



# The Print Culture of Conspiracist Antisemitism 1917–1945

## Universal Patterns and Nordic Particularities

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## The rise and impact of conspiracist antisemitism: an introduction

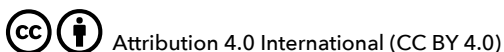
NICOLA KARCHER AND KJETIL BRAUT SIMONSEN

**ABSTRACT** • This special issue examines conspiracist antisemitic print culture in the Nordic countries from the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917 to the defeat of Nazi Germany in 1945. To contrast the universal patterns and particularities of the cases of Finland, Sweden, Denmark and Norway, the issue includes two contributions analysing Spain and Britain. Together, the articles provide empirical in-depth knowledge of the character and dissemination of conspiracist antisemitism in a particular time and within a particular region. Our aim is to expand the general knowledge of conspiracism as a *historical* phenomenon through the prism of antisemitism. In the introduction, we present the conditions of historical antisemitism in each case study as well as the conceptual framework of this issue, focusing on terms such as *conspiracism*, *conspiracy* and *conspiracy theories*. We argue that antisemitism can be interpreted as a *longue-durée* conspiracist tradition, marked by a dialectic interaction between continuity and dynamic changes.

**L**ONG before the rise of conspiracist antisemitism as a state ideology in Nazi Germany, antisemitic publications flourished across the far-right scene in Europe. For most of its actors, conspiracist antisemitism served as an overarching and comprehensive framework to make sense of broad political, social, economic and cultural developments.

In the shadow of the First World War and the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917, the mass dissemination of aggressive anti-Jewish

conspiracist ideas increased across the continent. As the historian Saul Friedländer put it: ‘Mass death, shattering political upheavals, and visions of catastrophes to come fuelled the pervasive apocalyptic mood that settled over Europe’ (Friedländer 1997: 90). This political climate of fear, desperation, polarisation and subversion created fertile ground for conspiracism and intensified the distrust of Jews. The most recognised and disseminated publication in this regard was without doubt *The Protocols*



of the Elders of Zion. A blueprint of conspiracist antisemitism, *The Protocols* were published for the first time in Imperial Russia in 1903 and translated into multiple languages during the 1920s. Although *The Times* exposed them as a falsification in 1921, *The Protocols* continued to play a key role in spreading narratives of an international Jewish conspiracy (Cohn 1981; Bronner 2003; zu Utrup 2003; Webman 2011; Landes & Katz 2011).<sup>1</sup> As the individual articles of this special issue show, they remained a central source in antisemitic circles and milieus across Europe until the end of the Second World War.

With Nazi Germany's invasion of the democratic countries of Western Europe and its various types of alliances and cooperation with other states, former underground proponents of conspiracist antisemitism became – at least partly – collaborators. From this point on, several of the publications which, during the inter-war years, had belonged to subversive movements were either meant to represent the political mainstream or were supported by a fascist state apparatus.

### Antisemitic print culture

This special issue examines conspiracist antisemitism in the Nordic countries from the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917 until the defeat of Nazi Germany in 1945 through the prism of its print production, focusing on various types of publications. Thus, it covers the mass dissemination of anti-Jewish conspiracy narratives during both the inter-war period and the Second World War, when the expansion of German National Socialism profoundly changed the political space and opportunities

1 Publications inspired by *The Protocols*, such as Henry Ford's *The International Jew* (first published in the newspaper *Dearborn Independent* from 1920 to 1922, and later as a book), were also widely circulated, both in the United States and in Europe (Cohn 1981: 158).

for the far-right scene. Through this approach, we seek to map the entangled nature of conspiracist antisemitism in a particular region. By contrasting the Nordic cases with the emergence and historical patterns of the same phenomenon in Spain and Britain, our special issue also provides a comparative approach. This not only gives us the opportunity to identify particularities and more universal tendencies in the Nordic material, but also uncovers new aspects within Spanish and British antisemitism. Thus, we emphasise both the common patterns of conspiracism as a discourse, and modifications and dissimilarities related to various situational and contextual frameworks.

In general, antisemitic print culture – underpinning conspiracist antisemitism as a state doctrine in the German-occupied countries, both at a grassroots level and subsequently at an institutionalised level – needs to be studied in greater depth and from a transnational perspective. We address this lacuna by presenting a collection of case studies that explore the content, style, expressions and functions of conspiracist antisemitic publications in several contexts and by considering the extent to which such ideas were circulated across borders.

