti-Semitic ones do? Why are Jews always the losers in the Diversity Hunger Games?

How do we know who belongs to a minority? Is it as simple as their appearance? Often, Jews do not necessarily appear as physically different as other minorities. Though Jews can occasionally have a swarthier or, as I often heard in France, have a 'Mediterranean' appearance, they can sometimes be said to hide in plain sight, a fact that incited the Nazis to require the Yellow Star during WW2. It is this fact, that Jews don't *look* 'Jewish' that enables the Right to be that more conscious of rooting out the Jews.

Is it Jews' 'whiteness' that allows the progressive Left not to consider prejudices against the Jews? If Jews are seen as white oppressors, then, according to this logic, they clearly belong to the *entitled* category. It therefore stands to reason for those who would protect minorities, that Jews need no help in surmounting

degrading stereotypes, possessing as they do power and money. It is undeniable that some Jews have been successful at making money, a point I will address below. But the *shame* associated with such success is particular to Jews. When Jews do succeed, they are somehow seen as not deserving it; some Jews themselves may be said to be ashamed of their own wealth and success.

Just let it go, my father would sometimes say to me when I evoked uncomfortable moments of everyday anti-Semitism. He was a Jewish Bostonian and, to his great pride, had been the first Jew admitted to the country club in his town. Just as he'd attended his university in the early 1950s as one of the Jewish quota. He had married educated Ashkenazi women 'who didn't look Jewish at all.' Yet, at the same time, he continued to send money to Israel. If anyone ever challenged the policies of that beautiful and complicated country in the desert my father would repeat: 'if Israel had been independent before the War, many of the 6,000,000 Jews could have been saved.' His own ambivalence about what it meant to be Jewish seems to me to be more the rule than the exception among the Jews I know.

Why are the Jews so damned if they do, damned if they don't? Why has any Jew, at any time in history, in even the most assimilated and privileged place always felt a tug, a ping that something is just not right. And why is anti-Semitism so uncomfortable to discuss? There are, it seems, too many taboos among Jews and non-Jews alike.

Among such taboo topics is Jews and Money, one that few outside of the extreme right dare evoke. I am certain other Jews share my experience: my mother always reminded me to be careful how I spent money on other people. Gifts were complicated: underspending made you a *cheap Jew*, generous gifts meant you were showing off.

In the wider world, it might be worth examining, as few have, whether Jews have, in fact, been more commercially or financially successful. However, most evade this subject. Baddiel, for example shunts aside the topic of Jews and wealth simply by 'disproving' it: He briefly cites the findings of a nonpartisan group which has demonstrated that Jews only make up 1.7 percent of the of the world's millionaires without taking into account population size. Similarly, he quotes a study that simply cites the single highest earning group in the US (the 'Hindus.')

He does not effectively disprove that Jews are disproportionately wealthy. Yet why does he need to address this question at all?

The real problem in the perception, if not the reality, that Jews are disproportionality wealthy is they are often seen to have procured their riches in an underhanded way. There is 'something dark, ill-gotten, and exploitative about how they, and all their brethren they are in league with, got that money,' he says. However, he avoids pursuing this point.

In this absence, Baddiel is in good company. Few serious scholars, aside from Hannah Arendt (in *Origins of Anti-Semitism*) and Jerry Muller have taken on such a potentially incendiary topics. Jews and money have always had a complicated relationship, from the very origins of Christianity, through the Middle Ages and, above all during the development of Capitalism. The history of Jews and capitalism are inextricably linked. Not to address Jews and money is truly to ignore the elephant in the room.

As Muller recounts in *Capitalism and the Jews*, since they left in antiquity the land that would become Israel, Jews have lived as a diaspora around the world. As a result, they became primarily merchants, like other diasporic peoples. In this way, Jews developed 'transregional trading networks' as well as the skills and knowledge they needed for trade. As a result, the Jews 'consolidated' their economic power yet had little, if no, political influence. Moreover, as non-Christians, they enjoyed fewer rights: they were, at best, tolerated, but only as 'despised outsiders.'

Moneylending was one of the few professions Jews were allowed to practice, and only because Christians were forbidden to lend money with interest. They could, however, work with people of other religions who did engage in this allegedly sinful practice. It was this commercial skill, developed well before modernity, in addition to a strong literary culture, that enabled Jews to step in and exercise one of the few professions available to them, and to do, sometimes, 'disproportionately well.'

