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ANTISEMITISM AND THE STRUGGLE FOR THE ‘GOOD’ SOCIETY: AMBIVALENT RESPONSES TO ANTISEMITIC ATTITUDES AND IDEAS IN THE 2014 SWEDISH ELECTORAL RACE

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Executive Summary

In the wake of Operation Protective Edge in the summer of 2014, the number of antisemitic incidents rose all over Europe. Sweden was no exception. In the campaign for the Swedish general elections that took place on September 14, several candidates from various parties were caught making antisemitic statements or comments on Facebook and in other contexts. Even though these candidates were eventually forced to resign and drop out of the electoral race, the complacency and apologetic attitude that met most of them speaks to a deeper problem in the Swedish political discourse. There is a widespread inability, or perhaps unwillingness, to recognize antisemitism when it does not present itself in the form of neo-Nazism. This became even clearer when contrasted with the shock and condemnation that met the sweeping electoral gains of the extreme rightwing Sweden Democrats. As long as self-avowed anti-racists allow themselves and others to employ antisemitic language, especially in the name of defense of the downtrodden, it won't be possible to combat the problem of antisemitism in any meaningful way.

“Antisemitism Is on the Rise in Our Country—and We Remain Silent”

This is the pertinent title of an article published in the evening newspaper *Expressen*, by the well-known Swedish actor, writer and circus director Henry Bronett. In his article, Bronett directs a scathing critique towards Swedish decision-makers, journalists and anti-racist activists for their astounding silence at a time when antisemitic sentiments flourish in social

media and on the streets of Sweden.¹ Until mid-August 2014, the issue of Swedish antisemitism was a marginal question at best, both in the electoral campaigns and in mainstream media. It was not until five political candidates had to resign their candidacies for having made antisemitic comments or posts on Facebook, that public discourse began to broach the subject of antisemitism in Sweden. However, this discussion has centred on the treatment of Swedish Jews and anonymous antisemitic comments made on different social media platforms. Very little of the political conversation has actually dealt with issues surrounding antisemitism as a specific problem of ideas and attitudes in contemporary Swedish society.

Reports of antisemitic expressions increased throughout the final stages of the electoral race, and voices from several different parties were heard after Bronett's article in defense of tolerance and against antisemitism. Yet, Swedish society and Swedish politics remain ambivalent towards what constitutes antisemitism—especially that which is expressed in relation to the Israel-Palestine conflict.

In 2006 the Swedish government agency Forum för Levande Historia (The Living History Forum) and BRÅ (the Council for Crime Prevention) published a report on antisemitism in Sweden, which shows that 5 percent of the Swedish population between the ages of 16 and 75 express antisemitic ideas in a forceful and consistent manner. Furthermore, the study demonstrates that 36 percent of all Swedes in the same age group have an ambivalent attitude towards Jews.² This means that more than a third of the Swedish population agrees with certain antisemitic ideas while rejecting others.

These results are consistent with the more recent global study conducted by the Anti Defamation League (ADL), which shows that 4 percent of the Swedish population harbors antisemitic attitudes.³ However, as the Swedish Committee against Antisemitism (SKMA) notes in a review of the study, over 10 percent agree with statements such as “the Jews have too much power over financial markets”, “Jews only care about what happens to

¹ Henry Bronett, ‘Antisemitismen ökar i Sverige—och vi tiger,’ *Expressen*, www.expressen.se/debatt/antisemitismen-okar-i-sverige---och-vi-tiger/, 27 July 2014, (accessed on 5 September 2014).

² Henrik Bachner and Jonas Ring, *Antisemitiska attityder och föreställningar i Sverige*, 2nd edn., Stockholm, Forum för Levande Historia, 2007, p. 8.

³ The Anti Defamation League, ‘ADL Global 100,’ global100.adl.org/#country/sweden, July 2013- February 2014, (accessed on 12 September, 2014).

individuals within their own group” and “Jews have too much influence over the American administration.”⁴

In the September 2014 general elections, the racist and immigration-hostile party, the Sweden Democrats, doubled their support and received over 12 percent of the Swedish national vote. Many of the Sweden Democrats’s political candidates were forced to resign as *Expressen* uncovered racist and homophobic comments on various internet forums.⁵ This is hardly surprising, given the Sweden Democrats’s political program, which proposes assimilation and radical changes to Sweden’s immigration policies.⁶ However, not only candidates from the Sweden Democrats have expressed antisemitic sentiments. The picture of Swedish antisemitism is unfortunately much more complex than that. In fact, suspensions from parties, as well as resignations of candidacies based on antisemitic statements in the 2014 electoral race, also occurred within parties with clear anti-racist, pro-tolerance platforms, such as the Social-Democrats, the Environmental Party and the Center Party.