Antisemitic publications, and their authors, printers and publishers, formed the cultural scaffold of a 'radical milieu' (Malthaner & Waldmann 2014) upon which political structures, from groupuscules to parties, were subsequently erected. Far-right publishers, conceptualised as 'entrepreneurs of ideology' by the historian Gary D. Stark (1981), produced and promoted an array of political publications. Drawing on this concept, we seek to illuminate the national and trans-national nature of radical milieus that produced antisemitic publications and highlight the relationship between conspiracist antisemitism and far-right ideology.

Geographically, our focus is directed at antisemitism at the European periphery rather than the ‘classical’ case of German National Socialism. The special issue includes studies of Finland, Sweden, Norway, Denmark, the United Kingdom and Spain, thus ensuring a differentiated perspective regarding national and regional frameworks.

Whereas Spain was religiously dominated by Catholicism, the Nordic countries had been Protestant since the Reformation. During the Second World War, Norway and Denmark were occupied by Nazi Germany, although the occupation regimes in the two countries (especially until 1943) differed profoundly. Sweden, for its part, remained officially neutral. Spain was ruled by an autocratic fascistised government with close ties to the Axis powers, while the United Kingdom, home to approximately 350,000 Jews (Holmes 1979: 4), was one of the leading forces of the Allies. Jewish minorities in Finland and Norway comprised only about 2,000 individuals at the beginning of the Second World War (Torvinen 1989: 120; Bruland 2017: 28), which made antisemitism there more or less an antisemitism without Jews (see Karcher & Simonsen 2023).

Together, the articles in this special issue highlight the impact of various historical conditions, political systems and religions, and the status of Jewish communities. They take into account national peculiarities, trans-national traditions, sources of inspiration and ideological similarities and differences.

### Antisemitism as a conspiracist tradition

Antisemitism is a complex and dynamic historical phenomenon. As a term, it was coined in Germany during the 1870s, serving as the ‘brand name of a social-political movement that attributed negative traits of modern society to “Jewish influence”’ (Hoffmann & Moe 2020: 8). In the last decades of the nineteenth century, the term *semitism* became synonymous

with a threatening and decadent modernism, allegedly caused by the Jews. Thus, rising antisemitic movements in countries such as Germany, Austria and France opposed the prevailing social, cultural and political developments that they considered expressions of modernity (Hoffmann 1997: 219–20; Nipperdey & Rürup 1972: 136–7; Simonsen 2023: 21–5).

In the shadow of the Second World War and the Holocaust, this use of *antisemitic* as a positive form of self-reference was completely discredited, except in small circles of far-right extremists. Although *semitism* originated from a racist worldview, with no connections to reality (Andersson 2000: 15), the term *antisemitism* has nevertheless been applied as synonymous with hostile attitudes and actions against Jews in various forms and shapes at distinct historical stages and in different geographical locations. Still, the relationship between continuity and discontinuity in this regard has been disputed. Some scholars apply the concept exclusively to modern, racist and nationalist anti-Jewish ideas and movements that evolved during the nineteenth century, in contrast to traditional Christian anti-Judaism. Others focus on the gradual evolution from old to new variations of anti-Jewish thought, using antisemitism as an umbrella term for various manifestations of hatred towards Jews in different historical eras (Hoffmann 1994: 293–317; Chazan 1997: 134–6; Simonsen 2023: 21–35).

Since this special issue focuses on the era between 1917 and 1945, it is not our ambition to take a definitive stand in this debate. Thus, we leave the concrete use of terms such as *anti-Judaism* or alternatives, *religious* or *pre-modern antisemitism* to the individual author. However, we agree with the historian Robert Chazan, who has stressed that ‘every new stage in the evolution of anti-Jewish thinking is marked by dialectical interplay between a prior legacy of negative stereotypes and the realities of a

new social context' (Chazan 1997: 135). In other words, anti-Jewish thought is characterised by ideological continuity as well as dynamic developments and changes.

