

From 'Left-Fascism' to Campus Anti-Semitism: Radicalism as Reaction

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There are many diverse and competing accounts of the 1960s and the legacies of that decade. None can lay claim to comprehensiveness, including the one discussed here: there are always other stories. However the narrative of the 1960s presented here has a particular significance, both for understanding what transpired decades ago and what we encounter today. It is a narrative about continuity, albeit with transformations. Like many Sixties stories, its venue is largely the university, although not exclusively so, but it also involves an international framework: it can hardly suffice to recall the student movements within universities and ignore the complex global context. Nor is it sufficient to appeal to the memory of sixties radicalism, while attributing its decline solely to external, putatively reactionary forces intent on repressing the progressive camp. On the contrary, in place of the nostalgic mythology of that erstwhile radicalism as indisputably emancipatory, any credible account has to describe how repression emerged within the movement itself. Sixties radicalism – or at least part of it – was always already reactionary. The revolution was repressive from its start, congenitally flawed with a programmatic illiberalism and anti-intellectualism and – remembering one of the most prominent epigrams of the era: ‘we have met the enemy and he is us.’ Anything less than that is at best romanticism, at worst a regression to old Left partisanship, blithely separating the world into camps of absolute difference, to the left the blessed bound to heaven, to the right the sinners consigned to hell by the divine power of an unforgivingly secular emancipation: which side are you on?

A heroic metahistory of the Sixties presents the moment of revolt as a refusal of a deficient and antiquated world, a recognisable variant of the modernist narrative of the victory of youth over old age. Familiar as the story is, it can point in various directions. In one version, the explosions of the late Sixties represented culminations of forces that had been building up for much more than a decade, finally finding articulate expression; in an alternative version, the revolutionary event in effect capped and terminated a prior phase of liberalisation. In both versions, an early period, the Sixties that pursued a hopeful opening toward the future, enters a new phase, the Sixties which, embracing violence, underwent a repressive turn characterised by a regression to older ideological formations. At the very moment

BERMAN | From 'Left-Fascism' to Campus Anti-Semitism

that the New Left became most anarchist and voluntarist, just as it began to place its bets on terror (its own and that of its role models), it ironically returned to the most Old-Left political vocabulary, replete with the old-style Marxism-Leninism and the associated habits of thoughtlessness and brutality. Whatever genuinely emancipatory tendencies pervaded the earlier phase of the protest movement were suddenly extinguished in the formation of dogmatic splinter groups and criminal gangs dedicated to carrying out violent acts in the name of the greater goal of a violent revolution. This essay begins by revisiting the character of repression in the Sixties through some German material (although the issues are not exclusively German by any means); it then describes elements of repression and illiberalism in the twentieth-century university which, at odds with the genuine mission of the university for teaching and scholarship, also represent the precondition for contemporary campus anti-Semitism; finally, the argument concludes with a discussion of this resurgent anti-Semitism in the academic world through a close reading of Judith Butler's comments on remarks by Lawrence Summers. Linking these steps, there is an underlying claim: the modern university, which flourished thanks to a liberalism of the mind, is currently threatened by a set of transformations and pressures inimical to that intellectual culture. The life of the mind may change into a graveyard of the spirit. This slide into repression has multiple causes, but it includes prominently the legacy of the Sixties and the worst habits of Communist culture, which the Sixties eventually embraced: political correctness, hypocritical dishonesty, and a rhetoric of bitter vilification, surrounded by a sea of apathy.

The Frankfurt School and 'Left Fascism'

A crucial turning point in the Sixties took place when, in the wake of violent demonstrations, Jürgen Habermas attacked the German student movement's growing contempt for democratic structures as 'left-wing fascism.' Here is the context: On June 2, 1967, the student of German literature, Benno Ohnesorg, was shot and killed by police in Berlin during a protest against a visit by the Shah of Iran. A week later, a funeral caravan accompanied Ohnesorg's coffin to his home in Hanover (i.e., it drove from West Berlin, past check points in order to enter Communist East Germany and then again past check points in order to be allowed to leave East Germany to reach Hanover in West Germany) . A university conference followed immediately after the burial: 'The University and Democracy: Conditions and Organization of Resistance.' Key speakers included Habermas, the SDS leader Rudi Dutschke, and another student leader, Hans-Jürgen Krahl, an Adorno protégé and later opponent. Habermas described and endorsed the