A majority of these candidates, who had to resign due to antisemitic statements, maintained and still assert that they are tolerant, compassionate human beings who do not recognize themselves as racists or antisemites. Therefore, to speak of tolerance at large as a solution to the specific problem that is antisemitism, is, in the Swedish context, not sufficient. The 2014 electoral race demonstrates how antisemitism continues to exist in Sweden as a latent structure, making itself known throughout the political spectrum, particularly in times of conflict in the Middle East. Therefore, it is vital that party responses to expressions of antisemitism within the party itself also acknowledge that it is antisemitism *specifically* that needs to be combated and not intolerance in general.

Contextualizing Antisemitism within the Anti-Racist Movement

A seemingly contradictory development within the Swedish anti-racism movement is that, whilst aiming to stand up for human rights values and tolerance, they find it difficult to see, acknowledge and act against expressions of antisemitism.⁷ Members of this movement, who

⁴ Svenska Kommittén mot Antisemitism, ‘Antisemitismen i ett globalt perspektiv. SKMA sammanfattar och kommenterar ny studie’, skma.se/blogg/2014/05/antisemitismen-i-ett-globalt-perspektiv-skma-sammanfattar-och-kommenterar-ny-studie, 17 May, 2014, (accessed on 10 September 2014).

⁵ Emma Löfgren, ‘Många avhopp i valrörelsens slutskede’, *Dagens Nyheter*, www.dn.se/valet-2014/manga-avhopp-i-valrorelsens-slutskede, 9 September, 2014, (accessed on 12 September, 2014).

⁶ Sverigedemokraterna, ‘Principprogram’, sverigedemokraterna.se/wp-content/uploads/2013/08/principprogrammet2014_webb.pdf, 2011, (accessed on 17 September, 2014).

⁷ Elin Melin, ‘Konflikten i mellanöstern kan utnyttjas för att legitimera judehat’, www.forskning.se/hurmarsverige/nationalism/nationalism/konfliktenimellanosternkanutnyttjasforattlegitimerajudehat.5.3b19111a146b5b338a69fc.html, 8 August, 2014, (accessed on 10 September, 2014).

aim to speak and act on behalf of the disenfranchised, are over-represented in the leftist and green camps in Swedish politics, although it has members across the political spectrum. One of the main figures of the Swedish anti-racism movement is Mona Sahlin, the former head of the Social-Democrats, who currently holds the title National Coordinator against Violent Extremism.

In a 2010 debate with the Christian democratic leader, Göran Hägglund, Sahlin demanded that her opponent apologize for suggesting that antisemitic attitudes were more prevalent among Swedish Muslims than other Swedish groups.⁸ Sahlin's indignant response to Hägglund's statement demonstrates the ambivalence felt when a socio-economically weak group in society is accused of intolerance. The leading scholar on Swedish antisemitism, Henrik Bachner, describes this phenomenon as an expression of ignorance by individuals who find it difficult to reconcile the idea of socio-economic weakness and expressions of intolerance. Conversely, this is also what causes the same individuals to trivialize antisemitism, making it a non-issue in the tolerance debate.⁹ Due to the fact that Jews are perceived as a strong socio-economic group, they are never identified as victims.

This notion is reinforced and consequently facilitated by the Israel-Palestine conflict, where the Israeli government's actions in the Gaza strip become an excuse for the expression of antisemitic sentiment. As Bachner argues in his doctoral dissertation on Swedish antisemitism after 1945, this form of antisemitism and extreme forms of anti-Zionism, framed by the Israel-Palestine conflict, has existed within the left wing of the political spectrum in Sweden and Western Europe since 1967.¹⁰ Although, "the anti-Zionist opinion that grew within the revolutionary left [...] was, without a doubt, also based on a genuine sympathy for the Palestinians as the weaker party in the conflict," it came to develop significant antisemitic elements as a result of the "western anti-Jewish intellectual heritage"¹¹ and antisemitic ideas embedded in socialist theory. The manner in which antisemitism is expressed in discourses on tolerance and solidarity on behalf of the Palestinian population is, therefore, nothing new, but has spread and developed since the late sixties.

