

## SIR ZELMAN COWEN LECTURE

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### "Trying to understand antisemitism today"

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#### I A GRANDSON OF PINSK

Sir Zelman Cowen's paternal and maternal roots lay in the Pinsk District of the Brest Region of Belarus. Given the history of Pinsk, it should be no surprise that a principal focus of Sir Zelman's life, including as Governor-General after the unprecedented actions of his predecessor Sir John Kerr dismissing the Whitlam government, was the healing of the social division.<sup>1</sup>

Pinsk is one of those areas over which the tides of conquest have flowed, then ebbed, then flowed again. It has been part of the medieval state of Kievan Rus, part of the Kingdom of Lithuania up to the 16th century, part of Poland until the 18th century, part of Russia until World War I when it reverted to being part of Poland again, part of the USSR, and now part of Belarus.

The Jewish people apparently came to Pinsk in the late 1400s because of the antisemitism that saw them expelled from the Lithuanian Empire. The Jewish community increased in size, but the antisemitic policies of the Russian Empire involved the ongoing oppression of Jews including periodic pogroms which saw many Jews of Pinsk, including Sir Zelman's forebears, flee Pinsk in the 1880s.<sup>2</sup>

The 1939 Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, styled as a treaty of "non-aggression" between Nazi Germany and the USSR, enabled Germany and the USSR to invade and divide the regions of eastern Europe between them. Jews fled eastwards from the Nazis and into the control of the Red Army. What the Bolsheviks began in 1939, the destruction of Jewish people and Jewish life in Pinsk, the Nazis completed from 1941. Jewish men were systematically murdered first. Survivors were subjected to compulsory labour and forced to live in an overcrowded ghetto. In October 1942, Himmler ordered that the Pinsk ghetto be liquidated – Jews were shot en masse

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<sup>1</sup> Zelman Cowen, *The Memoirs of Zelman Cowen: A Public Life* (The Miegunyah Press, 2006) at 301.

<sup>2</sup> See, eg, 'History', *Virtual Shtetl* (Web Page) <<https://sztetl.org.pl/en/towns/p/1214-pinsk/99-history/137845-history-of-community>>; Moshe Rosman, 'Pinsk', *The Yivo Encyclopedia of Jews in Eastern Europe* (Web Page) <<https://yivoencyclopedia.org/article.aspx/Pinsk>>.

in specially constructed killing pits. By December 1942, the Jewish community of Pinsk, established in the late 1400s, had been obliterated.<sup>3</sup>

This grandson of Pinsk, Sir Zelman Cowen, lived for 92 years because his forebears escaped the brutal institutionalised antisemitism of the Russian empire, before the Nazi regime swept eastwards determined to murder the Jewish people within its power. In those 92 years, he served in the Royal Australian Navy in World War II, completed his legal studies (including as a Rhodes Scholar at Oxford University), was made a Fellow of Oxford's Oriel College,<sup>4</sup> became Dean of the Law Faculty at the University of Melbourne for some 15 years, served as Vice-Chancellor at the University of New England and the University of Queensland, cemented his reputation as a world leading constitutional lawyer, and was appointed Australia's 19th Governor-General in 1977 – Australia's second Jewish Governor-General after Sir Isaac Isaacs.

Sir Zelman believed in knowledge, historical and personal. In his memoir, he observed that we can gain insight with knowledge of those who "begat those who begat us". No doubt with a view to his own personal history, Sir Zelman said that "there are those of us whose forebears in time past have suffered violence, discrimination and uprooting. In the severe dislocation of their lives, records have disappeared, so that we may not – cannot – know who our forebears were, what they did, how they lived and died."<sup>5</sup> Knowledge includes understanding why antisemitism continues today.

## II WHY DOES ANTISEMITISM CONTINUE?

### *A The question*

How is it that, at one time and in one place, we can engage in or choose not to see the systematic annihilation of an entire people and, at another time and in another place, can facilitate and celebrate the achievements of those same people? How is it that, having seen exactly what antisemitism can do, it still exists today, and we still must guard against it? Many people have made it their life's work to answer the first question. The second, to me, remains a mystery. But we still must guard against antisemitism in all its forms. So-called "casual" antisemitism might be expressed in off-hand remarks, without much thought by the speaker. That's what makes it so pernicious and terrifying. It is "casual" because it is ingrained, the person is comfortable with it. Here we are in contemporary Australia, in 2023, with some people still

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<sup>3</sup> See, Tikva Fatal-Knaani, 'The Jews of Pinsk, 1939-1943, Through the Prism of New Documentation', *Yad Vashem* (Web Page) <<https://www.yadvashem.org/articles/academic/the-jews-of-pinsk-through-the-prism-of-new-documentation.html>>.

