
sure of that. Hamlet's worries about his father's murder take a slightly different tone in our postmodern world as America still mourns the death of the Father:

TV or Not TV.
That is the question.

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The Jew Accused — Three Antisemitic Affairs (Dreyfus, Beilis, Frank) 1894–1915, by Alfred S Lindemann, Cambridge University Press, England, 1991.

The Jew Accused is a good illustration to Thoreau's bidding about books to be read as deliberately and as reservedly as they were written. Amidst tales of human tragedy and triumph, bewildering complexities and contradictions, Lindemann patiently pursues, dispassionately dissects and unravels. Like a faded age-blackened picture, with just the bare outlines discernible, after restoration colours ablaze as background and figures come alive complete with dimensions and vistas, all vibrant and relevant, as Lindemann uncovers new connections and insights. Well beyond the thriller-storyline of these courtroom dramas, beyond the ideological conflicts enriched with psychological portraits — the unique fascination of this book stems from the dimensions and connections, both in the historical setting and in comparing each affair that Lindemann presents us with. One is afraid to leave out a sentence — Lindemann is always pertinent, full of insights, thoughtful and well-researched. *The Jew Accused* is a riveting book.

The Dreyfus Affair, much more than a trial, re-focussed the issue of antisemitism in the modern world.¹ The French army accused Captain Alfred Dreyfus, the French "superpatriot" as Lindemann aptly calls him, of spying. Well before the trial popular opinion found him guilty. "One could hardly imagine a better example of how the popular press may pose a danger to legal justice".² The defence was not allowed to see evidence the judges had access to. This was in flagrant contradiction of French legal procedures even in a military court. It took Zola's *J'Accuse* to turn the smouldering Dreyfus case into an Affair and it took twelve years for the full exoneration of Dreyfus. A month after a retrial in 1899, which farcically re-established Dreyfus' guilt, the president of France granted a pardon — but Dreyfus had to petition to be pardoned. Finally in 1906 the previous judgments against him were annulled. The Affair divided French society into Dreyfusards and Anti-Dreyfusards for decades to come.

The other Affairs also abound in bizarre characters and behaviours, unexpected twists and turns, red herrings and puzzling complexities. Both the Beilis and the Leo Frank Affair happened in the shadow of the Dreyfus Affair. The Beilis Affair (1911–13) took place in pogrom-happy pre-war Russia where superstitious antisemitism was largely

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1 A scholarly study written recently was on the French bestseller list for several years. Jean-Denis Bredin, *The Affair: The Case of Alfred Dreyfus* (1986).

2 Lindemann, A S, *The Jew Accused* (1991) at 105.

supported and encouraged institutionally. Yet Beilis, accused of the ritual murder of a thirteen year old boy in Kiev and tried by clearly antisemitic judges and superstitious uneducated peasant-jurors at the end was not found guilty. The two affairs are in sharp contrast yet neither the legal system nor social consciousness was not superior in Czarist Russia. The ironic and strange qualities compound further with the chilling Frank affair (1913–15). America is perceived, with justification, as a multicultural society of emigrant people, where political and cultural tolerance was traditionally and consciously emphasised, yet, at the end of the nineteenth century, there developed a morbid preoccupation with race.

Leo Frank, a Jewish businessman was arrested in Atlanta for the murder of one of his employees, Mary Phegan. Frank was tried and found guilty, while the public grief over the murder was acquiring fevered and irrational dimensions. A whole cult, calling themselves “Mary’s people” sprang up and their case was taken up by the Populists. There was growing unease in other quarters, however, concerning the guilt of Frank. Hearst newspapers (rather uncharacteristically), amongst others, were demanding a retrial. A “strange and tragic chain reaction gathering in force and irrationality”³ was set into motion. An angry fellow prisoner cut Frank’s throat at night and gained popularity for his act. A few weeks later, his neck wound not yet healed, while being transferred to another prison, Frank was hanged by a lynch-mob.

The author also examines — and compares — two earlier anti-Jewish Affairs. The Damascus blood libel case in 1840 already revealed some patterns that would operate in the later Affairs. Jews were accused of ritual murder of a Capucine friar and his servant who disappeared without trace. A number of Jews were arrested and confessions were obtained under, as it was later established, brutal torture (which included the arrest of sixty-three Jewish children). The surprising angle was the French consul’s support of the local authorities. France, a champion of liberty and civil rights, provided the most liberal legal position to Jews in all of Europe. The explanation lies in the contemporary perception of France’s long-term international interests to consolidate power in the Middle East vis-a-vis England and other European countries. This international dimension lead to bizarre results such as Metternich, the Austrian arch-reactionary denouncing the charges. The other, lesser known forerunner happened in 1882 in Hungary. Starting off with the same superstitions and brutality, at Tiszaeszlár it was already apparent that the Affairs were as much about Gentile-Jewish cooperation as they were about Jewish-Gentile conflict. Eotvos, the Gentile lawyer of the defence did not just want acquittal; he set out to prove that there was no crime and, further, that the whole idea of ritual murder was based on superstition and bigotry. Interestingly, proving the point that Lindemann makes so eloquently, even in this case we see how the chief-villain (the unsavoury local investigator), as a modern antisemite, did not even believe the blood-libel charge, but was ready to make use of it.