Our general understanding of antisemitism uses the definition developed by the sociologist Helen Fein as a starting point. Fein understands antisemitism as a 'persisting latent structure of hostile beliefs towards Jews as a collectivity manifested in individuals as attitudes, and in culture as myth, ideology, folklore, and imagery, and in actions — social or legal discrimination, political mobilization against the Jews, and collective or state violence — which results in and/or is designed to distance, displace, or destroy Jews as Jews' (Fein 1987: 67).

An advantage of this approach is that antisemitism is treated as a complex and differentiated historical (and contemporary) phenomenon that comes in different variations and with various levels of intensity: as latent culturally rooted stereotypes on the one hand and a total anti-Jewish worldview nourishing and justifying discrimination, persecution and even genocide on the other. This special issue focuses on antisemitism as a full-blown worldview: a perception of reality in which all negative and historical developments are claimed to be generated by a 'Jewish plot'. In the era between 1917 and 1945, this total conspiracist model of explanation was particularly, if not exclusively, a trademark of the far right. Still, we recognise the dynamic relationship that existed between the ideological-propagandistic versions of antisemitism, and the more widespread, but vaguer, forms of cultural antisemitism.

Conspiracy narratives have been a core element of antisemitism for centuries. The image of the Jew as evil and subversive was present in the religious anti-Judaism of pre-modern times and became an ideological cornerstone of the modern nationalist and racist antisemitism of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

In the high and late medieval era and in early modern times, the Jews were identified with forces of the devil and the Antichrist, accused of plotting against Christianity and Christian communities through acts such as ritual murder, host desecration and well-poisoning (Heil 2006; Barzilay 2017; Chazan 1997: 58–94; Erb 1993).

During the process of secularisation and modernisation in the eighteenth and particularly the nineteenth centuries, traditional Christian perceptions of the Jews were supplemented and partly replaced by arguments based on nationalism and 'race'. While the roots of the modern narrative of a 'Jewish world conspiracy' can be traced back to the reactions against the French Revolution of 1789 (von Bieberstein 2008: 114–25; Byford 2011: 47; Bergmann 1989), it was first and foremost during the second half of the nineteenth century that conspiracist antisemitism became a hallmark of the far right. Socialism, liberalism, finance capitalism, atheism and women's emancipation were now associated with subversive Jewish forces (Hoffmann 2001: 100–1; Volkov 2006: 107–18; Caron 2009: 300–1; Kellogg 2005: 30–46). Eventually, *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion* combined antisemitism with anti-modernism, claiming the rise of modernity to be orchestrated by a Jewish conspiracy (see, e.g., Simonsen 2020a: 362).

A particularly extreme variation of conspiracist antisemitism that became an ideological pillar of German National Socialism and several other fascist and far-right movements has been conceptualised as *redemptive antisemitism* by Saul Friedländer. Elaborating further on his concept, we stress three core moments defining redemptive antisemitism as a worldview and discourse: *dualism and demonisation, conspiracism and intentionalism and apocalypticism and palingenesis*. Redemptive antisemitism perceives the past and present as a Manichaean struggle between the forces of

good and (Jewish) evil. As an intentionalist explanatory model, it understands historical developments as staged by a secret, evil cabal, and is based on a vision of national and racial rebirth as part of the struggle against the 'Jewish enemy' (Karcher & Simonsen 2023).

As a discourse, conspiracist antisemitism was (and is) not a reflection of actual conflicts between a Jewish minority and a non-Jewish majority. It serves as a tool for orientation and explanation, infusing coherence and meaning into the complex and confusing world of history and politics. In this regard, David Nirenberg's observation, that anti-Judaism is not simply 'an attitude toward Jews and their religion, but a way of critically engaging the world' (Nirenberg 2013: 3), is transferable to the radical forms of antisemitism examined in the context of this special issue.

The medieval historian Gavin Langmuir distinguishes between three assertions of outgroups which may be used to justify hostile attitudes and actions: realistic, xenophobic and chimerical assertions. Whilst xenophobic utterances are based on generalisations, with the actions of some members of the outgroup being ascribed to the group as a whole, chimerical assertions emphasise characteristics and actions of the whole group that have never been empirically observed (Langmuir 1996: 328). Using these terms, both xenophobic and chimeric sentiments were integrated into the anti-Jewish discourse. While, for example, both individual Jewish capitalists and Bolsheviks obviously existed and were attacked in anti-Jewish publications, the myth of a Jewish world conspiracy is a pure fantasy construction rooted in centuries of demonisation.