radical cultural and political content of the movement but remained cautious about the plausible range of action. In particular, he expressed concern about the movement's tendency to combine an indifference toward consequences with an oblivious actionism, as if the decision to act at all were always more important than any consideration of consequences. In response to Habermas' assault, Krahl and Dutschke objected vehemently, defending the necessity of action, unhindered by rational calculation of effect, the German variant of an American 'by any means necessary.' Thus Dutschke: 'For Professor Habermas, Marx may well say that it is not sufficient for the idea to strive for reality; reality must also strive toward the idea. That was correct in the age of transitional capitalism. But today that no longer makes sense. The material preconditions for the possibility of making history are given. Everything now depends on the conscious human will, to finally become conscious of the history it has always made, to control, and to command it, which means, Professor Habermas, that your objectivity devoid of concept is crushing the subject of emancipation.' [1] In other words, in another historical context, it may have been prudent to caution patience and to delay revolutionary actions until the conditions had ripened; but that was long ago and, so Dutschke's assertion, all that stands in the way of the revolution today is a lack of will to reinvent ourselves as revolutionaries. Indeed he not only disagrees with Habermas' moderation; he in effect accuses Habermas of standing in the way of revolutionary change. Dutschke's voluntarism conflicts with Habermas' pragmatism, as activism collides with theory. A maximalist aspiration for immediate revolution confronts a protective concern with the young institutions of democratic Germany; with the memory of Nazi Germany so recent and the example of an undemocratic dictatorship just across the Iron Curtain, the prospect of subverting the liberal democratic regime of West Germany was far from insignificant. At the Hanover conference, however, Dutschke ended up proposing nothing more radical than a sit-down strike – far short of the emphatic ambitions of his speech – but his defense of revolutionary illegality prompted Habermas to the notorious judgment. 'In my opinion, he has presented a voluntarist ideology, which was called utopian socialism in 1848, and which in today's context, I believe I have reasons to use this characterization, has to be called left fascism.' [2] Fascism: because of its ideology of unconstrained voluntarism, a triumphalism of the will, with neither ethical nor institutional limitations; a contemptuous disregard for democratic institutions and processes; and an adventurist willingness to engage in violence, precisely in order to provoke crises inimical to liberal democracy.

BERMAN | From 'Left-Fascism' to Campus Anti-Semitism

The drama of university, theory, and politics grew more tense in Frankfurt, five days later, on June 12 at an SDS meeting, with Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno in attendance, publicly announced as a discussion on Critical Theory and political practice. An open letter had attacked Horkheimer for the Frankfurt School's lack of attention to political practice and his 'support for American imperialism.' Horkheimer had replied in writing, declaring his willingness to participate in a public debate with SDS, while underscoring his own concern about the movement's support for Communist regimes. In direct discussion, the aging Horkheimer could not keep up with the questions that mixed philosophy with the impact of the Ohnesorg shooting and the politics of the Vietnam War. Adorno intervened, characterising the police shooting as a symptom of 'social sadism,' but also criticising the SDS illusion that the student movement's actions could plausibly initiate a genuine revolution in West Germany. He compared the actions to 'the movements of a caged animal looking for ways out' and refused to approve an 'emphatic concept of practice' that remains ignorant of objective circumstances. Hence his judgment: 'The Left tends to censor thought in order to justify its ends. Knowledge however includes a description of blockages. Theory is being censored for the sake of practice. Theory however has to be completely thorough, otherwise the practice will be false.' [3] Complete theory would have included a recognition of the futility of a campaign genuinely oriented toward revolution as well as a corollary embrace of the genuine values of liberal democracy everywhere, but especially in a country in which the experience of the Nazi past was not old and which bordered on the empire of the twin totalitarianism to the east. (Note: the capacity of the Left to compartmentalise solidarity, to protest abuses in one place and to be blind to them in another, was well established by 1967, when the Ohnesorg cortege could pass through East Germany in silence, despite self-assured moralism about Iran and Vietnam. The acquiescence in August 1968 regarding Czechoslovakia was only consistent with this willingness to refuse solidarity with the victims of the Soviet empire. With few exceptions, '68ers' in the West had nothing to say to 68ers of the Prague Spring, after the Warsaw Pact invasion, or to anyone else in the Eastern bloc. This apathy was not only German, and the situation in the United States was not very different. Aside from the journal *Telos*, which, founded in 1968, maintained active ties to East European dissidents, most of the New Left had nothing to say about repression under Communism, even though it otherwise claimed to be 'anti-authoritarian' and vigorously attacked repressive regimes allied with the West. That tradition has proven quite resilient: selective internationalism continues to characterise the Middle East debate today. International solidarity has come to mean nothing more than programmatic hypocrisy.)

