

THE RETURN OF ANTI-SEMITISM AS USUAL

YES, BUT

Anti-Semitism always existed. Depending on the times, it has the freest way and the necessary legitimacy to demonstrate without shame. But these days there is also a less strident anti-Semitism: the one that is based on the impossibility of repudiating the terrorist act perpetuated by Hamas without ifs or buts. Alexandra Kohan writes about "But", that word that transfers responsibility to the victim, about binarisms where the bad guys are always the same and about the attitude that redoubles the vulnerability of the Argentine Jewish community.

Por: [Alexandra Kohan](#)

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If you are attacked as a Jew, you must defend yourself as a Jew.
Hannah Arendt

On Saturday, October 7, the far-right group Hamas carried out a terrorist attack in Israel that some of us do not hesitate to call a *pogrom*. A massacre that included the slaughter of more than 1000 people, the kidnapping of nearly 200 hostages, the rape of women, mutilations. Entire families, men, women, children and babies were victims of the surprise irruption of the Hamas terrorist group. There have not been so many Jews murdered in a single day since the Shoah (more than 1300 until today). The images circulated everywhere, we witnessed the horror. But there is also something dehumanizing about this circulation of images. We get used to cruelty, the algorithm shows us a pair of shoes at the same time as a caged baby. The cruelty of the time is also encoded in the way we consume *everything* in the same way. Cruelty is tamed, like horror, in the anesthesia that runs through our bodies, a product of hours of exposure to the mass media and social networks.

There is something dehumanizing about these times, in the way we relate to each other: we tend not to register the other and to ask for what we want until we get it, and what we want is, many times, a piece of the other. We tend not to notice what it is, what day and what time it is, for example. Relationships often take place without qualms, without consideration, and here we go with the bulldozer. Dehumanizing are also the ways in which everything is a little bit the same, the ways in which words circulate in the public space, anything can be said without any consequence – especially for the person who said it; It seems that words no longer affect bodies, the widened limits of what can be said collaborate for the exercise of violence. The feeling that many have in the face of these unpleasant gestures is that of disposability, of feeling interchangeable, that the other doesn't care *who as* long as there is

someone – anyone – who is the object of their spitting. The precariousness of the social bond, fragmentation and fracture, even the logic of war, has been engendered for a long time. It's not something that happens overnight. It is engendered little by little, or not so little by little, and one day it is already too late: individualism, every man for himself and the constitution of the other as an object of hatred, viciousness and annihilation are already part of our most "natural" daily life. We let anything go, we are anesthetized and repeating set phrases, empty formulas and little things that let us sleep peacefully, believing ourselves to be on the side of good. A lot of inconsequential declamations. Those empty forms, those formulas, are also dehumanizing.

Dehumanizing was the word the analyst said and I underlined. Because this wasn't something I thought about alone – no one thinks alone – I thought about it, with the analyst, in the last analysis session. Analysis is that unprecedented place that, precisely, distances itself from the individualist, mercantilist, utilitarian logic and offers, as an invaluable refuge, a place of refuge where nothing is the same, where the difference that constitutes us is inscribed. Analysis is that place where we learn that we are made of otherness. Analysis is that place where we are also going to get rid of the burdens of what the logic of war makes of us.