<sup>4</sup> Sir Zelman later returned to Oriel to serve as Provost of the College.

<sup>5</sup> Zelman Cowen, *The Memoirs of Zelman Cowen: A Public Life* (The Miegunyah Press, 2006) 1.

consciously or sub-consciously holding to bits and pieces or a whole mishmash of bizarre views about Jewish people.

### *B Antisemitic tropes*

Modern antisemitic discourse seems an extraordinary jumble. I have read about the internal contradictoriness of antisemitic views, enabling a person to believe a whole spectrum of apparent antitheses. From the less to more manifestly abhorrent, antisemitism involves believing irreconcilable opposites like: Jewish people are somehow simultaneously "too pushy" but also "too passive"; "too mouthy" but also "too sly"; "controllers of capitalism and world banking" but also "agents for communism"; "too selfish and greedy" but also "too interested in taking care of their own"; and "a tiny inward looking minority" but also "a world-dominating cabal in control of the global financial system, global media, politics".

My responses to the question – how is it that, having seen exactly what antisemitism can do, it still exists today, and we still must guard against it – are those of the interested layperson, struggling to understand this bewildering phenomenon.

Deborah Lipstadt said about antisemitism:

"I know it when I see it. Now, that's not a sufficient definition, but it's that way with anti-Semitism. I know it when I see it because these are the elements that are there – something to do with money, something to do with finance, that Jews will do anything and everything, irrespective of whom it harms or displaces or burdens."<sup>6</sup>

We should all know antisemitism when we see it. The contradictions underlying antisemitic tropes all involve assuming that Jewish people, unlike other people, are not really individuated people. Somehow, Jewish people are a monolith, capable of reduction to a few common essential attributes. This is what seems peculiarly dangerous about antisemitism. All racism involves thinking about other people as de-individuated to some extent. Antisemitism, however, seems to just continue bubbling along like poison beneath the surface, waiting until social, economic, and political conditions are ripe for its re-emergence. We should not assume that awareness of and a sustained response to antisemitism is not required in Australia. There is a particular danger in not combatting the so-called "casual" antisemitic tropes when we hear them, which is that history shows that apparently "casual" antisemitism is readily emboldened.

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<sup>6</sup> Isaac Chotiner, 'Looking at Anti-Semitism on the Left and the Right: An Interview with Deborah E. Lipstadt', *The New Yorker* (online, 24 January 2019) <<https://www.newyorker.com/news/the-new-yorker-interview/looking-at-anti-semitism-on-the-left-and-the-right-an-interview-with-deborah-e-lipstadt>>.

It's like a social "Overton window" (or "range of ideas the public is willing to consider and accept").<sup>7</sup> If you can get away with a masked antisemitic trope, such as "global elite", you can also get away with more. Social media, of course, has its own Overton window which, to a non-social media user, looks far more extreme and hateful than everyday life. It would be naive, however, to assume that the discourse typical of social media does not reflect the discourse of the everyday life of many people.

### C *What's in a name?*

Lipstadt considers the origin of the phrase "anti-Semitism" in her most recent book, *Antisemitism Here and Now*.<sup>8</sup> She explains that the phrase "anti hyphen Semitism with a capital 'S'" has a history of relevance to the phenomenon of antisemitism. "Semitic" is a description of a language group, not a culture or ethnicity. There is no history or phenomenon of hatred of (being "anti" to) the speakers of Semitic languages. The "anti" relates to Jews, not speakers of Semitic languages. The term "anti hyphen Semitism with a capital 'S'" was popularised by a Jew-hating journalist in 19th century Germany. Because it was perceived that Jews who had converted from Judaism to Christianity were still Jews and appropriate objects of hatred, it was not enough to be "anti-Jewish". "Antisemitism" gave Jew-hating a false veneer of scientific credibility based on the notion of a "Jewish race" at the same time as enabling some purported monolithic "Jewish essence" to exist independently of the religious or cultural beliefs of any individual.<sup>9</sup> I will use the "all lower case no hyphen" version.

### D *Antisemitism – ideology and psychology*

Yair Rosenberg, a columnist for *The Atlantic*, described antisemitism as "one of the most durable and deadly conspiracy theories in human history." He explained that:

"The notion that such a minuscule and unmanageable minority secretly controls the world is comical, which may be why so many responsible people still do not take the anti-Semitic conspiracy theory seriously, or even understand how it works."<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> 'The Overton Window', *Conceptually* (Web Page) <<https://conceptually.org/concepts/overton-window>>.

<sup>8</sup> (Penguin Randomhouse, 2019).