The student movement was increasingly driven by voluntarism – the will, not reason, sets the pace – as well as by an indifference to, if not an outright enthusiasm for, many illiberal regimes, and a performative imperative, regardless of ethical contents: the priority of practice over thought. The time however of the German events is precisely June 1967, the moment of the Six-Day War. Horkheimer participated prominently in a German commemoration of Anne Frank as well as an ecumenical humanitarian support group for Israel. However this was also the moment when the first left-wing anti-Israel demonstrations began to take place, free of any sense of obligation to make subtle distinctions between anti-Semitism and anti-Zionism; as one leaflet would soon put it with admirable clarity, ‘The Jews, who have been driven away by fascism, have themselves become fascists, who in collaboration with American capital want to exterminate the Palestinian people.’ [4] The German text is clear: the enemy is the ‘Jews who have been driven away,’ i.e., this was not anti-Zionism directed against Israel, but anti-Semitism directed against Jews. The Jewish character of the enemy is all the more clear, since the cited document referenced the attempted bombing of the Jewish Community Center in Berlin which had been timed for the Kristallnacht commemoration on November 9, 1969. That choice of symbolism made it abundantly clear that at least part of the German Left understood itself as the direct heir to the fascism that Habermas had identified on other grounds. A particularly German series of events ensued: Left radical support for an attempted El Al hijacking in 1970 in Munich, the 1972 Black September attacks at the Olympics, the prominent German role in the 1976 hijacking to Entebbe of an Air France flight and the grotesque selection and separation of Jewish, not just Israeli passengers by German terrorists. Internationalism converged with anti-Semitism: Dieter Kunzelmann, leader of the ‘Tupamaros-West Berlin,’ a prominent Left-wing group. the name of which signalled solidarity with violent revolution in Latin America, participated in weapons training in a Palestinian training camp in Jordan and eloquently greeted Daniel Cohn-Bendit of Parisian May fame, on a visit to Berlin, as ‘a little Jewish pig.’ [5]

Several interconnected issues are at stake here: the student movement’s revolt against theory in the name of practice is also a revolt against the theoreticians themselves. This is part of the epochal subversion of professorial authority, within the specific German context, a faint echo of the Chinese Cultural Revolution, which is also at the root of the bitter break between Frankfurt School Critical Theory and the New Left as it rushed into self-reification; moreover this represents the revolt of the German student movement explicitly against the Jewish intellectuals who had been their mentors. One needs to ask to what degree the prominence of the break

BERMAN | From 'Left-Fascism' to Campus Anti-Semitism

with the Frankfurt School (as opposed to relations to other old-generation social critics), a break which has echoed through 'theory' ever since, had a fundamentally antisemitic component. As Adorno wrote to Marcuse in 1969, 'You only have to look into the manic frozen eyes of those who probably, basing themselves on us, turn their anger against us.' [6] This oedipal paradigm of reaction – radical resentment at the teachers of radicalism – was refracted through the particular circumstances of the German past as well as the changing politics of the Middle East. One of the absurd contradictions of the era, an indication of the characteristic backwardness of the progressive movement, is that the post-1967 German anti-Zionism typically advertised its own leftist allegiances – as one slogan put it poetically, 'Schlaegt die Zionisten tot, macht den Nahen Osten rot' ['Kill the Zionists dead, make the Near East red'] – precisely at the point in time when the Arab left was tumbling toward defeat and the Islamist reaction was gaining ground, leading eventually to the 1979 Iranian Revolution, which would equally appeal to reactionary tendencies, as it turned on the Iranian left and attacked the domestic communist movement. [7] An ironic version of enlightenment progress might be this: at least those illusions are gone. Contemporary anti-Zionism in the West, tempered by a cultural relativism that has robbed it of universal values, does not seriously believe anymore that there is a progressive content to a solidarity with Hamas or Hezbollah beyond formulaic anti-imperialism. No one would argue today that anti-Zionism, as in 'Kill the Zionists dead,' would lead to a 'red' Middle East. Far from it. This change marks the deep divide from the Sixties, when the New Left, for a moment, began to believe in an Old-Left world revolution in the name of progress. Today the vision of a progressive Middle East – rule of law, equality for women and minorities, secular culture – finds scant support on the Left, which has largely abandoned these contents to the vilified neoconservatives.

The repression of theory (in the name of practice) amounted to a sort of self-mutilation through the disregard for ethics and liberal institutions. Part of this derived from an immanent logic of self-destruction, but it also received a friendly assist from without. In the wake of 1989 and the opening of East German archives, it has begun to be clear how much the dogmatism of the West German left – including its anti-Semitism and its hostility to Critical Theory – was a function of manipulative Communist intrusion. The history of the era can surely not be reduced to espionage and conspiracies from the East (just as campus anti-Semitism cannot be explained solely with reference to Saudi funding). Nor, however, should we pretend that the long arm of orthodox Communism played no role

in the degeneration of progressive politics in the West, which was intentionally contaminated with the worst ideologemes of the Communist legacy from the East.