With this special issue, it is our ambition to contribute to the mapping of a particular stage in the long – but still dynamic and ever-changing – trajectory of anti-Jewish prejudices. Moreover, our aim is to expand the general knowledge of conspiracism as a *historical*

phenomenon and to highlight, in particular, its potential for discrimination, persecution and violence. As Mikolaj Winiewski, Wiktor Soral and Michal Bilewicz have noted, the element of conspiracy and envious prejudice has been present 'in almost all cases of genocide' (Winiewski, Soral & Bilewicz 2015: 32).

## Conspiracy, conspiracy theories and conspiracism

As we deal with *conspiracist* antisemitism, it is also necessary to clarify the content of the very term *conspiracism* and related concepts, such as *conspiracy* and *conspiracy theories*.

In the most minimal sense, a conspiracy can be defined as an action or series of actions conducted in secret by two or more individuals that affect others. Real conspiracies obviously exist: a *coup d'état*, for example, is by nature a conspiracy. The term *conspiracy theory* can thus, in a very broad sense, be defined as a theory about a conspiracy (Sørensen 2007: 13–4). While some scholars reserve the term for theories that are false or at least suspicious, others apply it to claims that might be either true or untrue (Dentith 2016: 94–109). A possible problem related to our material is that the very word *theory* is closely associated with scientific methodology. Therefore, *conspiracy beliefs* might serve as an alternative term.

Conspiracy theories or conspiracy beliefs can be limited or large in scope. The sociologist Michael Barkun distinguishes between three main forms: theories about event conspiracies, systemic conspiracies and super-conspiracies, with the first holding conspiracies to be 'responsible for a limited, discrete event or set of events'. In contrast, systemic conspiracies are based on the belief that the conspiracy has 'broad goals, usually conceived as securing control over a country, a region, or even the entire world'. Super-conspiracies, for their part, relate to 'conspiratorial constructs in which multiple conspiracies are believed to be

linked together hierarchically’, and to which event conspiracies are ‘joined in complex ways, so that conspiracies come to be nested within one another’ (Barkun 2003: 6).

The terms *conspiracism* or *conspiracist worldview* refer to a perception of reality in which history and politics are orchestrated by a secret plot (Barkun 2003: 3; Butter & Knight 2020: 2). Such worldviews are dualist, intentionalist and occultist in nature, since they ‘assume that everything has been planned and nothing happens by coincidence; they divide the world strictly into the evil conspirators and the innocent victims of their plot; and they claim that the conspiracy works in secret and does not reveal itself even after it has reached its goals’ (Butter & Knight 2020: 1; see also Cubitt 1989: 13). Thus, nothing happens by accident; nothing is at it seems, and everything is connected. Conspiracism implies ‘a world based on intentionality, from which accident and coincidence have been removed’ (Barkun 2003: 3–4). Moreover, this perspective is based on a monological form of logic: ‘a unitary, closed-off worldview in which beliefs come together in a mutually supportive network known as a monological belief system’ (Wood et al. 2012: 767). This combination of dualism, intentionalism, occultism and monological reasoning were and still are part and parcel of conspiracist antisemitism.

### Conspiracist antisemitism at the periphery

Despite the different national political cultures, all our cases were anchored in Western European traditions. For all of them, Germany, with its historically embedded *völkisch*-antisemitic discourse and, from 1933, with conspiracist antisemitism in its most radical form as a state ideology, was the major reference. Contacts and cooperation with like-minded German networks and an extensive exchange of ideas were considered crucial in far-right

and fascist circles across the European continent. Antisemitism at the periphery always developed in contact or in contrast with the developments in Germany.

The Nordic countries obviously had longer and stronger mutual ties, not only because of their geographical locations, but also because of their centuries-long political and cultural connectedness. In this special issue, we seek to contrast the specific Nordic similarities and peculiarities by comparing them with the cases of Spain and the United Kingdom – both also examples of a kind of *Sonderweg* regarding the development of conspiracist antisemitism, and at the same time, characterised and deeply connected to the same sources of inspiration.