It doesn't matter. But it's not all the same. It's not all the same. It's not all the same. As Martin Kohan pointed out [here](#): not all conflicts are always the same conflict. The darkness, more or less crouching, this time became, at least for many of us, denser, much denser. Of course, in the emergence of anti-Semitism as always, the most obvious, the most strident, the one that led to throwing a stone at a window of the Martin Buber school, the one that led a student from another school to call a classmate a "fucking Jew"; the rampant, bloody and heartbreaking anti-Semitism of social media, which led to attacks on Jews around the world. Yes, that anti-Semitism that has always existed, has always existed. And that, according to the times, it has the freest way and the necessary legitimacy to demonstrate without shame. But the density of darkness, this time, was elsewhere as well. A more subtle, less obvious, less strident anti-Semitism: the one that is based on the impossibility of repudiating without ifs or buts the terrorist act perpetuated by Hamas – an organization that expressly aims at the extermination of Jews throughout the world. The one who was quick to blame Israel. "Yes, but Israel." *But*: a little word that has the power to disrupt everything, a little word that has the power to make someone believe that they are not responsible for what they said. *But*: a little word that transfers the responsibility to the victim, to the other. Of course, the darkness that hurts the most is the one that comes from nearby, from those close to us, the one that is unexpected. That is why it hurts that in a university that pretends to be inclusive and that insists on inclusion and diversity as its motto, a university that perceives itself to be free of violence, a sign has been put up that said "solidarity with the Palestinian people" - mixing fundamentalist terrorism with the Palestinian people - but without ever having repudiated Hamas's bloody attack on Israel. That is why it hurts a lot that the Argentine left, represented by Myriam Bregman in the presidential candidates' debate, has not repudiated the Hamas terrorist attack and, instead, has given an ambivalent message blaming Israel: "The civilian victims that occur in a conflict that is based on the policy of the State of Israel hurt. of

occupation and apartheid against the Palestinian people," and marking only a "methodological" disagreement with Hamas' terrorist violence. Confusing the Palestinian cause with Hamas terrorism is not only a matter of ignorance but, at this point, an ideological issue. As if the Palestinians themselves were not also victims of Hamas, as if there were not a large number of people in Israel who support the Palestinian cause. You don't have to know, or understand everything, but you can ask. Kevin Ary Levin is very clear [here](#) and in his many interventions these days.

Left-wing anti-Semitism, progressive anti-Semitism, exists. Pablo Maurette put it this way: "What the progressive friend does not see is that the strong emotion he feels for the 'Palestinian cause' (and not, say, for the Rohingya cause or for the Uyghur or for the Armenians in Nagorno-Karabakh) is nothing more than the ancestral anti-Semitism that appears masked but unmistakable." The silly, foolish, stupid binary that prevents thinking. The binarism that leads to denouncing all that is bad and being in favor of all that is good. It sounds like a period parody, but it's not. There are people who go to sleep with that idea of themselves.

The dehumanization that I started talking about also creeps into those people who just want to take care of their image. The scoundrel of the well-thinking, of the well-intentioned, of the standard-bearers of good causes, those who have a repertoire of automatic responses and slogans. Those who raise their fingers and always denounce others. The finger that covers the forest. The finger is the stridency that prevents us from listening to that which is happening in the meantime, that which unfolds surreptitiously and that confronts us with the strange, and even the unpleasant, which is also part of us. The stupid binary that pretends that there are good guys and bad guys. And, oh coincidence, the bad guys are always the Jews. In Argentina, as [Ignacio Rullansky points out here](#), "the stigma of associating Jews with enemies has historical roots, and during the dictatorship, this idea resurfaced, linking Jews with the enemies of the Military Junta. Today, Hamas's attacks on Israeli civilians, regardless of ethnicity or religion, are not the object of any repudiation by sectors that see them as enemies of the causes of the oppressed." In the same text, the author underlines: "the relationship with these images and what has been said about them reveals a key dimension of the construction of a public ethic in the face of events: a stubborn and indolent coldness disdains the verisimilitude of the material, restricts its compassion in the face of spilled blood and denies the humanity of the victims. This attitude redoubles the vulnerability of the Argentine Jewish community, threatened by amateurs of violence, who stone their schools, and by Hamas' invocation of international jihad, directed against its institutions." There is also a relationship between anti-intellectualism and anti-Semitism, according to Rullansky: "In a dangerous anti-intellectual gesture strangely linked to the values of socialism, the left saw fit to organize a counter-march. In the middle of the day of mourning, they paraded a swastika equated with a bleeding Star of David. This, in defense of the violent institution of a caliphate and in rejection of the commitments made by other Palestinian forces to Israel, and with recognition by the international community."