Antisemitic Expressions and Ambivalent Responses in the 2014 Electoral Race

⁸ Peter Rubinstein, 'Varför blev Mona Sahlin så upprörd?' *Judisk Krönika*, no. 2, 2010, p. 42.

⁹ Elin Melin, 'Konflikten i mellanöstern kan utnyttjas för att legitimera judehat', www.forskning.se/hurmarsverige/nationalism/nationalism/konfliktenimellanosternkanutnyttjasforattlegitimerajudedeat.5.3b19111a146b5b338a69fc.html, 8 August, 2014, (accessed on 10 September, 2014).

¹⁰ Henrik Bachner, *Återkomsten—Antisemitism i Sverige efter 1945*, Stockholm, Natur och Kultur, 1999, p. 330-331.

¹¹ H. Bachner, *Återkomsten—Antisemitism i Sverige efter 1945*, Stockholm, Natur och Kultur, 1999, p. 155.

On August 5 Birgitta Hansen, the city council member representing the Environmental Party (Miljöpartiet, MP) in the Stockholm borough Skarpnäck, published a statement on her Facebook page where she compares the State of Israel with the Nazis and states that the world stands by and does nothing because “the Jews” have such influence over big business and the American administration. After being criticized for her antisemitic outburst, Hansen commented that she never intended her statement to be *interpreted* as antisemitic or to offend anyone. She went on to explain her comments by being vaguer but still alluding to the idea that the Jews as a group affect world-events by influencing the American government.¹² On August 12, the daily newspaper *Metro* reported that Hansen had renounced all her political responsibilities after being asked to step down by the head of the Environmental Party in Stockholm, Per Olsson.¹³ Before Hansen resigned from her post, Olsson commented to *Metro* that “as a representative of the Environmental Party, one has to manage a critique of Israeli military operations without expressing antisemitic ideas.”¹⁴ This response seems reasonable, as it condemns antisemitic expressions while leaving a critical stance against the Israeli state’s use of force in Gaza open to opinion and debate.

However, in an interview in the major daily newspaper *Svenska Dagbladet* (SvD), Åsa Romson, one of the two national leaders of the Environmental Party¹⁵ explained Hansen’s, as well as the recently suspended political candidate Jerker Nordlund’s,¹⁶ statements as having been *interpreted* as if there was antisemitism *behind* them. Thereby Romson claims that the antisemitic character of Hansen’s statements is open to interpretation and implicitly denies that there was any antisemitism evident in the statements themselves. Furthermore, Romson concludes that “it is important, when we have a problem with antisemitism in Sweden, that we are clear with how our representatives frame their

¹² Peter Lindholm, ‘Miljöpartist kritiseras för antisemitism’, *Metro*, www.metro.se/stockholm/miljopartist-kritiseras-for-antisemitism/EVHnhk!FbbuDCArUL02, 12 August 2014, (accessed on 5 September, 2014).

¹³ Patrick Ekstrand, ‘MP-politiker slutar efter att ha jämfört Israeler med nazister’, *Metro*, www.metro.se/nyheter/mp-politiker-slutar-efter-att-ha-jamfort-israeler-med-nazister/EVHnhk!6Qmb4vIcMsko, 13 August, 2014, (accessed on 5 September, 2014).

¹⁴ Peter Lindholm, ‘Miljöpartist kritiseras för antisemitism’, *Metro*, www.metro.se/stockholm/miljopartist-kritiseras-for-antisemitism/EVHnhk!FbbuDCArUL02, 12 August 2014, (accessed on 5 September, 2014).

¹⁵ The Environmental Party, *Miljöpartiet-de gröna*(MP), became a political party in 1981 and chose to have two so called spokespeople (*språkrör*) instead of one party leader.