<sup>9</sup> Deborah E Lipstadt, *Antisemitism: Here and Now* (Penguin Randomhouse, 2019) 2-24.

<sup>10</sup> Yair Rosenberg, 'Why So Many People Still Don't Understand Anti-Semitism', *The Atlantic* (online, 19 January 2022) <<https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2022/01/texas-synagogue-anti-semitism-conspiracy-theory/621286/>>.

This perspective of antisemitism as an "incredibly malleable"<sup>11</sup> conspiracy theory as world view makes sense. Antisemitism continues to bubble along, ebbing and flowing in its intensity in response to circumstances, because it is not just a form of religious, racial, ethnic, or cultural discrimination. It is, as Rosenberg put it, "a conspiracy theory about how the world operates."<sup>12</sup> This has explanatory power. It explains why, after the Holocaust, antisemitism exists. It explains why antisemitism increases under circumstances of social, economic, and political pressure. Antisemitism, on this conception, is nothing less than a false ideology not about some aspect of life, but about how the world works. In this ideological conception, negative feelings and beliefs about, and actions towards, Jewish people are able to be understood as a consequence of, or response to, the perceived world problems said to be caused by or as a result of Jewish people. This reductive and false world view then becomes capable of explaining all that is wrong with the world including the wrongness of the antisemite's own place in the world.

As a (shocking) example of antisemitism as ideological distortion, Rosenberg refers to Walter Russell Mead's criticism of a notorious reference by the BBC to the "Jewish lobby" in American politics; as if, as Russell Mead put it, US policy in respect of Israel was "set by the fiat of the 1.8% of the population that is Jewish, rather than the prevailing opinions of the 98.2% that is not – a formulation that ignores both the diversity of views among the 1.8 percent and the political ideas and preferences of the non-Jewish majority."<sup>13</sup>

Rosenberg also endorses Russell Mead's essential thesis – that antisemitism is "particularly dangerous, and not just because of what anti-Semitism can do and has done to the Jews".<sup>14</sup> Russell Mead explains this in a few paragraphs which I am going to quote in full as they expose antisemitism also functioning as a reductive ideological distortion disabling people from meaningful participation in modern liberal democracies:

"The rise of anti-Semitism is a sign of widespread social and cultural failure. It is a leading indicator of a loss of faith in liberal values and of a diminished capacity to understand the modern world and to thrive in it. Societies that tolerate anti-Semitism take a fateful step toward the loss of both freedom and prosperity. People who think 'the Jews' run the banks lose the ability to understand, much less to operate financial systems. People who think 'the Jews' dominate business through hidden structures can't build or long maintain a successful modern economy. People who think 'the Jews' dominate politics lose their ability to interpret political events, to diagnose

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Walter Russell Mead, "The BBC and "The Jews"", *The American Interest* (Blog Post, 13 May 2012) <<https://www.the-american-interest.com/2012/05/13/the-bbc-and-the-jews/>>.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

social evils and to organize effectively for positive change. People who think 'the Jews' run the media and control the news lose the ability to grasp what is happening around them. And people who think 'the Jews' control America's Middle Eastern policy lose the ability to understand, much less to influence, American policy in this vital part of the world. Emancipation from anti-Semitism is thus one of the necessary steps that many individuals and cultures have to take before they are able to act effectively and participate meaningfully in contemporary life.

Jew hatred isn't more stupid or more wicked than other forms of racial and religious hatred. The anti-black bigot is as delusional as the Jew hater; hatred and prejudice of all kinds corrode the intelligence and degrade the spirit of everyone who suffers from them. But Jew hatred is more disempowering and self-defeating than most other kinds of hate because it involves not only negative emotions about a group of people but a deeply false set of ideas about how the world works."<sup>15</sup>

This ideological perspective helps explain why, post the Holocaust, antisemitism still exists and why its visibility, prevalence, and virulence respond so directly to social, economic, and political pressures. Antisemitism is not only about irrational hatred, it is also about a way of explaining the world that enables a person to channel all their most powerful negative emotions and instincts – about how the world is, about how people are, about their place in the world and in relation to other people – and displace them onto some other people who, by reason of long history, can be lumped together as a perceived monolith.

Russell Mead describes antisemitism as a "leading indicator of a loss of faith in liberal values and of a diminished capacity to understand the modern world" because it is not just about hatred of the perceived "other"; it depends on a view that the world is not as it should be, and people are not as they ought to be, because of one thing alone – supposed Jewish power.<sup>16</sup>

But is ideology alone responsible for the resilience and virulence of antisemitism in the modern world? Russell Mead's reference to the world not being as it should be and people not being as they ought to be suggests that a powerful individual and group psychology of resentment also spurs antisemitism. A false ideology that a tiny minority is responsible for the world not being as it should be feeds into and reinforces a psychological need to explain why a person's own place in the world is not as it should be, making it, in turn, easier to believe that the explanation is that the same tiny minority has displaced that person from their rightful place in the world.