The Structural Transformation of the University

Yet neither the tradition of Communist anti-Semitism, nor the revolt against the Jewish intellectuals, nor Palestinian or Islamist activism, nor even the struggle with the theory-practice problem is a sufficient explanation. All these factors contributed, but there is more at stake. There is today a growing illiberalism in the academic world due to deep-seated structural changes in the university as institution and the culture of education. It is especially this gradual shift in educational paradigm which underpins the personality type which Habermas dubbed left-fascist and which, with some adjustments for the different national setting, is familiar within American universities as well, not to mention other countries. The prognosis is worrisome. The modern university, which can claim great accomplishments in teaching and in research, is currently subject to structural transformations that are eroding the robust liberalism that has been the precondition of free and creative scholarship. These transformations may generate alternate structures of repression and self-repression, signs of which are becoming evident, including a resurgent anti-Semitism and the complacency of responses to it. While academic anti-Semitism is itself a matter of concern as the basis for potentially discriminatory practices, it is also an ominous indicator of the wider spread of repressive tendencies inimical to the vitality of the university.

The paradigm of cultural modernity set up an expectation that the institutions of education, especially the research university, should be defined in terms of freedom and individuality: academic freedom, freedom of research, a Kantian freedom to use one's own mind. Whatever the historical credibility of that description, whether empirical reality ever matched that norm, there are now alternative tendencies at work within academic life which push precisely away from those goals: the decline of the humanities and the liberal arts, most obviously, and more broadly a tendency toward narrow specialisation, which is hidden just beneath the surface of interdisciplinarity. Whatever its benefits, interdisciplinarity too frequently ends up encouraging post-modern forms of eccentricity, idiosyncratic combinations defined by lateral moves rather than by depth of disciplinary field. This post-disciplinary narrowness eliminates the need to measure and to test one's beliefs against the objectivity of evidence, counter-argument or falsifiability. Yet if freedom has become the license to ignore objections, then we can begin to

BERMAN | From 'Left-Fascism' to Campus Anti-Semitism

understand why advocates of idiosyncratic and especially extremist positions are not likely to meet opposition from a university public, where a relativism unwilling to criticise others has come to prevail. Instead of agreeing to disagree, today we just agree to ignore. To the extent that campus anti-Semitism, as an expression of a classically repressive personality type, has taken root, it is due in part to a reluctance to challenge grotesque positions: tolerance has become apathy as the signal feature of universities defined in terms of career advancement rather than the conversation of ideas. Someone else's prejudice, no matter how fanatic, is just another opinion, as legitimate as any other. The problem is compounded by the legalisation tendencies of a litigious society that leave university administrations structurally incapable of exercising good judgment; their goal is simply to stay out of court. Academic freedom, like freedom of speech, has become a license to attack freedom. To be sure, in our atomised culture of apathy and indifference hardly anyone notices, but the gradual erosion of the paradigm of the free university involves a loss of freedom in general.

The liberal arts discourse, organised around a model of the creative and thoughtful personality, has become a privilege of a tiny fraction of students attending the top colleges and universities in the U.S. with little echo elsewhere in the world. The higher education that western universities export overseas – or for which foreign students come to the US – is technocratically foreshortened, only very rarely defined in humanistic terms. Yet this radical reduction of education to practical matters – technology and economics – is not only part of transnational cultural transfers to international students. Domestic undergraduates similarly clamour for pre-professional programs: scholarship, which for Weber, was once vocation, now plummets towards vocational training. The student movement's revolt against theory in the name of activist practice has turned into the active practice of job internships, which is more interesting as a story of continuity in a fetishisation of practice since the Sixties than as a decline from a golden age of activism. Meanwhile the notion of free research has been undermined by extensive and growing dependence on external funding, be it a matter of government, industry or foundations. Each demands its own Faustian bargains that subvert the credibility of the autonomy of knowledge. To some extent, that dependence was always the case, but an accelerated shift has taken place, away from the autonomy of the researcher or the scholarly community and to a heteronomous definition of goals. Moreover, this process is repeated within the university in growing pressure for collaboration or the definition of research agenda at higher, even university-wide levels. At Stanford during the past two years, motions have been brought to the Senate of

the Academic Council – note: not by the administration but through processes of faculty self-governance – proposing restrictions on aspects of free scholarship. The results have been mixed, which is itself cause for alarm.

The erosion of the instructional structures of the humanistic university has echoed through university discourse as well. Whatever structural forces contributed to this change, scholars have spent the past decades celebrating it by providing intellectual rationale: this is the content of the so-called death of the subject and the eager collaboration of the humanities in that execution. Even during the decades in which ‘theory’ reigned supreme, the status of the concept was as much under attack as was the individual subject and the objectivity of truth – possible, if dubious intellectual positions to be sure, but much less convincing when we take note of how they seemed to accompany magnetic attraction to power and a predisposition to offer apologetics for reactionaries: Foucault on Khomeini, Derrida on de Man. The cultural history of that era has to include as well the reception of *Orientalism* and the one-dimensional resentment it legitimated. Said’s work is complex and multifaceted, but in a study devoted largely to imperialism in the Middle East, the deafening silence on the Ottoman Empire, Turkish hegemony and the fate of the Armenians provided a model of one-sidedness and cold-hearted indifference from which many have been able to learn, in the spirit of the same selective internationalism mentioned earlier.