In view of its close ties to Russia, Finland occupies a special position among the Nordic countries. However, after several centuries as the eastern part of the Swedish realm, the country remained religiously and culturally closely connected to Sweden and was also firmly anchored to Western European tradition after it became a grand duchy of the Russian Empire in 1809. Finland continued to observe the strict position on Jewish immigration and the practise of religion set out in the Swedish constitution of 1772 for many decades. Consequently, the creation of a Finnish Jewish community only took place from the mid-nineteenth century onwards (Jacobsson 1951). The discussion on the issue of Jewish citizenship dragged on until 1918, and modern political antisemitism strongly influenced the debate over the emancipation of Finnish Jews. The country’s independence in 1917 in the aftermath of the Bolshevik Revolution was followed by a civil war in 1918 and the declaration of the Republic of Finland in 1919. The proximity to Russia exposed Finland in particular to the strains of modern Russian antisemitism. Thus, the first signs of conspiracist antisemitism can be detected almost immediately after the Bolshevik coup. As with several of our

other cases, two of the most notable examples were the dissemination of *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion* (first translated into Swedish in 1919 and into Finnish in 1920) and the rapid transmission of the idea of Jews as carriers of Bolshevism and revolution, which was eagerly adopted by important segments of Finnish society, such as the security police and swathes of Evangelic-Lutheran clergy (Silvennoinen 2008; Ahonen 2017).

Sweden provides examples of antisemitism both with and without Jews, depending on the changing legislation regarding residence permission throughout the centuries and whether Jews were considered a profitable source of income for the Swedish state (Valentin 1924; Carlsson 2021; Nyman 1988; Johannesson 1988; Heß 2018). In general, the Jewish population was minuscule but grew from the beginning of the 1860s, when immigration was permitted with an influx from Russian Poland. However, the Jewish minority remained small, with about 6,000 individuals in the 1930s. During the First World War and following the Bolshevik Revolution, Swedish refugee policy became restrictive, partly as a consequence of antisemitism (Hammar 1964; Lindberg 1973). From the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Sweden had witnessed the establishment of small antisemitic organisations, which spread conspiracist antisemitism and inspired both by their predecessors on the European continent and the translations of major works of leading antisemites, such as Wilhelm Marr, Theodor Fritsch and Édouard Drumont (Tydén 1985; Berggren 1999).<sup>2</sup> As everywhere else, the dissemination of antisemitic prints increased with the Bolshevik Revolution and in the aftermath

2 See, e.g., Theodor Fritsch, *Den statsfientliga judiska läran* (Stockholm: E. P. Holmwall, 1928); Wilhelm Marr, *Judarnes seger öfver germanerne betraktad från social och politisk ståndpunkt* (Uppsala: Esaias Edquist, 1881).

of the First World War. Books, booklets and articles propagating the idea of Judaeo-Bolshevism (Blomqvist 2013) flooded Sweden, with numerous editions of *The Protocols*, the first appearing in 1919,<sup>3</sup> and Henry Ford's *The International Jew*,<sup>4</sup> published in 1924, occupying places of prominence. Since the country remained neutral during the Second World War, about 900 Jews from occupied Norway and 8,000 from occupied Denmark found refuge in Sweden (Levine 1996; Kvist Geverts 2008).

As a result of Article 2 in the Norwegian Constitution of 1814, which banned Jews from entering the country until its abolition in 1851 (Harket 2014; Ulvund 2014), Jewish immigration to Norway first took place in the second half of the nineteenth century. However, only a few individuals entered the country, and the supposed mass immigration of Jews never happened. As in Sweden, with the mass emigration of Jews to Western Europe as a response to antisemitic persecution in the Russian Empire, this gradually changed (Gjernes 2002). In Norway, with its minor Jewish community, organised political antisemitism did not achieve political success during the 1920s and 1930s. However, antisemitic conspiracy narratives were culturally rooted and widespread, and they were communicated in the political press, satirical publications and popular literature. 'The Jew' was associated with Communism, capitalism and decadent

3 See Sergej Aleksandrovič Nilus, *Förlåten faller – det tillkommande världssjälv-härskardömet enligt 'Sions vises hemliga protokoll'* (Helsingfors: Enskilt förlag, 1919), which was followed by two more editions in 1920 and 1924, published in Helsinki and Stockholm, respectively.