In moments like this when the darkness deepens even more, I find refuge in the words of others. I also liked what Eial Moldavsky pointed out, for example: "It is one thing to discuss the factors that lead to a war and its historical context. It is another thing to discuss whether a terrorist attack on civilians is deserved or not. Arguing about the innocence of civilians who become fatal victims after the attack that takes place in this context is not a debate. It's a position in the face of a heinous act." And he added something about the anti-Semitism of those who cannot repudiate and show solidarity: "It doesn't mean that you're going to put on boots, cover your head and go out and kick Jews (...) but to say Israel deserves it, it's a kind of anti-Semitism." Perhaps it is that anti-Semitism defined by Theodor Adorno as "the rumor about the Jews." Rumors, whispers, adversarial conjunctions.

As always, as on other occasions, the texts of Facundo Milman and Diana Sperling give me vital relief. I really like what Milman says about what it is to be Jewish: "To be Jewish also means to be responsible for our inheritance." There is an ethical position there: to answer for that as well. And he continues: "We think from otherness – from responsibility, from the inheritance of a tradition, from the other – that is what it means to be Jewish." Diana Sperling's text "*On the Tightrope*," which circulated a lot in these days of mourning, says that, upon returning from the march in support of Israel, "a thought suddenly crossed my mind: how can it be that we still, yes, still have to explain and justify the existence of Israel and the Jews? Will it never be enough? Should we continue to ask for permission to exist, forgiveness for existing, to argue our right to defend ourselves, to base our lives on logic and reason? What other people experiences that need, that imposition, that urgency? How is it possible that the confusion lasts for so many centuries? Israeli, Israeli, Hebrew, Jewish... (...). And there we are, over and over again trying to clarify. That no one wanted to eliminate Argentina at the time of the military dictatorship, because it is not so difficult to distinguish a country from its eventual government (...). That Judaism is not a religion – there are millions of "secular" Jews – but a people, part of which has religious practices. The Jew is the only people who can be hated under different names, depending on the time: Judeophobia, anti-Judaism, anti-Semitism, anti-Zionism... The only one who is persecuted on the basis of different arguments: religion, race, economy, nation... Because they are powerful or weak, rich or miserable, intelligent or backward, communist or imperialist... Curious, isn't it? I would say: symptomatic. Extraordinary. If the arguments and names change, isn't it that none of them is the real one? That there is, strictly speaking, no motive attributable to the Jews themselves, but rather to the haters?" Sperling also refers to the intellectuals who were not clear enough with the repudiation of the terrorist attack: "they try to balance on the tightrope so that no one is offended... It is not a matter of emphatically defending Israel taking away the pass to the privileged circles of I don't know what exclusive club! Oh yes, it gives me horror and anguish to hear and read them... Denying the difference between a democratic state and a terrorist organization, accusing – covertly or explicitly – Israel's policies of "provoking this violence"... Those who balanced on the tightrope were called tightrope walkers or tightrope walkers. I believe that they are rather acting like somnambulists, and that when they suddenly wake up and realize that (as in the poem falsely attributed to B. Brecht) it

is they themselves who are threatened, who run the risk of being exterminated by the murderous beasts, they will suffer the most brutal of falls from that imaginary height. Or they will even be hanged by that rope that, once loose, now closes around their denial heads."

Finally, I would like to take up the idea of many authors of how the hostility and hatred of others leads us to constitute ourselves as Jews in a gesture of resistance. That's a legacy I care a lot about. Peter Gay underlines how Freud became more Jewish in times of hostility. In 1926, thinking about the contemporary political situation, he said in an interview: "My language is German. I considered myself intellectually German until I noticed the growth of anti-Semitic prejudice in Germans and in German Austria. From that moment on, I prefer to call myself a Jew."

When we speak of the State of Israel, we almost always omit why and under what circumstances it was founded: so that we Jews would not again be pariahs in the world. That omission is also symptomatic. There is too much tolerance for anti-Semitism. I'll say it creeps me up.

And no. I am not saying anything about the policies of the State of Israel in this text. I wanted to talk about something else.

Am Israel Jai