The emancipatory moment of the Sixties entailed a dialectic of repression, which we could see played out in the particularity of the German context: it was not repression from without that ended the Sixties, but an internal and self-destructive repression, which however has had long-lasting consequences, especially for intellectual culture. The emerging illiberalism gave expression to underlying transformations which have only accelerated in contemporary academic life. Antisemitism runs through this process on multiple levels: as a constitutive component of historical fascism, as an element of orthodox Communist discourse which has been a key source for anti-imperialist politics, and through an instrumentalisation of Middle East politics for propagandistic purposes (whether pan-Arab socialist or reactionary Islamist). More generally, the lowering of the barrier against attacks on Jews in universities corresponds to the Frankfurt School diagnosis: hostility to the cultural figure taken to represent liberal individualism turns into the perfect politics for a new masochistic personality yearning for submission – demonstrative anti-Semitism offers emancipation from emancipation, the comfort of repression

BERMAN | From 'Left-Fascism' to Campus Anti-Semitism

available to everyone regardless of race or religion, including Jews. The antisemitic act provides the excitement to surpass limitations of civility which are otherwise experienced as merely conventional; it can offer the actor an illusion of freedom from constraints, through gestures directed precisely against freedom; and, with or without political pretexts, these gestures allow one to indulge in the pleasures of hatred. The psychological calculus of anti-Zionism has nothing to do with expressing genuine solidarity with one group and everything to do with denying solidarity with another: it is all about showing how tough one can be, with only superficial interest in the specific contents of Palestinian or Israeli lives.

Lawrence Summers, Judith Butler and campus anti-Semitism

That kind of analysis however does not obviate the need to specify the problem. In 2006 the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights determined that 'many college campuses throughout the United States continue to experience incidents of anti-Semitism, a serious problem warranting further attention' and that such behavior may constitute a hostile environment in the sense of Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. [8] At stake is less institutionalised discrimination, i.e. old-style limitations on admissions and employment, but a range of practices, including verbal and physical assaults on Jews which may constitute hate crimes, vandalism against Jewish religious structures (for example, attacks on Sukkot, the harvest-festival structures at some California campuses), and a misunderstood application of principles of free speech that has led some student newspapers to publish paid advertisements with holocaust-denying content. The U.S. Commission on Civil Rights also found that 'Anti-Israeli or anti-Zionist propaganda has been disseminated on many campuses that include traditional anti-Semitic elements, including age-old anti-Jewish stereotypes and defamations.' This is where the parsing becomes complex. Criticism of specific Israeli policies is not in and of itself antisemitic. Selective or propagandistic criticism may or may not be antisemitic but is probably by definition intellectually insufficient. All this hedging misses the point however that anti-Zionism alone does not disprove an accusation of anti-Semitism; indeed anti-Zionism can very well provide a pretext for or slide into anti-Semitism, particularly when anti-Zionist rhetoric explicitly utilizes classically antisemitic rhetoric. Statistical research has demonstrated a strong correlation between degree of anti-Israel sentiment and anti-Semitism, at least in Europe. [9]

On September 23, 2002, then President of Harvard, Lawrence Summers delivered an address at Memorial Church on Harvard Yard on 'Antisemitism and the Academy.'

Nearly a year later, Judith Butler, Professor of Rhetoric at Berkeley, published a response with the title 'No, it's not anti-Semitic' in the *London Review of Books* of August 21, 2003. [10] A close look at the two documents finds some points of unexpected similarity, even agreement, but there is also evidence of considerable misreading by Butler, in ways that are instructive regarding the topic of campus anti-Semitism. Needless to say, the mere fact of this exchange between two such prominent intellectuals testifies to the standing and urgency of the question. Given that prominence, the sensitivity of the topic and the interlocking of the texts, there is even a temptation to pursue a close reading, line by line. Here however some select observations will have to suffice.

Both Summers and Butler oppose anti-Semitism, and they both declare that they speak as Jews, although they do so in very different registers. Summers reports how he had heretofore regarded anti-Semitism as a thing of the past, certainly distant from his personal experience and how he 'attributed all of this to progress – to an ascendancy of enlightenment and tolerance.' However in his speech he claims that a turn has taken place, which had led him to become less 'complacent.' This turn involves a global context of attacks on synagogues in Europe, the rise of politicians like Jean-Marie Le Pen (not mentioned by name but by inference, in the wake of his surprisingly strong showing in the French presidential election of the previous spring), and the tenor of the Durban conference (the 2001 UN World Conference Against Racism which had been the site of strident attacks on Israel). But in his remarks, Summers' point is to move from that larger picture and focus specifically on the academy: 'I want to bring this closer to home,' and he then asserts that antisemitic views have migrated from 'poorly educated right-wing populists' to 'progressive intellectual communities.' He follows with the one dictum to which Butler takes particular offense: 'Serious and thoughtful people are advocating and taking actions that are anti-Semitic in their effect if not their intent.'