4 Henry Ford, *Den internationelle juden* (Uppsala: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1924). The title of the series is *I tidens stora frågor*, and Ford's book was apparently seen as addressing 'the Jewish question'.

modernity, and represented as disloyal to the Norwegian nation and accordingly subversive (Johansen 1984; Emberland 2005; Simonsen 2012; Snildal 2014; Lien 2015). In other words, antisemitism in Norway was first and foremost present as a reservoir of cultural stereotypes. From an ideal-typical point of view, one can differentiate between two expressions of antisemitism in the inter-war years: antisemitism as a vague discourse, expressed regularly in public through a spectrum of negative images and stereotypes; and antisemitism as a total worldview, wherein the 'struggle against the Jew' was perceived as the burning political issue of the time (see, in particular, Simonsen 2020b: 21–50).

On the threshold of the Second World War, approximately 8,000 Jews resided in Denmark, descendants of Jewish families that had established roots in the country for centuries, with their immigration dating back to the seventeenth century. As in Sweden and Norway, the community experienced significant growth in the first part of the twentieth century when refugees, escaping vicious antisemitic persecution in the Russian Empire and, later, in Germany and Austria, managed to obtain residence permits in the country (Thing 2008; Rünitz 2000). Organised political antisemitism did not emerge in Denmark until 1917. However, upon its introduction, it took on a conspiracist form, not only adopting international antisemitic conventions but also establishing a tradition of Danish tropes and references that proved resilient throughout the 1930s and 1940s (Bak & Emberland 2022). These traditions became significant when National Socialism was introduced in Denmark in 1928, constituting not only an ideological challenge but also a threat to national survival because of Denmark's vulnerable geopolitical situation of an actual physical border with Germany. A crucial role was played by *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, first translated into Danish

in 1920 and re-published several times before and during the war. However, the text faced ridicule and resentment in the Danish mainstream press, making explicit references politically controversial and increasingly stigmatised (Lauridsen 2002; Bak 2004).

Unlike in several of our other case countries, Jewish communities existed in Britain already in medieval times. However, increasing anti-Jewish discrimination resulted in the expulsion of all Jews from Britain in 1290, an exile from which they did not formally return until 1655 (Mundill 1998). While anti-Judaism remained a persistent feature of Jewish life thereafter, modern conspiracist antisemitism in Britain came into its own after the 1917 Bolshevik Revolution, as it did elsewhere in Europe. *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion* were first published in 1919 as the *Jewish Peril* and provided a master frame for interpreting current events, such as antisemitic claims about the imperilment of Britain's imperial entanglements. Even though it was debunked as a forgery in 1920 by *The Times* journalist Philip Graves (Holmes 1978), *The Protocols* helped formalise the antisemitic alarm heightened by Jewish immigration into Britain during the late nineteenth century. As a result of tsarist persecution, around 200,000 Jews arrived from Russia between 1870 and 1914. Having no British parentage, they were classed as 'aliens' and subject to the various alien acts that were passed in the decades that followed (Holmes 1979; Gainer 1972). The idea of a Jewish conspiracy manipulating politics had already been foregrounded in prejudices expressed towards numerous Anglo-German politicians (some of whom were of Jewish origin) during the First World War, which in antisemitic circles was dubbed a 'Jewish war' (Pendlebury 2006). By the early 1920s, conspiracist interpretations of the role played by 'the Jew' in political subversion, cultural decadence and racial degeneration had become a central tenet of



British antisemitism – as in all antisemitic circles across Europe.

After the expulsion of 1492, it took more than three and a half centuries before the first Jewish families settled in Spain, beginning in the second half of the nineteenth century. Shortly afterwards, the first signs of modern antisemitism began to arrive from France, which were quickly applied to Spanish (anti)liberal politics and especially promoted by Catholic integralists (Botti 1999: 714; Álvarez Chillida 2007: 213–14). As a result of the Republic's liberal citizenship policies and the flight from antisemitism in central Europe – especially Nazi Germany – the Jewish population grew rapidly during the 1930s, with around 6,000 to 7,000 individuals on the Spanish peninsula before the military *coup d'état* in 1936 (Botti 1999: 725; Grüttner 2001: 97; González-Albo 2022: 123–36). At the same time, the surge of illiberalism after 1931 intensified antisemitism in Spain, especially as an integral part of conspiracy belief, 'to levels never known before' (Álvarez Chillida 2002: 302). Almost every illiberal far-right proponent shared the myth of a 'Jewish–Masonic conspiracy' and used it as the leitmotif of propaganda against the Second Spanish Republic (Grüttner 2001: 108; Domínguez Arribas 2009: 76). The idea of a Judaeo-Masonic conspiracy, seemingly connected with national tradition, was deeply rooted in Catholicism and had its own myths: the Reconquista, the secular rivalry with France and the colonial war in Morocco (Rohr 2010: 65–6). The alleged enemy – including leftists, Catalans, the French, Jews, Freemasons and 'Moors' – was constructed as a foreign 'other' that was alien to the nation's body. 'The Jew', unknown, unreal or imaginary, served as a projection of all these fears.