¹⁶ At the end of July, 2014, the political candidate for the Environmental Party, Jerker Nordlund, posted several antisemitic texts on Facebook where he encouraged a “global war on Israel” stating that the Israeli state is a “mental illness,” cf. Anna Lindberg, ‘MP-politiker: “Israel är en sjuk stat”’, *Aftonbladet*, www.aftonbladet.se/nyheter/article19267753.ab, 27 July, 2014, (accessed on 3 September, 2014).

arguments.”¹⁷ Hence, rather than condemning Hansen’s and Nordlund’s antisemitic ideas, Romson critiques the candidates’ choice of words.

Moreover, in reply to the question “why do Environmental Party members behave in this manner?” Romson refers to the “desperation” felt in many debates. She specifically points to Operation Protective Edge as a conflict which made many within her party feel “a great sense of desperation with the children who were murdered needlessly.” She continues by saying that “the fight for the ‘good society’ is sometimes desperate but that does not excuse acts of *stupidity* by political representatives.”¹⁸ Romson thus attributes the antisemitic statements by politicians within her party as stupid slips of the tongue made in the struggle for a better society. She mentions that Sweden has a problem with antisemitism but does not acknowledge that it also exists in, and is often framed by, the Israeli-Palestine conflict. In this context, Romson believes that antisemitic expressions are statements that have been misunderstood and constitute a semantic problem rather than a problem of attitudes and ideas.

Similarly, the antisemitic statements made by Petronella Petersson, the third name on the ballot for parliament of the Center Party (Centerpartiet, C),¹⁹ were summed up by both the offender and her district head as statements which had been misinterpreted. In a thread on Facebook on July 20, Petersson repeats antisemitic statements in which she refers to “the Jews” as being reclusive and against gay marriage. She also alludes to the idea that antisemitism, and ultimately even the Holocaust, depended on how “the Jews” behaved. For example, Petersson comments; “you who think that the Jews’ actions are good through and through, do you also mean that the German population disliked the Jews because of pure and random evil?”²⁰ This comment reflects the antisemitic notion that hatred of Jews emanates from Jewish behavior and ways of life. According to this view, it is the fault of the Jews themselves that they are being shunned and persecuted.²¹ In the Facebook feed, many of

¹⁷ Tobias Brandel, Jenny Stiernstedt and Frida Svensson, ‘Live: Svds utfrågning av Åsa Romson’, *Svenska Dagbladet*, www.svd.se/nyheter/valet2014/svd-fragar-ut-asa-romson-live_3856352.svd, 28 August, 2014, (accessed on 5 September, 2014).

¹⁸ Tobias Brandel, Jenny Stiernstedt and Frida Svensson, ‘Live: Svds utfrågning av Åsa Romson’, *Svenska Dagbladet*, www.svd.se/nyheter/valet2014/svd-fragar-ut-asa-romson-live_3856352.svd, 28 August, 2014, (accessed on 5 September, 2014). My italics.

¹⁹ The Center Party has a liberal profile and has governed Sweden in a centre-right coalition (*alliansen*) for the last eight years. The party has a liberal, green profile with an emphasis on local politics and the importance of rural areas and their survival in an urbanized economy.

²⁰ Sylvia Asklöf Fortell, ‘När fördomar blir sanningar’, *Blekinge Läns Tidning*, [www.bltsydostran.se/ledare_blt/nar-fordomar-bliir-sanningar\(4379587\).gm](http://www.bltsydostran.se/ledare_blt/nar-fordomar-bliir-sanningar(4379587).gm), 24 July, 2014, (accessed on 6 September, 2014).

²¹ Henrik Bachner and Jonas Ring, *Antisemitiska attityder och föreställningar i Sverige*, 2nd edn., Stockholm, Forum för Levande Historia, 2007, p. 9.

Peterson's party colleagues point out that her statements about "the Jews" as one homogenous group are antisemitic and offensive. Petersson's defence consists of the theory that a tolerant and open society, which she claims to promote, is dependent on the intermingling of cultures and religions, something which "the Jews" oppose.

As such, Petersson's argument is similar to Romson's idea about a desperate struggle for "the good society." In the quest for a more open and tolerant society, "the Jews" are identified as an obstacle; either in the incarnation of the State of Israel, supported by powerful Jews in the United States, or as a reclusive group which refuses to mix with the rest of the world. As in Hansen's case, Petersson's comments were excused by the Center Party district leader for the Blekinge county, as "an unfortunate choice of words which has led to people drawing the wrong conclusions" about Petersson.²² In addition, Petersson's rather meek public apology shows that she does not lament the content of her comments but rather the fact that they might have been "perceived" as antisemitic, when that was never her intention.