Butler's rhetoric is, in contrast, impersonal. Only once does she refer to herself in the form of 'What do we make of Jews such as myself, who...' (p.7), but otherwise she maintains a distanced perspective of trying to parse the difference between effect and intent, and between anti-Semitism and anti-Zionism, rather than taking an explicit stance of her own. Summers describes his own earlier predisposition against raising the charge of anti-Semitism but, reversing this erstwhile reticence, he now claims the importance of doing so in the current context and (perhaps especially) because anti-Semitism has entered the privileged halls of the academy; Butler concedes the

BERMAN | From 'Left-Fascism' to Campus Anti-Semitism

importance 'for every progressive person' to challenge anti-Semitism, but takes pains to argue instead for a wider critical discussion of Israel. For her, the urgency of a critique of Israel outweighs the importance of any discussion of anti-Semitism. Her intention seems to be to constrain the discussion of anti-Semitism to as narrow a terrain as possible (by limiting it to 'those who do discriminate against Jews – who do violence to synagogues in Europe, wave Nazi flags or support antisemitic organizations' [6]), which would effectively preclude any nuanced discourse analyses or a consideration of the polite zones of the academy. In contrast, Summers' vision is more ominous and more complex, involving the putative intrusion of ethnic or religious antipathy into the university. It is perplexing to find Butler so unwilling to consider the possibility that universities might be home to prejudice, which is hard to understand except as a considerable idealisation of the university and/or a wilful obliviousness to anti-Semitism – akin to Summers' admitted former resistance to lend credence to allegations of anti-Semitism ('I have always throughout my life been put off by those who heard the sound of breaking glass, in every insult or slight...'). Yet they respond to this resistance in opposite ways.

Some of this resistance is a Jewish story: the self-censorship involved in a reluctance (Butler's or Summers') to talk about anti-Semitism, is part of a troubled relationship to politics. Part of this however relates to the topic of this essay, a current of illiberalism within the university involving a predisposition to conformism, a reluctance to differ from the norm, and an intellectual risk aversion. The rise of anti-Semitism and, especially, the resistance to addressing it are part of this picture. For all their indisputable differences on Middle East politics – and to make the content clear, this is about Butler's support for divestment, the political call to compel universities to refrain from investing endowment funds in companies doing business in Israel, and Summers' opposition to it – both share the assumption that members of university communities are (or worse: should be) progressive, which is a somewhat dated way to say 'politically correct,' since conservatives, so the assumption, have no place in the capaciousness of the academy. Moreover both assume with breath-taking naivete that progressive credentials exclude – or ought to exclude – the possibility of anti-Semitism. Butler limits anti-Semitism to the true fanatics, the Nazi flag-wavers, a corollary to Summers' ignorant populists. Of course Summers' key point is that such bad populism can in fact contaminate good progressivism, but he too shares Butler's rosy assumption about progressive comrades: genuine progressives never harbor prejudices. This optimism is however the low-hanging fruit: how shall we count the ways that they are wrong? What is the political blindness that leads both Summers and Butler to this idealistic account?

From Marx on the Jewish Question to the notorious Doctor's Plot, the progressive tradition, far from excluding anti-Semitism, has always cultivated its own home-grown brand. [11] Dieter Kunzelmann had venerable predecessors. We are far beyond the time when one could plea ignorance to the extent of the tradition of left-wing anti-Semitism, its historical depth and its contemporary manifestations.

Despite these proximities between Summers and Butler, there is however plenty of distance between them too, and these differences are perhaps more important than the similarities. On point after point, Butler misreads Summers or grossly overstates his claims in order to turn them into easier targets. She asserts for example that Jews cannot 'monopolize the position of victim,' (2) which is no doubt true, but Summers nowhere claims that they do. She engages in similar mendacity when she insinuates that Summers opposes 'letting criticism of Israel into the public sphere' (4), even though he states that there is 'much in Israel's foreign and defense policy that can be and should be vigorously challenged.' That statement ought to be clear enough for literate readers and even for Butler, but she nonetheless confesses that she does not 'know whether he approves of all Israeli policies' (5), as if she were blind to his just quoted statement that not only single issues but 'much in Israel's foreign and defense policy can be and should be vigorously challenged.' Perhaps she was skimming; in any case, Summers' statement is quoted here twice because Butler misses it repeatedly. In various permutations she imputes to Summers a prohibition on any criticism of Israel presumably because he does not endorse her specific criticism of Israel and, in particular, her preferred vehicle of protest, the divestment campaign. It is as if for Butler a concern with anti-Semitism anywhere, and, in particular, in the academy were, in her view, incompatible with any criticism of Israel.