A recent example of the mutually supporting and reinforcing nature of this ideological distortion and psychology of resentment seems to be the resurgence of the "Jews will not

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

replace us" rhetoric of white supremacists, particularly evident in the United States. The phrase seems so divorced from any possible reality that it is easy to dismiss it as nonsense. But in chanting apparent nonsense, the message is serious – people too numerous to be dismissed as harmless are expressing the belief that they have been displaced from their rightful place of power in the world by Jews and that Jews are intent on removing them from the world altogether. The slogan is nothing less than a projection of genocidal intentions onto Jews. That kind of projection has resonated throughout history with ultimately horrific consequences.<sup>17</sup>

Christopher R Browning, in a recent review of Götz Aly's 2014 book, *Why the Germans? Why the Jews? Envy, Race Hatred, and the Prehistory of the Holocaust*<sup>18</sup> (which I have not managed to read), identified the "great paradox facing any scholar wrestling with the 'prehistory' of the Holocaust ... to explain how the land of golden opportunity for Jews in the late nineteenth century became transformed in less than four decades into the land of their murderers".<sup>19</sup> Browning concluded that the explanation in Aly's recent work makes an important scholarly contribution. Following emancipation of the Jews in the various German states, and armed "with a culture of education", modernisation, urbanisation, and industrialisation, Jewish life rapidly transformed at a greater rate than that of others in Germany, "producing envy of Jewish wealth and success as well as fear and a sense of inferiority vis-à-vis Jewish competition."<sup>20</sup> These circumstances, taken with the ideological underpinnings of antisemitism as a conspiracy theory, Browning said, make it "logical rather than paradoxical that the most intense anti-Semitism would also occur in Germany, the land of the greatest and most visible Jewish success."<sup>21</sup>

Seen through the ideological perspective, antisemitism is necessarily anti-democratic and anti-pluralistic. Modern democracies are complex. A view of the world in which all perceived wrongs can be brought home to one supposed cause helps to explain how antisemitism crosses political ideologies, disables people from meaningful participation in modern liberal democracies, and purports to justify anti-Jewish beliefs and actions. Michael S Broschowitz, for example, explains how the idea of "real or imagined Jews as a blank canvas" on which antisemites can "project and characterize their fears and dislikes" pre-dates the development of fascism and communism, with the result that both ideologies incorporate

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<sup>17</sup> See generally, Andrew S Winston, 'Jews will not replace us!' (2021) 105(1/2) *American Jewish History* 1.

<sup>18</sup> tr Jefferson Chase (St Martins Press, 2014).

<sup>19</sup> Christopher R Browning, 'How Envy of Jews Lay Behind It', *The New York Review of Books* (online, 8 January 2015) <<https://www.nybooks.com/articles/2015/01/08/how-envy-jews-lay-behind-it/>>.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

antisemitic perceptions and beliefs.<sup>22</sup> Seen through a psychological perspective, antisemitism as a manifestation of resentment helps to explain how antisemitic beliefs might emerge and flourish in times of social unrest and upheaval. It also helps to explain the circumstances in which a small but active minority of antisemites in any society can gain traction for abhorrent antisemitic views in the face of what has been described as the "indifference" or the "passive complicity" of others.<sup>23</sup>

Eric Ward of the Southern Poverty Law Center specialises in the relationship between antisemitism and white nationalism. In an article with Megan Black of the Western States Centre, Ward comes back to the malleability of antisemitism, saying "Jews are identified by others through whatever lens the anxiety of the moment demands".<sup>24</sup> Thus, Ward proposes, white nationalists in America see proposed "Jewish power" behind many social justice movements for other minorities including Blacks in America. But instead of recognising this for the threat it is to Jewish people and all other minorities, according to Ward, social progressives often characterise Jews, a tiny minority in the US, as in Australia, as holders of "white privilege" and power. As Ward puts it:

"Within social and economic justice movements committed to equality, we have not yet collectively come to terms with the centrality of antisemitism to White nationalist ideology, and until we do we will fail to understand this virulent form of racism rapidly growing in the US today."<sup>25</sup>

Ward also makes this chilling point:

"Because modern antisemitic ideology traffics in fantasies of invisible power, it thrives precisely when its target would seem to be least vulnerable. Thus, in places where Jews were most assimilated – France at the time of the Dreyfus affair, Germany before Hitler came to power – they have functioned as a magic bullet to account for unaccountable contradictions at moments of national crisis."<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Michael S Broschowitz, 'The Violent Impact of Anti-Semitic Conspiracy Theories: Examining the Jewish World Domination Narratives and History', *Middlebury Institute of International Studies at Monterey* (News Stories, 6 May 2022) <<https://www.middlebury.edu/institute/academics/centers-initiatives/ctec/ctec-publications/violent-impact-anti-semitic-conspiracy>>.