In contrast, the Social-Democratic candidate, Omar Omeirat, whose statement on Facebook that "the Palestinians [were] being slaughtered by the Jewish swine"²³ was both reproached and rejected in full by Åsa Hååkman Feldt, the head of the Social-Democrats (Socialdemokraterna, S) in Filipstad, where Omeirat was running for city council. Omeirat changed the wording of his statement to "Zionist swine" thinking that this might be considered more acceptable to his party. This assumption proved erroneous and although the local ballots had already been printed, Hååkman Feldt declared that Omeirat would not be "electable" come election day. Hååkman Feldt doesn't offer any excuses or explanations for Omeirat's statements.²⁴ Rather, she clearly states that these views are not acceptable and they have no place within the Social-Democratic Party. Even the paraphrased version of the statement is denounced and no issues of 'interpretation' are raised with regard to the context within which the statement was made.

The fact that the ballots were already printed was, in Omeirat's case, not an issue for the city council in Filipstad, as the former was declared not "electable." However,

²² 'Petersson hoppar av politiken efter beskyllningar om antisemitism', *Sveriges Radio P4 Blekinge*, sverigesradio.se/sida/artikel.aspx?programid=105&artikel=5930985, 6 August, 2014, (accessed on 5 September, 2014).

²³ Bengt Hedin, "'Palestinier blir slaktade av judesvinen'", *Sveriges Television*, www.svt.se/nyheter/regionalt/varmlandsnytt/palestinier-blir-slaktade-av-judesvinen, 5 augusti, 2014, (accessed on 9 September, 2014).

²⁴ Bengt Hedin, "'Palestinier blir slaktade av judesvinen'", *Sveriges Television*, www.svt.se/nyheter/regionalt/varmlandsnytt/palestinier-blir-slaktade-av-judesvinen, 5 augusti, 2014, (accessed on 9 September, 2014).

two weeks before Omeirat's statement, a political candidate for the Center Party, Dayana Jadarian, had posted a video on her Facebook page with the notorious racist and antisemitic former Ku Klux Klan leader David Duke. When criticized for spreading antisemitic and racist propaganda, Jadarian responded that she did not know of Duke's past, but that what he discusses in the video were mere "facts."²⁵ The daily newspaper *Metro* contacted the head of the Center Party in Jadarian's district, Bo Rundquist, and asked him whether or not Jadarian was going to be excluded from the ballot. Rather surprisingly, Rundquist replied that since the ballots were already printed, the party could not make her resign her candidacy. He added that if the ballots had not been printed and a line had been crossed, Jadarian would be excluded from the election, but he could not say if this was the case.²⁶ This response is astounding, as Jadarian's antisemitic post goes far beyond Omeirat's statement, containing a multitude of hateful statements about Jews, including notions that Jews have influence and power over Hollywood and that Jews demoralize society, which encourages crime and the spread of disease. Thus, Jadarian's post and her claims that it only contains "facts" is not a comment on the Israel-Palestine conflict, but goes far beyond this context. Yet, the head of the Center Party in the district of Sörmland cannot say whether or not Jadarian has "crossed the line."²⁷

Finally, three weeks after Jadarian's post, she renounced all her candidacies for the city council, the county board and Parliament, on the basis that she had not known Duke's background. The Center Party simultaneously declared that although Jadarian's name would be on the ballot, she would not be "electable."²⁸

Where Is All the Outrage?

With the exception of the Social-Democrats, antisemitic statements made by political candidates throughout the electoral campaign in 2014 have been perceived internally as proverbial 'slips of the tongue' and party responses have been mild at best. Why are so few taking these antisemitic outbursts seriously?

²⁵ Åsa Larsson, 'Centerpartist sprider antisemitisk propaganda—får vara kvar på valbar plats', *Metro*, www.metro.se/nyheter/riksdagskandidat-sprider-antisemitisk-propaganda/EVHnid!ujpQth7jyvYVw, 5 September, 2014, (accessed on 9 September, 2014).

