

Psychologists Hope to Combat Antisemitism as an Illness

by Phyllis Chesler



Although I'm a co-founder of the [The New Antisemitism](#) in 2003, I received a flurry of emails from professors whose reputations, funding, friendships, even jobs, were in jeopardy given that their views of Israel were too-positive because they were fact-based. I found a *New York Times* education editor who was interested in interviewing these endangered academics. But within weeks, she told me that she'd "been stopped at the highest levels."

Many Jewish psychologists, both academics and clinicians, tend to be highly assimilated progressives, often leftists, proudly non-religious, "culturally" Jewish. About 10 years ago, as a favor to two psychoanalyst friends, I delivered a lecture on antisemitism to a large group of New York City analysts. I

barely escaped with my dignity intact. The disbelief, anger, accusations, rejection of what they perceived as a too-Zionist point of view, one which almost rendered trendy little me as a dangerous *oustjuden*, an embarrassing greenhorn, was something amazing to experience.

The American Psychological Association (APA) Council of Representatives did [documented](#) in 2012, namely, that virulent antisemitism also exists among Muslims; that American text books on prejudice and racism do not include Muslim antisemitism, and for that matter, rarely include antisemitism itself as a form of racism. In [2017](#), Kressel published a series of studies which documented the lack of scholarly anti-racist interest in antisemitism. "There is not a single reference to any of the books published in the last two decades that focuses on recent antisemitism," he wrote. "In addition, there is not a single reference to antisemitism coming from Muslims, Arabs, or the Muslim world."

Thus, antisemitism does not seem to exist in the academy, is not important, not even a unique form of prejudice. But false concepts such as "Islamophobia," [Hatem Bazian](#) at Berkeley are accepted as divine truth. Anti-Zionism, which today is a current form of antisemitism, is hotly debated and denied as such. The chancellor at Rutgers University just [Julie Ancis](#), a counseling [Asaf Romirowsky](#), the executive director of [Statement on the Black Lives Matter Movement](#). She wanted to know whether the psychologists were "endorsing the official platform of BLM."

"One area of concern is that the platform includes inflammatory language related to Israel as an 'apartheid' and genocidal state," she wrote. "The platform also calls for a fight for Anti-Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions (BDS) bills with the goal of helping Palestinians and fostering 'free speech' when in fact BDS is antithesis to both... I respectfully request clarification and ask that we become more critical consumers of information, and that we try not to perpetuate oppression

while advocating for justice.”

In her view, that’s when her formerly fashionable anti-racist work began to be “disappeared.” Her studies and textbook were no longer always included in syllabi or in other books.

The illness of hate

Still cautious, patient, fair-minded, not one to poke the hornet’s nest, Ancis bided her time – but no longer. She just put out a call before the Memorial Day weekend for a Coalition of Psychologists Against Antisemitism. Her stated goal was: “1. Combatting antisemitism. 2. Informing the field of psychology about antisemitism. 3. Providing a framework for Jewish affirming training, education, research, and practice.”

Within five days, more than 135 psychologists expressed interest in joining. Ancis said she also received email from “psychologists in a variety of divisions expressing their appreciation and concerns with antisemitism, silence around anti-Jewish hate, and reports of challenging interactions with those who are advocating BDS within the division.”

These psychologists may bring a unique set of skills to the table.

For example, if they jettison partisan politics and politically correct narratives, they may very well help us see antisemitism as an irrational belief or fear, one suffered by the antisemite, not caused by the Jew. They may also employ a valuable expertise in terms of empathic listening—and processing conflict without resorting to jargon or propaganda.

The task at hand is daunting because Israel and the Jews are trying to defend themselves from outrageous lies and slanders.

Israel is allegedly a settler, colonial, imperialistic, Jewish supremacist aggressor; a Nazi apartheid state that perpetrates ethnic cleansing and that has erased the history of the only

indigenous people of the region – the Palestinians. Demands to boycott Israeli products and Israeli academics and to [harass](#), and [professors](#) who refuse to sign on to such genocidal propaganda have been underway for nearly 20 years.

As Israel won war after war in self-defense, Jew haters funded a lethal propaganda campaign, one in which Israel would increasingly find itself totally surrounded by ill-deserved hatred, not only in the Sunni and Shi'a Muslim worlds but also at the [celebrity academics](#), [media](#), the internet, and among student [Theodore Isaac Rubin](#) suggested that antisemitism is an illness – a madness – a virus, a plague, infectious, something evil that is not caused by Jews.

We must shed our illusions permanently as we search for the antidote.

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