



Press Release

23 June 2020

A special report from the Kantor Center at Tel Aviv University

**The COVID-19 pandemic has
unleashed a unique
worldwide wave of
antisemitism**

- The new wave of antisemitism includes a range of libels that have one common element: The Jews, the Zionists and/or the state of Israel are to blame for the pandemic and/or stand to gain from it.
- The antisemitism generated by the coronavirus is intensive and fierce, has continued unremittingly for several months, and reflects a high level of anxiety and fear in many populations.
- Coronavirus-related antisemitism is manifested throughout Europe, in the Americas and in the Muslim world. This new type of antisemitism, which partly reiterates classic antisemitic themes, includes conspiracy theories alongside medieval blood libels, now renewed in a 21st century format.
- Coronavirus-related antisemitism is propagated mostly by right-wing extremists, ultra-conservative Christians and Islamists, through their own media in various languages. The phenomenon is reported by many central media channels: the social media, television, radio and the printed press.
- Islamists describe Israel as the COVID-1948 virus – after the year in which the Jewish state was established, declaring that this is the most dangerous virus of all.
- Activists in movements for delegitimizing Israel use the same argument. In addition, they accuse Israel of using the coronavirus as ammunition against the Palestinians
- An Oxford University study revealed that 19.1% of the British public believe that the Jews caused the pandemic.

TEL AVIV, June 23, 2020 — The Kantor Center for the Study of Contemporary European Jewry at Tel Aviv University, published a special report: a summary of worldwide antisemitic phenomena associated with the COVID-19 pandemic. The report relies on hundreds of accounts from different locations around the world received over the past four months (March-June). The reports come from an international network of colleagues, living in 35 countries, who identify and classify

acts of antisemitism, which are added the material to The Moshe Kantor Database on Antisemitism. The network was established by the Tel Aviv University over 30 years ago and today numbers about 60 participants. The database is an up to date collection of materials and resources on trends and events related to contemporary antisemitism, which includes English summaries based on source materials in all languages and formats including texts, visuals and audiovisuals. The collection of COVID-19 antisemitic material was coordinated in Venezuela by Sammy Eppel.

Professor Dina Porat, Head of the Kantor Center said: "These common motifs perpetuate antisemitic accusations from previous generations and other global catastrophes, once again presenting the well-known image of the Jew. However, the antisemitism generated by the coronavirus is fiercer and more intensive, has continued unremittingly for several months, and reflects a high level of anxiety and fear in many populations. This having been said, the situation should be seen in its overall context — in which others are also blamed for spreading the virus: first of all, the Chinese, 5G antennas and the authorities who allegedly are not doing enough to stop the epidemic. Countries close down their borders, every foreigner is a suspect, and no new immigrants are allowed".

Coronavirus-related antisemitism is manifested in many parts of the world: A significant portion comes from the US and from Middle Eastern countries such as Iran and Turkey as well as the Palestinian Authority, but also from Europe and South America. While in the US, accusations come mainly from white supremacists and ultraconservative Christians, pointing the finger at Jews in general and Haredi Jews in particular, accusers in the Middle East mostly blame Israel, Zionism and the Mossad for creating and spreading the virus and intending to make a vast fortune from medications and the vaccine they are already developing.

In the western world, the main elements promoting antisemitic discourse are civil

society groups with various ideologies, while in the Middle East some of this discourse is put forth by the regimes themselves.

Dr. Giovanni Quer adds: "Universal disasters have been attributed to the Jews and to Israel before, giving rise to antisemitic discourse — such as conspiracy theories blaming Israel for 9/11, or false reports accusing Israeli soldiers of harvesting organs from the bodies of dead Palestinians. The current wave of antisemitism is unprecedented, however, because, spreading very swiftly through the social media, it focused at first on the COVID-19 crisis and then quickly moved on because of social and political changes: Just a few days passed between the coronavirus crisis and the racism-related social crisis in the US, but antisemitic discourse remained just as fierce, with its proponents simply adapting their antisemitic narratives to the changing social contexts."

Even though the antisemitic materials come from a range of different directions and entities, they contain many common themes:

Classic antisemitism, such as a return to the well-poisoning libel from the time of the Black Plague. One example is this French caricature of the former Minister of Health (a Jewish woman) pouring poison into a well, while smiling.



Figure 1. Agnès Buzyn, former French Minister of Health, smiles while poisoning a well. Her large nose signifies that she is Jewish.

Antisemitism toward Haredim in the US: Jews of the Haredi community – mainly in the US – are seen as spreaders of the virus because they supposedly disregard the rules, and view themselves, as always, as living outside the law that binds everyone else; and when ultimately Jews are infected with the virus – it's because they rejected the teachings of Jesus Christ and crucified him.



Figure 2. *The classic image of the Jew depicted with the coronavirus*

A modern-day version of the Protocols of the Elders of Zion: The Jews always seek to rule the world, and this time they will do so by spreading a virus that undermines economies and societies, and preparing a vaccine and a drug that will be sold worldwide at an enormous profit.



Figure 3. *A protestor in the US*



Figure 4. Distributed on social networks- unknown source



Figure 5. <https://www.facebook.com/CanaryMission/videos/262468158196528/?t=1>

Claims propagated in Iran and Turkey assert that the Zionists, together with the US, are the source of the pandemic, and will gain from it when thousands of Muslims die in the Middle East, particularly in Iran.