²⁶ Åsa Larsson, 'Centerpartist sprider antisemitisk propaganda—får vara kvar på valbar plats', *Metro*, www.metro.se/nyheter/riksdagskandidat-sprider-antisemitisk-propaganda/EVHnid!ujpQth7jyvYVw, 5 September, 2014, (accessed on 9 September, 2014).

²⁷ Daniel Vergara, 'Riksdagskandidat för centerpartiet spred judehat', *Expo*, expo.se/2014/riksdagskandidat-for-centern-spred-judehat_6621.html, 5 September, 2014, (accessed on 11 September, 2014).

²⁸ Daniel Vergara, 'C-kandidat lämnar efter att hon spridit judehat', *Expo*, expo.se/2014/c-kandidat-lamnar-efter-att-hon-spridit-judehat_6632.html, 10 September, 2014, (accessed on 11 September, 2014).

In the media coverage of the election, political voices have been heard against antisemitism, although not within the context of the antisemitic statements made by individual politicians. On August 27, representatives from all parties represented in Parliament, except the Sweden Democrats, published an appeal on the public television network SVT's news website, as a united protest against the new wave of antisemitism that had been, and still is, sweeping over Sweden. This cross-partisan effort was significant in that it was not merely a call for tolerance at large, but clearly defined antisemitism as a specific problem of intolerance. More importantly, in the appeal, the representatives acknowledge the 2006 study conducted by the LHF and BRÅ which shows that antisemitism is not only a problem of the extreme right but exists amongst the population at large.²⁹

In addition, on August 18 the small party Feminist initiative (Fi) posted on their website a call for action against antisemitism in Sweden as well as Europe at large. In their call for action they state that "the growing antisemitism has to be taken seriously and be addressed with concrete politics".³⁰ This is perhaps the strongest statement against antisemitism made by any of the political parties during the 2014 electoral campaign. Fi received 3.1 percent of the national vote in the 2014 election which meant that they did not reach the 4 percent threshold required for getting seats in Parliament. This means that the only party that reacted forcefully against antisemitism in this year's electoral race did not even make it into Parliament. The cross-partisan protest is significant but it does not make as big an impact on the political agenda as when a party itself recognizes the problem and calls for action against it.

In contrast, the parties that have had internal crises with regard to antisemitic statements made by political candidates, have not incorporated agendas regarding ways to deal with antisemitism specifically into their party programs. Rather, the Environmental Party stated, after the antisemitic statements by Hansen and Nordlund, that they would work even harder against "intolerance" and toward the equality of all individuals, within the party ranks.³¹ However, in this promise of engaging with problems of intolerance within the party, antisemitism is never identified as a particular problem with a specific set of causes. This is problematic, as expressions of antisemitic attitudes within the anti-racist movement often

²⁹ Hanif Bali, Victoria Kawesa, Lars Ohly, Caroline Szyber, 'Vi kan inte blunda för antisemitismen', *Sveriges Television*, www.svt.se/opinion/article2267926.svt, 27 August, 2014, (accessed on 5 September, 2014).

³⁰ Feministiskt Initiativ, 'Feministiskt initiativ uppmanar till aktion mot antisemitism i Sverige och i Europa', feministisktinitiativ.se/feministiskt-initiativ-uppmanar-till-aktion-mot-antisemitism-i-sverige-och-i-europa/, (accessed on 12 September 2014).

³¹ Christoffer Röstlund, 'MP satsar mot intolerans efter antisemitiska sociala medie-utspel', *Svenska Dagbladet*, www.svd.se/nyheter/valet2014/mp-satsar-mot-intolerans-efter-antisemitiska-uttalanden_3817326.svd, 15 August, 2014, (accessed on 5 September, 2014).

come concealed behind arguments of tolerance and solidarity with groups in society who are identified as weaker and ‘more victimized’ than the Swedish Jewish minority. Even more problematic is the fact that the Center Party has failed to make any effort whatsoever to deal with the antisemitic ideas expressed by their former representatives.

I Am Not an Antisemite, But...