Yet that absurd presumption is undermined by Butler's own prose: for she too, despite herself, has to come to grips with anti-Semitism in the academy and not – this would be the easy case – with Nazi flag-wavers or right-wing populists – but in the very core of her chosen political community, the academic anti-Zionist movement. Fervently claiming that anti-Zionism is not anti-Semitism, she ends up having to confront an anti-Zionist antisemite. The repressed returns to haunt her, when her argument builds to a critique of Mona Baker, the academic in Manchester, England, who dismissed Israeli scholars from the editorial board of her journal and who, so Butler reports, subsequently attacked 'Jews' and the 'Jewish press,' which Butler – to my mind correctly – identifies as anti-Semitism. It is not hard to decipher Butler's intent; her rhetorical strategy involves inventing a fictional

BERMAN | From 'Left-Fascism' to Campus Anti-Semitism

symmetry between Summers and Baker, both of whom she sees linking Israel too closely to Jews, so a critique of one quickly becomes a critique of the other. On one level the logic of the argument works by providing a reassuringly moralistic lesson about two extremes meeting: except that her prose thereby falls prey to its own deconstruction, since to make this argument she has to cite evidence (Baker) that proves her opponent (Summers) correct. Butler's essay is entitled, 'No, it's not anti-Semitism.' Unfortunately for its author, it proves in fact that, yes, it is.

Summers' speech addressed the rise of anti-Semitism internationally and then focused on the transformation of university discourse; Butler does not mention the former, the larger context, and basically denies the latter, with the exception of her attack on Baker. In a follow-up letter to the editor of the *LRB*, Baker dismissed Butler's charges against her, but somewhat revealingly attributed Butler's discomfort with her (Baker's) more aggressive anti-Zionism to Butler's imputed need 'to resolve her own anxieties at being a Jew who is highly critical of Israeli policies [...].'^[12] In other words, Baker levels the charge that Jews cannot be, or have difficulties being, reliable and trustworthy anti-Zionists. Noam Chomsky has faced similar accusations: his career argument against Israel as an agent of Washington now faces denunciations from more radical anti-Zionists as a white-washing camouflage for the reverse hypothesis, the hypothetical Israeli domination of Washington, which is nothing more than the colorful antisemitic fantasy of conspiratorial Jewish world control. ^[13] Yet that is exactly a claim that has migrated on the path that Summers accurately described: from the murky margins of right-wing extremists to the buttoned-down center of the academy with Mearsheimer and Walt on the 'Israel lobby.'

Butler accused Summers of having a chilling effect on public debate, although he explicitly stated that 'academic communities should be and always will be places that allow any viewpoint to be expressed.' While the normative 'should be' is probably indisputable, the predictive 'always will be' has already turned out to be wrong, given the fact that the Regents of the University of California retracted an invitation to Summers to speak to them at Davis, after a protest movement developed in the faculty. The ostensible issue concerned Summers' statement on gender and science, but Butler's high profile attack on him likely contributed to his vilification in the progressive community. In any case, the cancelled invitation certainly demonstrates that universities will not 'always be places that allow any viewpoint to be expressed.' Here however the point is not really Summers or Butler, nor divestment or anti-divestment, but the increasingly constrictive character of academy life, played out

in a drama over the possibilities and limitations of Jewish speech from which both Summers and Butler emerge wounded. The concern here is not the rightness or wrongness of their positions on divestment or on Israel, to which they each have a right, of course. However, Butler's misreading of Summers' plea is, effectively if not intentionally, a repression of his progressive critique of anti-Semitism, the price for which she has to pay when she faces Baker's rejoinder. It is the rhetorical legacy of the self-destructive Sixties: Butler's repression of repression – her effort to censor Summers' putative censoriousness – becomes an emancipation from emancipation: not only by (and I use the term cynically here) surpassing the critique of anti-Semitism but in the very rhetorical core of her argument, the caricature and refusal of his distinction between intent and effect. Few principles are more crucial to liberal jurisprudence than the difference between subjective intention and objective result. Butler rejects this distinction. Whether or not this turn might be taken as a sign of her vestigial Hegelianism, it certainly implies a chilling effect, a retreat from subjectivity, far beyond anything she ascribes to Summers' speech.