<sup>23</sup> Christopher R Browning, 'How Envy of Jews Lay Behind It', *The New York Review of Books* (online, 8 January 2015) <<https://www.nybooks.com/articles/2015/01/08/how-envy-jews-lay-behind-it/>>.

<sup>24</sup> Eric Ward and Megan Black, 'Antisemitism', *Moving Toward Antibigotry* (Essay, May 2022) 124, 125 <<https://www.bu.edu/antiracism-center/files/2022/06/Antisemitism.pdf>>.

<sup>25</sup> Eric Ward, 'Skin in the Game: How Antisemitism Animates White Nationalism' (Summer 2017) *The Public Eye* 10.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.



Ward's views align with antisemitism involving a reductive conspiracy theory purporting to explain why the world is as it is and able to harness a psychology of resentment purporting to explain why the person's place in the world is not as they perceive it should be.

Tellingly, the crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic provided the conditions of uncertainty and division in which antisemitism could emerge from hiding and flourish. Research shows that as early as March 2020 antisemitic conspiracy theories related to COVID-19 emerged.<sup>27</sup> Antisemitic disinformation about COVID-19 flooded social media, and the historic persecution of Jews, particularly under the Nazi regime during the Holocaust, was co-opted by some illegitimately and irrationally comparing that history to public health measures in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.<sup>28</sup> In the response to the COVID-19 crisis we can see antisemitism as reductive false ideology, and antisemitic rhetoric involving techniques of both inversion and projection, two themes discussed further below.

### III CONFRONTING ANTISEMITISM

In her most recent book, Lipstadt gives a stark example of unconscious antisemitic assumptions. She says she was teaching a class about the Holocaust and dealing with the Nazi claim about Jews controlling the world economy. A student said, "But all the German bankers *were* Jews weren't they?". Lipstadt tried to demonstrate that was statistically untrue until another student said, "So what ... what if they had been ... so what?". To Lipstadt, this was the correct response. The question was based on a false premise, but the most important point was that the question was irrational. So what if all German bankers were Jews? How can that be any justification for antisemitism, let alone the Holocaust.<sup>29</sup>

There are estimated to be nearly 16 million Jewish people in the world, a mere 0.2 percent of the global population. Some seven million live in Israel, with the other eight or more million living in other countries, mainly the US. According to the 2021 Australian census, about 100,000 people identified themselves as Jewish, representing about 0.4 percent of the

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<sup>27</sup> Kelly W Sundberg, Lauren M Mitchell and Dan Levinson, 'Health, Religiosity and Hatred: A Study of the Impacts of COVID-19 on World Jewry' (2023) 62 *Journal of Religion and Health* 428, 429, 436.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid 436. See also, Elisabeth Steffen et al, 'Codes, Patterns and Shapes of Contemporary Online Antisemitism and Conspiracy Narratives – an Annotation Guide and Labeled German-Language Dataset in the Context of COVID-19' (Conference Paper, International AAAI Conference on Web and Social Media, 5-8 June 2023) 1082.

<sup>29</sup> Deborah E Lipstadt, *Antisemitism: Here and Now* (Penguin Randomhouse, 2019) 78 (emphasis in original).

population.<sup>30</sup> Jews are a tiny minority in the world and in all countries bar Israel.<sup>31</sup> The current estimated Jewish population of Germany is about the same as in Australia.

In her 2014 speech at a rally against antisemitism in Berlin, then Chancellor Angela Merkel said:

"The fact that today there are again more than 100,000 Jews living in Germany is nothing short of a miracle. It's a precious gift which fills me with profound gratitude.

That people in Germany today are being verbally abused, threatened and attacked when it somehow becomes apparent that they are Jewish or when they express their support for the State of Israel, is outrageous.

That is something I cannot accept. No-one present here today is prepared to accept that – and there are many; many who share my sentiments.

...

With this rally we want to send out the clear message that Jewish life belongs in our country. It's part of our identity and culture.

...

We have witnessed crimes which constitute an attack on our freedom and human dignity.

We must not, and indeed cannot, look away. And we will not look away. That's why we're here today.