The failure to identify antisemitism as a specific phenomenon also enables individuals to express antisemitic ideas while simultaneously adhering to a narrative of the ‘self,’ which proclaims; ‘I am not an antisemite.’ Taken to its extreme, this argument was used to defend the famous Swedish cartoonist and caricaturist Lars Hillersberg, who expressed antisemitic ideas about Jews in his caricatures pertaining to the Israel-Palestine conflict, from the late 1960s onward. When Hillersberg’s antisemitic caricatures were debated in the early 2000s, his defenders claimed that he was not an antisemite, although his caricatures could be *perceived* as such, and used arguments such as; “at least he wasn’t a Nazi.”³² In this case, what Hillersberg *was* became more important than what he *did*. This phenomenon is also prevalent in the discussions surrounding antisemitic expressions by political candidates in the 2014 electoral race.

In the Facebook thread where the Center Party candidate Petronella Petersson expressed antisemitic views, she repeats that there isn’t any room to criticize “the Jews” within her own party without being labelled an antisemite. Her main concern is therefore not that others criticize her ideas but that they label her with an attribute that seemingly negates her own self-perception of being a good, moral, tolerant individual. Being an antisemite *means* something to Petersson. It means that you are a bad person, someone who is intolerant of other groups and individuals in society. As such she does not want to acknowledge that her prejudiced ideas fit into a system of ideas that constitute a certain form of antisemitism. However, nowhere in the Facebook thread is Petersson ever called an antisemite by her critics.³³ Rather, all of them point out that her statements are antisemitic and attempt to make her see the antisemitic nature of her arguments regarding “the Jews” as a single homogenous group.

³² Mathan Ravid, ‘Antisemitiska teckningar i fokus’ *Expo*, no. 2, 2013, p. 11.

³³ Fredrick Federley, www.facebook.com/fredrick.federley/posts/10152168259325976?comment_id=10152168866095976¬if_t=like, 20 July, 2014 (accessed on 15 September, 2014).

In her reply to the newspaper *Metro*, also Hansen emphasizes that “she is not an antisemite.”³⁴ She makes this comment just after an elaboration of her Facebook argument that the United States gives billions of dollars to Israel and “that there must be a reason for that,” alluding to Jewish influence over American politics.³⁵ Again, being an antisemite does not fit with Hansen’s perception of herself as an anti-racist, tolerant human being. In her mind, just as in Petersson’s mind, she is merely ‘telling it like it is.’ What they are both communicating in their – rather weak – defences of their earlier comments, is that antisemites constitute the ‘other.’ In other words, antisemites are genocidal, extremist, right-wing, intolerant people who oppose the struggle for the ‘good’ society.

Similarly, although Jadarian commented on her Facebook page that what David Duke presented in his video were “facts”³⁶ she maintained, when resigning her candidacy, that she is not a racist or an antisemite. Like Hansen and Petersson, Jadarian expresses a belief that there are characteristics of “the Jews” as a homogenous group which have negative effects on the rest of the world and that these negative effects are somehow being hidden from view or subject to a collective form of self-denial. Yet, it seems very important to Jadarian that she is not perceived as an antisemite. In February, 2010 Jadarian posted a text on her blog in which she heavily reproached local politicians in Malmö for asking Swedish Jews to refrain from commenting on the Israel-Palestine conflict. She points to the violence and harassment that Swedish Jews have to endure and argues that this is unacceptable.³⁷

So what has changed in the last four years? Perhaps we can find the answer by exploring the type of antisemitism that Jadarian as well as Hansen and Petersson are expressing on their Facebook pages. Rather than calling for a legal repression or the physical persecution and extermination of Jews, the political candidates are reproducing “culturally contingent attitudes and ideas towards Jews.”³⁸ As Bachner notes,

³⁴ Patrick Ekstrand, ‘MP-politiker slutar efter att ha jämfört Israeler med nazister’, *Metro*, www.metro.se/nyheter/mp-politiker-slutar-efter-att-ha-jamfort-israeler-med-nazister/EVHnhl!6Qmb4vIcMsko, 13 August, 2014, (accessed on 5 September, 2014).

³⁵ Patrick Ekstrand, ‘MP-politiker slutar efter att ha jämfört Israeler med nazister’, *Metro*, www.metro.se/nyheter/mp-politiker-slutar-efter-att-ha-jamfort-israeler-med-nazister/EVHnhl!6Qmb4vIcMsko, 13 August, 2014, (accessed on 5 September, 2014).