In the light of these various national contexts, the articles of our special issue explore uncharted terrain in regard to the history of

conspiracist antisemitism and its print culture in Europe.

In his article, 'The first steps in a Judaeo-Bolshevik conspiracy', **Paavo Ahonen** focuses on the spread of the Jewish-Bolshevik conspiracy theory in Finland after the Russian Revolution. He analyses how quickly the idea became commonly accepted and how little it was questioned in the years following the First World War. The main sources of his article are Finnish newspapers and magazines from the first years of Finland's independence, published between 1917 and 1920. The aim of Ahonen's article is to describe at what stage and from where the idea of a Jewish–Bolshevik conspiracy spread to Finland and why antisemitic Russian propaganda was accepted as part of a realistic analysis of the Finnish political and social situation.

**Sofie Lene Bak** sets out to explore whether conspiracist antisemitism can be considered a variant of Saul Friedlander's redemptive (1997) and Gavin I. Langmuir's chimeric (1991) antisemitism. She asks if conspiracist antisemitism as such was an inseparable and integral part of national-socialist antisemitism in Denmark, or rather a marginalised, extremist position even within national-socialist settings. Her article "Denmark contra Jvdæos" discusses these questions through a systematic analysis of the Danish inter-war and war-time national-socialist journal *Kamptegnet*, which was prone to conspiracist antisemitism; the weekly journal *National-Socialisten*, published by the National Socialist Workers' Party of Denmark (Danmarks Nationalsocialistiske Arbejderparti); and *Fædrelandet*, with its perception of *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*.

From the early 1930s until the end of the Second World War, a determined attempt to propagate conspiracist antisemitism in Finland and introduce it as a staple element into the ideologies of contemporary far-right organisations was made. Behind this approach stood

a relatively tight-knit group of activists. The article ‘For freedom and justice?’ by **Oula Silvennoinen** deals with the content of the most ideologically conscious publications of conspiracist antisemitism, such as *För Frihet och Rätt*, *Tapparamies* and *Siniristi*, and the key personalities behind them in inter-war and war-time Finland. Silvennoinen’s analysis enables an assessment of the prospects of success for this type of conspiracist antisemitism and shows how dependent it was on political developments outside the control of any of the publishers.

Antisemitic conspiracy narratives were an integral element of national socialist propaganda in Norway during the German occupation between 1940 and 1945. Both the German occupier and the collaboration party National Unity (Nasjonal Samling) described an entity called ‘International Jewry’ or ‘World Jewry’ as the sinister force behind all destructive social and political developments, such as Communism, liberalism, capitalism and cultural decadence. In their article “‘The apocalyptic battle’”, **Nicola Karcher** and **Kjetil Braut Simonsen** explore the argumentation, style and functions of antisemitic conspiracism in Norway by analysing the Norwegian edition of the German journal *Welt-Dienst*, the weekly magazine *Hirdmannen* and the antisemitic periodical *Nationalt Tidsskrift*.

The idea that all problems would be solved if the Jews disappeared has long roots in Swedish history. However, this form of antisemitism, known as redemptive, became more ominous after the Bolshevik Revolution in 1917 and the First World War. The most explicit example in Sweden appeared in 1943 in the form of the journal *Hammaren*. It was named after Theodor Fritsch’s notorious antisemitic journal and intended as a Swedish version of Julius Streicher’s *Der Stürmer*. In his article “‘Until the dominion of the Jews is crushed, Sweden is not the land of the Swedes!’”, **Lars**

**M Andersson** maps the ideological world of *Hammaren* and compares it with its German role model *Der Stürmer* and partly with similar journals in other Nordic countries.