Tales of modernity, these were passionate, intense dramas, with committed observers taking sides. The issues evoked passionate beliefs that went beyond “justice” and “truth” (both in the narrower, legal and the wider, philosophical sense) and were compounded by

political and ideological agendas and undercurrents. Questioned were the legal system, the forces of history, modernity, assimilation and of course the connecting tissue in the Affairs: antisemitism.⁴ This book demonstrates that the more one knows and understands about a subject, the more interesting and thought-provoking and — much like the fractals in Chaos theory — the more intricate it becomes. The analysis of historical settings is outstanding as one of the many fortes of *The Jew Accused*. The Affairs become unexpectedly relevant as the dynamism of the ideological forces are placed into historical context.

The industrial revolution introduced new techniques of production and distribution. In agriculture it meant more crops with fewer people, which led to depopulated villages and induced unprecedented urbanisation. Peasants moved into industrial centres enveloped by slums filled with rootless city-dwellers. Social tensions were exacerbated as industry broke up traditional handicrafts and manufacture. In the enormous social mobility of the 19th century two new huge classes appeared: the bourgeoisie and the proletariat, while the aristocracy, albeit not immune to déclassé processes and losing some of its previous glossy grandeur, still managed to hold onto substantial power. Rights of the individual became important and hitherto vertical village life became horizontal, almost without boundaries. Not only could serfs move outside their village, they could — and did — change countries, continents, indeed lifestyles. Religion was overshadowed by science and the new classes gave birth to new ideals; liberalism, the ideology of the bourgeoisie and Marxism, the ideology of the proletariat.

How did the mass movements and ideological trends that characterised and determined the Fin de Siècle and beyond view the liberal emancipation of Jews? Holding up nature and sentimental visions of a romanticised and idealised picture of the peasant, volkischness — and the corresponding populist, narodnik movements — used the image of Jews as central to its tenets as the negative, the alien, indeed, as the embodiment of the vices of modernity. While volkischness was a cultural movement reaching into pre-modernity past, political Marxism reached into the future, and offered the equally romanticised and idealised picture of the proletariat. The socialist and communist movements politicised Jews in different ways, but the question of Jews was at this stage incidental to the theory.

Nationalism, which in the beginning of the 19th century aligned itself with liberalism and facilitated the transition from feudalism to capitalism and gave birth to nation-states, shifted by the end of the century. It was becoming increasingly racial, ethnocentric and supremacist as it was simultaneously embraced by opponents of liberalism: the conservative Right and the Church on one hand and increasingly ideology-craving proletariat on the other. National identity was more and more defined through hatred and fear of the “alien”. That often underrated forerunner of Nazi racism — eugenics — was gathering respectability fast. Nationalist antisemitism identified Jews as responsible for the despised and feared aspects of modernity; liberalism, industrialisation, urbanisation,

4 Antisemitism covers a multitude of different behaviours and sentiments; everything from prejudice to racism, from mild distaste to murderous hatred. The word itself is a misnomer, product of an era where everything had to be oh-so-scientific. If there is antisemitism, there must be a semitism ... which is what?

capitalism and — with characteristic inconsistency — socialism. Antisemitism was becoming a political weapon and was utilised as a manoeuvrable tool to mobilise the masses. An abject failure even in the 1880s, by the 1890s antisemitic political parties and platforms were emerging in Europe.

Lindemann points out that the three Affairs occurred within a fifteen-year period. This fifteen-year span, which in England was named the Edwardian era, in France was called the Belle Epoque, in Germany the Wilhelminian period and the in United States the Progressive era, had certain discernible common characteristics. Dominant trends notwithstanding, there were, as Lindemann points out, also major differences from country to country in the development of mass politics and the usage of antisemitism. In the intellectual crisis of these years the Affairs were catalytic events for society and for individuals. Lindemann gives the definition of Affair as passionate and conflicting beliefs and emotions enmeshed in the issues and ideological implications transcending the trial itself. This distinction between case and Affair uncovers hidden, less obvious but nevertheless meaningful layers. Juxtaposing moral imperatives and self-justification Lindemann examines how “preconceived belief, ideological intoxication can tragically cloud the mind, weaken the reason and pervert the moral sense of good people as well as of evil ones.”⁵ Myths are not only woven into the fabric of society. Having to act on an absorbed but yet unquestioned belief (which may have made sense “explaining” some unpleasant phenomenon or social grievance) evokes personal responsibility and can cause dramatic moral tension. It may not produce conflict at all. Morality, as Hannah Arendt showed, can be negated, individual responsibility abrogated. However, the three Affairs demonstrate that maintaining personal integrity will generate spectacular outcomes, like previous “antisemites” fighting antisemitism.