Figure 6. Caricature by Turkish artist Yuksel Cengiz , submitted to the international competition 'We are beating the coronavirus' organized by Iran in March 2020.

Additional Muslim interpretations regard the virus as a God-sent punishment to 'the enemies of Islam', which include many different nations.

Iran's anti-Israeli and antisemitic propaganda is also disseminated in South America via Spanish-speaking television channels.



Figure 7. An item appearing on Hispan TV – the Iranian Spanish-language propaganda website, under the title: "Report: the new coronavirus is the result of a Zionist plot"

Israel and the IDF are constantly accused of spreading the virus by force among Palestinians, especially inmates in Israeli prisons. This claim completely ignores the facts: So far only one person has died of coronavirus in the Palestinian Authority and Gaza. The accusation is especially rife in networks that regularly promote the vilification of Israel.



Figure 8. "Prisoners continue to suffer from Zionist medication and vaccine experiments"

Distorting terminology associated with the Holocaust: Restrictions enforced as part of anti-pandemic policies are compared to policies of the Nazi regime: Lockdown is likened to the ghettos and release from it to the German slogan Arbeit Macht Frei (work liberates) which appeared at the entrance to Auschwitz; The word 'unvaccinated' replaces 'Jew' on the yellow star worn by demonstrators protesting against vaccination policies, suggesting that those who have not been vaccinated are like Jews persecuted in Nazi Germany, and that those who disagree with vaccination opponents see them as disease spreaders – like the Jews. This phenomenon became so widespread that in Munich it is now forbidden to wear the yellow star in demonstrations.

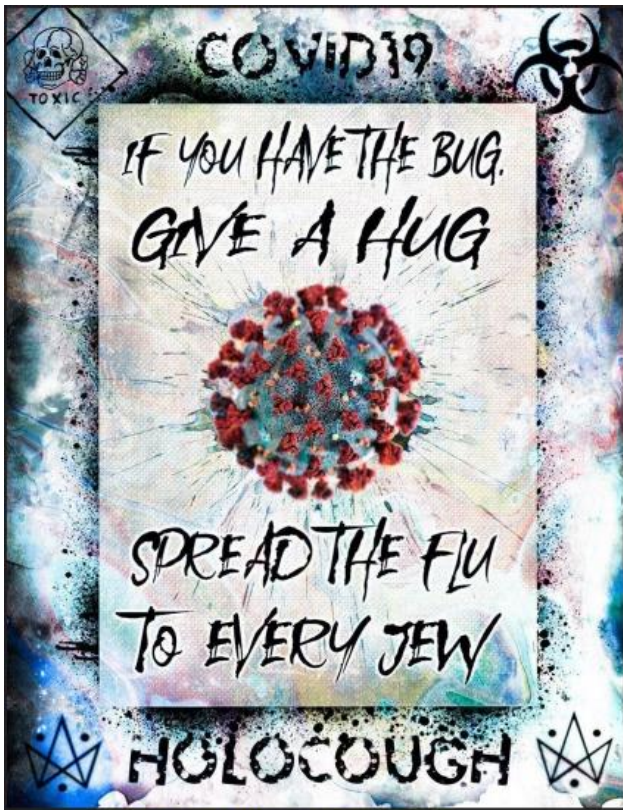


Figure 9. A German demonstrator wearing a yellow star with the word 'unvaccinated' replacing 'Jew'



Figure 10. The entrance to Auschwitz with the words *'Vaccination liberates'* instead of *'Work liberates'*

The term Holocough – combining Holocaust with cough, is widespread in the social media, especially among neo-Nazis and white supremacists. Some arguments claim that coughing is a means employed by Jews to harm the white race. In addition, sceptics argue that there actually is no epidemic, and that current events are all part of a Jewish-Zionist plot to take over the world. Direct calls are propagated to attack Jews by spreading the virus among them (for instance the rhymes "If you have the bug, give a hug" and "Spread the flu to every Jew"). This trend reached a peak in a sign raised in a demonstration in the US: **"Synagogues are closed – the gas chambers are open"**



Exposing and combatting antisemitism.

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Figure 11. A picture posted in the social media, including the expression Holocough as well as incitement to infect Jews with the coronavirus

The killing of George Floyd in Minneapolis — since the tragic killing of George Floyd, a new stage has emerged where some anti-Israel activists inject antisemitic themes into valid civil rights protests. They say that the slave traders who brought Africans to America were Jews; police forces in the US are brutal and racist because they are trained by the Israel Police; and that African Americans and Palestinians share the same cruel fate.



Figure 12. A cartoon showing an Israeli soldier and American policeman supporting each other as they kneel on a Palestinian and a black man, choking them (Al-Hayat al-Jadida screenshot).

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About Tel Aviv University

Tel Aviv University is Israel's largest and most comprehensive institution of higher learning. The university is home to more than 30,000 students, 400 labs, 9 faculties, 35 schools, 98 departments and has 17 affiliated hospitals in its network. TAU's rise as a world-renowned university in a mere 50 years demonstrates the power of vision and dedication.

About the Kantor Center for the Study of Contemporary European Jewry

The Kantor Center, inaugurated in 2010 at Tel Aviv University, provides an academic framework for the interdisciplinary research of European Jewry from the end of World War II until the present day. The center offers a platform for the diverse needs of researchers, students, governmental and civil service personnel, professionals, activists, and the public at large, both in Israel and abroad, and cooperates with European Jewish communities and their leaders. For more information, visit <https://en-humanities.tau.ac.il/kantor>

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