However, as Muller shows, associating money with a 'theologically stigmatized minority' made moneylending all the more suspicious. Paradoxically, as over time moneylending largely dispensed with its dishonourable reputation as European society modernized, what remained of moneymaking's stigma *continued* to be seen as incarnated by the Jews. Thus, Jews, even among more progressive groups would be doubly damned: only allowed a limited role in civil society and then despised for being outsiders, as Hannah Arendt illustrates and Karl Marx earlier still, when he speaks of the 'dirty-Judaical manifestation' of materialism.<sup>6</sup> It sometimes seems that the Jews are forced to incarnate capitalism and all its evils.

It is only when society addresses its ambivalence about capitalism and the injustices that it has produced for everyone, particularly minorities, that it will even be possible to unpack anti-Semitism and its poisonous manifestations. This is surely the job of the progressives whom Baddiel all but condemns in *Jews Don't Count*. Yet the very real discomfort that Jews everywhere experience, that I could barely discern as a child but seems so much more apparent today, the pangs of injustice that are condemned by the Left and dismissed by the Right must be made more apparent if we are to address society's growing anti-Semitism that Baddiel so aptly exposes.

In considering the Jewish question that Baddiel and others pose today, we (self-appointed) progressives, Jews and non-Jews alike, might well recall the words of Lenin (and not Marx) on Jews more than a century ago.

Only the most ignorant and downtrodden people can believe the lies and slander that are spread about the Jews... It is not the Jews who are the enemies of the working people. The enemies of the workers are the capitalists of all countries.

The above quote was generously provided by my teenage son. Unabashedly progressive (like many of his urban peers) he spent Saturday mornings distributing fliers and pasting posters for a left wing French presidential candidate. This teenager 'somewhat' identifies as Jewish.

When my father, this young man, and I visited Israel in the autumn of 2019, my father had an agenda: that this beloved grandson, never bar mitzva-ed, never having set foot in a synagogue, utterly unfamiliar with the Torah, get to Israel (though my father would hardly have approved if any of us were to actually make *Aliyah*—to return there permanently.)

And so my father crossed the Atlantic, while my son and I travelled from Paris across the Mediterranean to Israel. This nation, a place approximately 25 times smaller than France and nearly 500 times tinier than the US, a country so minuscule it could barely contain the histories of Muslims and Christians and Jews, veiled women or people bearing wide, heavy crucifixes or black-clad Hassidim or bronzed, fit young people emerging from their military service. And all these histories blurred together as our guide burst with history and my young son asked question upon question in the hot sun, debating and arguing relentlessly with my father about history and politics and the West bank and Palestinians and Jews and what it all

really meant until I wearied of all this discussion and gazed longingly at the Mediterranean beach from the Roman ruins of Caesarea.

And from where I stood, I could see very young Israeli soldiers with machine guns strapped across their young bodies and I thought about the what the mothers of both sides felt when their boys went off to war, something we in Western Europe and the US experience much less often today. The heat was stifling and the falafel was foreign and the street signs in Hebrew seemed strange, evoking as they did the prayers I'd learned and then forgotten and that my boys had never known, just as I had never experienced overt anti-Semitism and my parents had grown up far removed from the Shoah.

And there we were in that hot and beautiful and multi-faceted country, far from the clutter of the internet and the deafening clamour of twitter and the little pings that may or may not have been anti-Semitic. And at that point I knew only one thing: we four Jews were united in our desire to discuss and debate and possibly establish what it meant to be Jewish, or Palestinian, to take on topics Baddiel and others have had the courage even to bring up. The only thing we were certain about was that just as Israel struggled—and all too often failed—to accommodate everyone's pain and prejudice, the failings of capitalism, and the brutal colonisations that were the building blocks of modernity— we the privileged, and the less privileged, non-Jews and Jews, should surely to at least admit that the conversation is still riddled with unchallenged assumptions and taboos on both the Right and the Left. A serious reflection upon the Jewish Question and the discomfort even the most assimilated Jews feel will enable us to understand what exactly a minority is and what it means to recognize it.

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<sup>1</sup> See 'Investigation into antisemitism in the Labour Party', report of the Human Rights Commission (London, October 2020) ; ISBN: 978-1-84206-831-1

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<sup>2</sup> In Dana Horn, *People Love Dead Jews*.

<sup>3</sup> Dara Horn, *People Love Dead Jews*, W.W. Norton, 2021

<sup>4</sup> in A. Azmanova, "Who Sews Kamala Harris' Clothes? Feminist Struggles: Individual Emancipation versus Class Liberation", 7 Feb 2021: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V3QivTFs-Ac>

<sup>5</sup> Etgar Keret, 'Eating Olives at the End of the World,' *The New York Review of Books*, April 12, 2020:

<https://www.nybooks.com/daily/2020/04/12/eating-olives-at-the-end-of-the-world/>

<sup>6</sup>. See Hannah Arendt, Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (Mariner Books, 1973) and Karl Marx, Theses on Feuerbach (1845): thesis #1.