And not only that – it's the duty of our state and of every citizen to fight anti-Semitism."<sup>32</sup>

The crimes to which Chancellor Merkel was referring were not the crimes of the past. They were crimes of the present; crimes she identified in her speech that were happening in modern Germany and which drove the holding of the rally – such as verbal and physical abuse of a person wearing a kippa or a Star of David, desecrating gravestones in Jewish cemeteries, acts of hatred, and destruction of synagogues.

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<sup>30</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Census of Population and Housing: Census article – Religious affiliation in Australia, 2021* (4 July 2022).

<sup>31</sup> 'Jewish Population by Country 2023', *World Population Review* (Web Page) <<https://worldpopulationreview.com/country-rankings/jewish-population-by-country>>.

<sup>32</sup> Chancellor Angela Merkel, 'Speech by Federal Chancellor Angela Merkel at the rally against anti-Semitism organised by the Central Council of Jews in Germany' (Speech, Berlin, 14 September 2014) <<https://www.bundesregierung.de/breg-en/service/archive/archive/speech-by-federal-chancellor-angela-merkel-at-the-rally-against-anti-semitism-organised-by-the-central-council-of-jews-in-germany-433246>>.

In response to a rise in antisemitism over the last decade the UN Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief, Ahmed Shaheed, described antisemitism as the "canary in the coalmine of global hatred" posing risks of course to Jewish people, but also to all minority groups.<sup>33</sup>

In the US, Jews comprise about 2.4 percent of the population, but FBI data shows that about 63 percent of all religious hate crimes in the US are committed against Jews.<sup>34</sup> In response to what it described as recent experience of an "alarming increase in antisemitic incidents, among other acts of hatred", in May 2023 the US Government released a US National Strategy to Counter Antisemitism. The Strategy begins with these words from President Biden:

"Six years ago, Neo-Nazis marched from the shadows through Charlottesville, Virginia, chanting, 'Jews will not replace us.' With torches in hand, they spewed the same antisemitic bile and hate that were heard across Europe in the 1930s. What happened in Charlottesville – the horror of that moment, the violence that followed, and the threat it represented for American democracy – drove me to run for President. The very soul of our Nation was hanging in the balance. It still is today.

...

History teaches that hate never fully goes away; it only hides until it is given just a little oxygen. That is why we must confront antisemitism early and aggressively whenever and wherever it emerges from the darkness."<sup>35</sup>

The four pillars of the Strategy are to: (1) increase awareness and understanding of antisemitism, including its threat to America, and broaden appreciation of Jewish American heritage; (2) improve safety and security for Jewish communities; (3) reverse the normalisation of antisemitism and counter antisemitic discrimination; and (4) build cross-community solidarity and collective action to counter hate.<sup>36</sup> To achieve these pillars, the Strategy sets 18 specific strategic goals each of which includes actions for the Executive, for Congress, and for society as a whole.

In December 2020, the Council of the European Union issued a declaration on mainstreaming the fight against antisemitism across policy areas. The declaration identifies

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<sup>33</sup> 'Antisemitism "toxic to democracy", UN expert warns, calling for better education', *UN News* (online, 18 October 2019) <<https://news.un.org/en/story/2019/10/1049591>>. See also, Martin J Riedl et al, 'Platformed antisemitism on Twitter: Anti-Jewish rhetoric in political discourse surrounding the 2018 US midterm election' (2022) *New Media & Society* 1, 5.

<sup>34</sup> The White House, 'Fact Sheet: Biden-Harris Administration Releases First-ever US National Strategy to Counter Antisemitism' (Press Release, 25 May 2023) <<https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2023/05/25/fact-sheet-biden-harris-administration-releases-first-ever-u-s-national-strategy-to-counter-antisemitism/>>.

<sup>35</sup> The US National Strategy to Counter Antisemitism (Strategy, May 2023) 2 <<https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/U.S.-National-Strategy-to-Counter-Antisemitism.pdf>>.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid* 6.

antisemitism as an attack on European values of "respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law and respect for human rights, including the rights of persons belonging to minorities." The declaration also acknowledges that the "fight against antisemitism needs to be considered consistently in the measures and decisions taken by the institutions of the European Union and in particular be reflected in the measures tabled by the European Union."<sup>37</sup>

The Executive Council of Australian Jewry Report on Antisemitism in Australia for 2022 records a 35 percent increase in recorded antisemitic incidents in Australia between 2020 and 2022, mainly in the form of hate speech in posters and stickers.<sup>38</sup> Not unexpectedly given its ideological provenance, conspiracy theories about the COVID crisis involved antisemitism (proving again that antisemitism involves a distorted world view capable of attaching to any circumstance of uncertainty).<sup>39</sup> The report identifies a rise in neo-Nazi activity and the proliferation of neo-Nazi groups.<sup>40</sup> It notes that antisemitic incidents, proportionally to population, far exceed the main other classes of hate incidents, against Muslims and Asians, in Australia. The report says this:

"When antisemitism is erased from the narrative in the mainstream media, in party politics, in universities, and elsewhere, and by public figures and commentators, the net effect is the desensitisation of society to antisemitism.