³⁶ Daniel Vergara, ‘Riksdagskandidat för centerpartiet spred judehat’, *Expo*, expo.se/2014/riksdagskandidat-for-centern-spred-judehat_6621.html, 5 September, 2014, (accessed on 11 September, 2014).

³⁷ Dayana Jadarian, ‘Vad händer i Malmö?’, *Dayana Jadarian: politik, juridik och lite teknik*, [web blog] dayanajadarian.wordpress.com/2010/02/25/vad-hander-i-malmo/, 25 February, 2014, (accessed on 5 September, 2014).

³⁸ Henrik Bachner, *Återkomsten—Antisemitism i Sverige efter 1945*, Stockholm, Natur och Kultur, 1999, p. 27-28.

These expressions do not necessarily involve a will to act [against Jews], a discriminatory purpose, exclusion or violence. Neither are they always conscious, but can be reproduced without further reflection.³⁹

Hansen's, Petersson's and Jadarian's critical statements are all conscious critiques but, more importantly, *non-conscious* expressions of antisemitism, since none of them understands that the critique of Jews as a collective is, by definition, antisemitic.⁴⁰ Antisemitic ideas are so ingrained in Swedish society that to some, they seem nothing but self-evident.

Some Concluding Remarks

Looking at the political responses to expressions of antisemitism within the Center Party, the Environmental Party and the Social-Democrats, one is struck by the lack of force and urgency with which this problem is approached. This attitude is particularly striking when contrasted with the stark reaction to the strong showing of the Sweden Democrats in the September 14 elections. In the weeks following the elections, almost the entire political discourse revolved around the staggering results of the Sweden Democrats, which received 12, 9 percent of the national vote and thus became the third largest party in the Swedish Parliament. Debates in major newspapers have addressed the question; 'who are these people voting for the Sweden Democrats?'

This is indeed a pertinent question. However, since almost the same percentage as those who voted for the Sweden Democrats in this year's election believe that "the Jews" have too much power over the media, I would like to pose the question; 'who are these people, harboring antisemitic attitudes and ideas?' Are they Sweden Democrats voters, are they left-wing, liberal, or right-wing extremists? Do they consider themselves tolerant or intolerant, and more importantly, what are we going to do about it?

It seems the perfect time, while Sweden is going through a period of introspection, to answer more than one question about who we are as political citizens and how we express antisemitic ideas as well as racist, homophobic and anti-ziganist sentiments. It is not important whether or not someone *is* or *isn't* an antisemite, but it's rather the action

³⁹ Henrik Bachner, *Återkomst—Antisemitism i Sverige efter 1945*, Stockholm, Natur och Kultur, 1999, p. 27-28.

⁴⁰ The definition used herein being Helen Fein's definition of antisemitism which identifies the latter "as a persisting latent structure of hostile beliefs towards *Jews as a collectivity* manifested in *individuals* as attitudes, and in *culture* as myth, ideology, folklore, and imagery, and in *actions*—social or legal discrimination, political mobilization against the Jews, and collective or state violence—which results in and/or is designed to distance, displace, or destroy, Jews as Jews.", Helen Fein, 'Dimensions of antisemitism: Attitudes, Collective Accusations, and Actions', in Helen Fein (ed.) *The Persisting Question: Sociological Perspectives and Social Contexts of Modern Antisemitism*, current research on antisemitism, vol. 1, Berlin; New York, 1987, p. 67.

itself, the communicative reproduction of antisemitic ideas and attitudes, that matters. What one *is* is never determined, but is contingent upon contextual changes. Therefore, our focus needs to be on what individuals and groups do and say within the realm of politics. Only then is the argument ‘I am not an antisemite, but...’ made obsolete and individuals can no longer hide their prejudiced ideas behind a façade of ‘goodness.’

Furthermore, the silence that Bronett speaks of in his article will persist if antisemitism is not taken seriously as its own set of prejudices with its own problems. The pervasive antisemitism that exists and is expressed throughout Swedish political life requires powerful responses from the parties themselves. Also, it is crucial to understand that antisemitism, especially that which is expressed by individuals aiming for political influence, is not merely a question of semantics. Antisemitism is a real problem with real consequences and this year’s electoral race has demonstrated that real responses are definitely lacking.

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