The Summers-Butler controversy, in conclusion, tells us about anti-Semitism and the responses it elicits, but it also tells us about contemporary intellectual debate. The university today too often organizes stage-managed controversies composed of irreconcilably incompatible positions. Long gone are the pipedreams of consensus or even just conversation. Instead we can see extremist speakers visiting campus *in seriatim*, typically attracting only the true-believers and their oppositional *Doppelgaenger*. Yet these flashpoints, sparks of a reified intellectual life, are lonely points of cold incandescence in the darkness of an uninterested institution. Today's campus anti-Semitism is not about a broadly politicised world; on the contrary, it is lodged in a context of apathetic pre-professionalism and mind-numbing specialisation, where ideology can flourish without anyone really caring and even fewer ever really thinking. New Left sectarianism has morphed into post-modern fragmentation. Fanaticism and indifference have become roommates, and while indifference remains unconvinced, fanaticism is always good for a laugh, offering momentary respite from the boredom of career preparation for life-sentences in the service sector. In that sense, then, perhaps we are living the future of the Sixties: not in the sense of the consistency of thinking, not elaborate theory or even ideology, but an ongoing revolt against theory, the excitement of perfunctory performance and the seductions of thoughtlessness. Yet there is an alternative to that morose diagnosis, a vitality that, despite it all, continues to thrive within the academy, if only we would embrace its traditions and its attendant virtues: bold thinking, imaginative learning, and the innovative research which depends on a culture of

BERMAN | From 'Left-Fascism' to Campus Anti-Semitism

freedom.

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Notes

- [1] Wolfgang Kraushaar, ed., *Frankfurter Schule und Studentenbewegung: Von der Flaschenpost zum Molotowcocktail, 1946-95* (Hamburg: Rogner & Bernhard, 1998), p. 259.
- [2] *Ibid.*
- [3] *Ibid.*, p. 261.
- [4] Manfred Gerstenfeld, 'The Failed Bombing by Leftists of the Berlin Jewish Community Center on Kristallnacht 1969,' *Jewish Political Studies Review* 18:3-4 (Fall 2006). [Rev. Wolfgang Kraushaar, *Die Bombe im Jüdischen Gemeindehaus* (Hamburg: HIS Verlag, 2005)]. <http://www.jcpa.org/JCPA/Templates/ShowPage.asp?DBID=1&LNGID=1&TMID=111&FID=388&PID=1631&IID=1655>
- [5] *Ibid.*
- [6] *Ibid.*
- [7] Gerd Langguth, 'Anti-Israel Extremism in West Germany,' in Robert S. Wistrich, ed. *The Left against Zion: Communism, Israel and the Middle East* (London: Vallentine Mitchell, 1979), p. 257.
- [8] *Campus Antisemitism*, <http://www.usccr.gov/pubs/081506campusantibrief07.pdf> p. 3
- [9] The notorious events at San Francisco State University in 2002 provide a noteworthy example, when demonstrators opposing pro-Israel students surrounded them in a threatening manner, leading to police intervention. More importantly a Muslim Student Association (MSA) flyer announcing the anti-Zionist demonstration had been circulated previously including an image with the caption: 'Palestinian Children Meat – Slaughtered According to Jewish Rites under American License.' Of the several groups listed on the flyer, only the MSA eventually took responsibility and apologized to the university president. Whether the university responded effectively or not is not the concern here. The example demonstrates the porousness of the separation between anti-Semitism and anti-Zionism, as well as a seepage between the two. However, it should be noted that while universities typically issue verbal condemnations of anti-Semitism, there has sometimes been evidence of university officials' minimizing allegations or setting exaggeratedly high barriers for grievances: in that narrow-minded spirit, some have argued that the Title VI provisions do not apply because the law was not intended to protect Jews as a religious group but only racially defined groups. <http://www.sfsu.edu/~news/response/summary.htm>
- On the proximity of anti-Zionism and anti-Semitism see Edward H. Kaplan and Charles A. Small, 'Anti-Israel Sentiment Predicts Anti-Semitism in Europe,' *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 50:4 (August 2006), 548-61.
- [10] Cf. Lawrence Summers, 'Antisemitism and the Academy,' <http://www.frontpagemag.com/Articles/Read.aspx?GUID=A2735511-B011-4127-8148-CF02D18CCC80>; Karen

Democratiya 13 | Summer 2008

Anderson, 'Harvard President Sees Rise in Antisemitism on Campus,' *New York Times* (Sept. 21, 2002) <http://query.nytimes.com/gst/fullpage.html?res=9B0CE7DD1F30F932A1575AC0A9649C8B63> and Judith Butler, 'No, it's not anti-Semitic,' *London Review of Book*, August 21, 2003 http://www.lrb.co.uk/v25/n16/butl02_.html. Page references included in the text.

- [11] Nor do we have to restrict ourselves to that explicitly Communist lineage: in a matter which can surely not be attributed to Zionism, consider how long it took Jaures to stop dragging his feet and rally the socialists to the Dreyfus cause, which is however, from the standpoint of Herzl, precisely a matter concerning Zionism.
- [12] Mona Baker, Letter to the Editor, *London Review of Books*, September 11, 2003 <http://www.lrb.co.uk/v25/n17/letters.html#letter6>
- [13] Cf. Ghali Hassan, 'Protecting Israel: Chomsky's Way,' *Countercurrents.Org* (April 5, 2006) <http://www.countercurrents.org/hassan050406.htm>