...

Antisemitism did not end in 1945, instead, it went underground, only to re-emerge when the opportunities arose and the political and ideological atmosphere was conducive. Its continuing spread is aided and abetted by those who refuse to condemn it or to act against it, and also by those who erase antisemitism from their narrative or minimise or relativise it. As history has shown time and again, societies in which antisemitism is not acknowledged, and not opposed, set themselves on a path to devastation."<sup>41</sup>

The results of a 2023 Australian Jewish University Experience Survey exposed that 64 percent of Jewish university students had experienced antisemitism at university, 57 percent had hidden that they were Jewish at university, and 19 percent stayed away from university campuses to avoid antisemitism. Drilling down into the survey in more detail shows that only 13 percent of the 563 students who completed the survey had not felt intimidated because of

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<sup>37</sup> Council of the European Union, *Declaration on mainstreaming the fight against antisemitism across policy areas*, 2 December 2020, 13637/20, 1 and 5.

<sup>38</sup> Julie Nathan, *Report on Antisemitism in Australia 2022* (Report, 12 December 2022) 6.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid* 280.

being Jewish in their previous 12 months at university.<sup>42</sup> Antisemitism was experienced equally within and outside of the classroom at university.<sup>43</sup> When university staff were present while the antisemitic conduct occurred, they ignored it 70 percent of the time.<sup>44</sup> Eighty-five percent of students who experienced antisemitism at their university did not submit a complaint because they thought it would make no difference.<sup>45</sup> In common with other areas of modern antisemitic discourse, one common theme of the Jewish student experience was either someone comparing Israel to Nazi Germany or being involuntarily singled out, or excluded, because of matters relating to Israel.<sup>46</sup>

Singling out or excluding a Jewish person because of disagreement with the policies of Israel involves the antisemitic fallacy that Jews are an indivisible and non-individuated whole that can be somehow equated with and held collectively responsible for every action of Israel. Comparing Israel to Nazi Germany has been described as a particularly insidious form of antisemitism called "Holocaust inversion".<sup>47</sup> Kenneth L Marcus describes Holocaust inversion, by comparing Jews to Nazis, as a form of Holocaust distortion involving degrees of "Holocaust denial, minimization, and trivialization by its precisely targeted offensive usage".<sup>48</sup> In Marcus's words, "[l]ike other contemporary hate and bias modalities, Holocaust inversion has been protected from normal anti-discrimination enforcement by its ability to replicate or mimic the tropes of a dissident political discourse."<sup>49</sup> Inversions and false comparisons are a standard part of hate speech. Marcus describes "Accusation in a mirror" or "AiM" rhetoric (projecting one's own intentions onto the subjects of hatred) as a key component of hate speech and genocidal priming, performing five key functions – "to shock, to silence, to threaten, to insulate, and, finally, to motivate or incite."<sup>50</sup> On this analysis, the "Jews will not replace us" chants of white supremacists in the United States is a form of "AiM" rhetoric, projecting onto Jews the white supremacist goals of world domination and the removal of Jews from the world. This is rhetoric intended to shock, silence, threaten, and insulate Jews and people who oppose antisemitism.

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<sup>42</sup> Social Research Centre, *The Jewish University Experience Survey* (Report, July 2023) 6.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid* 7.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid* 8.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid* 9.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid* 1.

<sup>47</sup> See, eg, 'Antisemitism defined: Why drawing comparisons of contemporary Israeli policy to the Nazis is antisemitic', *World Jewish Congress* (Article, 25 January 2022)

<<https://www.worldjewishcongress.org/en/news/antisemitism-defined-why-drawing-comparisons-of-contemporary-israeli-policy-to-the-nazis-is-antisemitic>>.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid* 376.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid* 380.

<sup>50</sup> Kenneth L Marcus, *Accusation in a Mirror* (2012) 43 *Loyola University Chicago Law Journal* 357, 361.