The tangled web of fantasy around the kernel of truth is another main theme of the book. The importance of these truth-fragments lies in the dissemination of hatred. Providing a semblance of rationality, they become the springboard from where the irrational can take off. This book is of course primarily about antisemitism. In Lindemann’s concept, Jew-hatred was an ongoing phenomena taking different forms. Although the author points to the “way ordinary human friction between Jews and non-Jews fuses with ancient and enduring myths of great power and complexity” and “the changing nature of that fusion”,⁶ he glosses over the the chicken-and-egg role of Christian antisemitism in the interplay between fear and fantasy. For continuity is not just linear, religious Jew-hatred is not only an antecedent. Viewing (and condemning) Jews as biologically, historically, socially or culturally alien, “scientific” racism rationalises antisemitism according to the science-centered demands of modernity. Political, racist and cultural antisemitism builds on and exploits the earlier, religious form. The charge of conspiracy was underpinned by the old accusation of “Christ-killers”. This repetitiousness, the very history of the old charges, lend themselves as “rational” proof of validity. Religious-superstitious Jew hatred paved the way for the social acceptance, indeed “respectability” of racial and political antisemitism. This explains how, even though anti-

5 Id at 4.

6 At 279.

semities in the late 19th century distanced themselves from religious hatred of Jews, blood libel still easily could maintain a foothold even in the latter decades of the 20th century.⁷

In each Affair there are two (or even more) charges: the one which is openly on trial (treason, ritual murder) and the charge voiced in the popular press, of international Jewish conspiracy, clandestine power-wielding, trying to distort or buying justice. Lindemann dissects and exposes a number of these bogeys. One is about Jewish isolation. Jews were marginalised and kept out of the mainstream, kept together mostly in forceful isolation — after all ghettoisation or the Pale was not a Jewish wish. Then this very self-reliance even across boundaries is held against Jews, thus forgetting the aim of ghettoisation: to marginalise and oppress. Lindemann dissects myth and reality, painstakingly looking for the kernel. In his quest for objectivity he somewhat exaggerates and even misunderstands Jewish “power” which only existed as long as the interests of Jews coincided with those of real power. Once the internal or international, political or national reasons changed, the basic, underlying powerlessness of Jews became painfully clear again.⁸

Exposing the “hidden” charges and that lethal mixture of grain of reality and fantasy, Lindemann potently demonstrates through the three Affairs the dynamics of how stereotypes, created by prejudices, in their turn launch and strengthen prejudices. He shows how slippery is the road from prejudice to hatred and, even more importantly, how political movements and ideologies make use of these stereotypes. Painstakingly avoiding generalisations, Lindemann sets out with the comparative approach to present insights and aspects that are hidden while these Affairs are viewed individually. The affairs become mirrors reflecting the essence of each society. He uses comparisons to clarify, make minute observations and understand trends. The book shows that the role of antisemitism was more ambiguous and less decisive than generally believed; that Jews were not just passive victims, but fought back resolutely and that villains and heroes can be disconcertingly placed on unexpected sides. It also shows the importance of the behaviour of people of authority, that judicial death (Justizmord) is not the problem of the victim and antisemitism is not a Jewish problem. *The Jew Accused* is also a book about political and legal justice and about the responsibility we all have about our opinions and beliefs.

Some of the 19th century problems Lindemann writes about we can identify approaching the turn of our century: population movements, poverty (not only in the now inappropriately called Third World, but in the US and the former Soviet Union, Eastern Europe), ideological disenchantment and sometimes grim, sometimes menacing demands for self-determination. We can see the re-emergence of the same dangerous self-defeating answers to those problems: religiously defined nationalism, right-radicalism, étatism, antisemitism. As during the Frank Affair, the near-pogrom on Crown Heights showed not only the volatility of hatred but indeed of American society itself. What makes

7 The last one to surface was in the respectable venue of the UN Human Rights Commission, by a Syrian diplomat in early 1991 (JTA, February 13, 1991, 4).

8 For instance, in the Damascus case (see next paragraph) much of the success of the Jews was due to the imperial foreign interests of the respective countries like England vis-a-vis France. Hungary, a country believing and exercising magyarisation programs needed its patriotic and dedicated Jews to balance disgruntled minorities. Later, in the wake of the Versailles peace treaty, when Hungary became a one-nation state, the first Numerus Clausus Act in Europe was promptly passed.