In 1947, Sir Zelman was invited to work in Berlin as an Officer of the British Control Commission preparing materials concerning future constitutional arrangements for Germany. In his memoir, Sir Zelman said:

"It was pleasant enough, save that I can still hear the voices of hatred when the events of this last year of the British mandate in Palestine were being discussed. I heard ugly things spoken about Jews, in the context of Palestine, by British officers of the commission. Awful things were happening, but it was deeply depressing that these violent antipathies should be publicly expressed by British officers and officials who were part of the occupation force in defeated Nazi Germany."<sup>51</sup>

Here again we see Jews subjected to a blind assumption of non-individuation. Compare this – there is more than one country which criminalises homosexuality under sanction of the death penalty.<sup>52</sup> Nations, organisations, and people may wish to take a strong stand and organise action against those policies. But it would not be a part of acceptable modern discourse to suggest that nationals of those countries en masse, let alone the descendants of the diaspora from those countries, should be the subject of hatred because of their government's policies or held collectively responsible for those policies.

Lipstadt justifiably describes conflating legitimate criticism of Israel's policies and antisemitism as not just wrong but "dangerous, because it diminishes real anti-Semitism". Believing that the policies of Israel as a nation state involve or expose some supposedly essential and nasty truth about being a Jew involves the same antisemitic reductionism that enabled the concept of and beliefs about "the Jew" to flourish. Kenneth L Marcus has observed:

"The criteria by which antisemitic criticisms of Israel may be distinguished from other criticisms have now become largely conventional. They include the use of classic antisemitic stereotypes, such as the demonization of Jews or the Jewish state; the use of double standards for Israel and all other nations, including denial of national self-determination only to the Jews; and holding Jews collectively responsible for Israeli policy. What these criteria have in common is that they all indicate when facially anti-Israeli expressions are in fact an expression of an underlying anti-Jewish animus."<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Zelman Cowen, *The Memoirs of Zelman Cowen: A Public Life* (The Miegunyah Press, 2006) 147.

<sup>52</sup> Uganda being a recent example: see, President Biden, 'Statement from President Joe Biden on the Enactment of Uganda's Anti-Homosexuality Act' (Statement, The White House, 29 May 2023) <<https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2023/05/29/statement-from-president-joe-biden-on-the-enactment-of-ugandas-anti-homosexuality-act/>>; 'Uganda Enacts harsh anti-LGBTQ law including death penalty', *Reuters* (online, 30 May 2023) <<https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/ugandas-museveni-approves-anti-gay-law-parliament-speaker-says-2023-05-29/>>; Stéphane Dujarric, 'Statement attributable to the Spokesperson for the Secretary-General – on Uganda' (Statement, United Nations, 30 May 2023).

<sup>53</sup> Kenneth L Marcus, 'The Definition of Antisemitism' in Charles Asher Small (ed), *Global Antisemitism: A Crisis of Modernity* (Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 2013) 97, 102 (footnote omitted).

#### IV CONCLUSION

President Biden said that history teaches that hate never goes away. It also teaches that antisemitism is a bellwether for the fracturing of the social compact on which contemporary liberal pluralistic democracies, like Australia, depend. Both lessons are apparent from a short statement Prime Minister Menzies released on 26 January 1960. Menzies said this:

"I have hitherto made no statement about some recent manifestations of anti-Semitism in Australia, evidenced by the painting up of slogans on walls and other malicious or foolish activities.

...

... It may be, of course, that these sporadic actions are those of irresponsible people on the 'lunatic fringe' who hope, by their childish antics, to secure some form of anonymous notoriety. It may be, on the other hand, that those who seek to divide our country are using this as one means of doing so. So far we have no clear evidence that there is an organised campaign of such a sinister kind, but we are of course watching the position very closely.

... I say without any hesitation, first, that we roundly condemn any attempt to stir up false issues and, second, that we invite the people of Australia to treat these outbursts with contempt."<sup>54</sup>

Before the internet, the distinction between a "lunatic fringe" and "an organised campaign" was justified. In the internet age, this distinction may no longer stand. The antiquity, endurance, and prevalence of antisemitism, and its alarming capacity to attach to any crisis, reflect its nature as a grotesquely false world-view harnessing the negative allure of a psychology of resentment. This is why, in the internet age, concerted action to educate ourselves about, and concerted action to combat antisemitism, are required. As Sir Zelman put it:

"The importance of social consensus, of a widely shared adherence to a set of basic values and acceptance of established procedures to resolve differences, seems to me to be fundamental to the maintenance of the delicate balance of liberal democracy."<sup>55</sup>

Antisemitism is irreconcilable with every part of that delicate balance.

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<sup>54</sup> Prime Minister Robert G Menzies, 'Anti-Semitism in Australia' (Statement, PM No. 2/1960, 26 January 1960) <<https://pmtranscripts.pmc.gov.au/sites/default/files/original/00000148.pdf>>.

<sup>55</sup> Zelman Cowen, *The Memoirs of Zelman Cowen: A Public Life* (The Miegunyah Press, 2006) 300.