In “‘Jewry ueber Alles’”, **Graham Macklin** explores the emergence of a distinct antisemitic counter-culture in England in the immediate aftermath of the First World War. He pays particular attention to the role of several antisemitic ideologues who formed the Judaic Publishing Company (renamed the Britons Publishing Company), which for the next six decades would devote itself to the publication and dissemination of antisemitic literature. The article focuses largely upon the ideological development of the group’s newspaper, *Jewry ueber Alles* (with several name changes between 1920 and 1925), and the role it played in perpetuating a particular form of conspiracist racial antisemitism.

In his article ‘Fascist antisemitism in Spain, 1931–1945’, **Toni Morant i Ariño** explores antisemitism within the Spanish Falange, one of the exponents of the second wave of fascist movements. During its early years, the Falange, founded in 1933, remained a somewhat secondary presence in the illiberal far right until its emergence during the Spanish Civil War and its conversion into the single party of the Franco dictatorship. Using German, Italian and Spanish diplomatic documentation and various publications of the Falangist party and organisations, Morant analyses conspiracist antisemitism as a hitherto understudied part of the political culture of Spanish fascism during three different periods: democracy, civil war, and the first years of the Franco dictatorship.

Together, the articles of this special issue provide empirical in-depth knowledge of the character and dissemination of conspiracist antisemitism. Ideology alone is not a sufficient explanation for the Holocaust – in fact, anti-Jewish ideas were also widespread in countries where mass violence against Jewish minorities

did not occur. Still, conspiracist antisemitism was a *necessary* precondition, as the notion of a Jewish world conspiracy served as an ideological cornerstone of German National Socialism and of several far-right collaboration movements. Although the focus of our issue is historical, the topic remains highly relevant. In the shadows of the terrorist attack on Israel on 7 October 2023 and the subsequent warfare in Gaza, antisemitism has gained renewed strength worldwide.<sup>5</sup> In this situation, knowledge of *longue-durée* anti-Jewish stereotypes and conspiracy narratives is essential. ■

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**Kjetil Braut Simonsen, Ph.D.**, is a historian and researcher at the Jewish Museum in Oslo, Norway. He has written extensively on antisemitism, the Holocaust, Jewish history and the far right before, during and after the Second World War in journals such as *Scandinavian Journal of History* and *Historisk tidsskrift*. In autumn 2023, he published the monograph *I skyggen av Holocaust: Antisemittisme i norsk historie 1945–2023* (Humanist forlag, 2023) on antisemitism in Norway from the end of the Second World War to the present day. In this book, he analyses the character and development of Norwegian post-Holocaust antisemitism, focusing both on the far right, the public debate and the political left. Simonsen has been a Ph.D. candidate in the research project *Democratic institutions facing Nazi occupation: Norway in a comparative perspective* from 2012 to 2016, at the Norwegian Holocaust Center (HL-senteret), financed by the Norwegian Research Council. In his Ph.D. thesis of 2016, he analyses the Nazification of the Norwegian ministerial bureaucracy and its manoeuvring room during the German occupation. He is co-editor of the anthology *Historie og moral: Nazismen, jødene og Hjemmefronten* (Oslo: Dreyers forlag, 2020). Simonsen received the prestigious Sverre Steen Price from the Norwegian Historical Association in 2021.

**Nicola Karcher, Ph.D.**, is a historian and Associate Professor in Social Science at the Østfold University College, Norway, where she leads the research group PRIS (Politics, Religion, Ideology and Society in Education) and is a member of the Research Steering Committee on her faculty. She is also an affiliated researcher at Uppsala University. Karcher has been part of the research project 'Democratic institutions facing Nazi occupation: Norway in a comparative perspective' from 2013 to 2017, at the Norwegian Holocaust Center (HL-senteret), financed by the Norwegian Research Council. She has been a visiting researcher at the NIOD Institute for War, Holocaust and Genocide Studies in Amsterdam and a guest lecturer at the University of Valencia. Karcher's doctoral thesis in 2012 dealt with Norwegian-German fascist networks in the inter-war period. She has published articles and books in Norwegian, German, and English on the history of fascism and occupation history, particularly with respect to the Nordic countries. In her monograph *Kampen om skolen* (Oslo: Dreyers forlag, 2018), she analysed fascist education in the light of Nazification policy and civil resistance in occupied Norway. Karcher is co-editor of the anthology *Nordic Fascism: Fragments of an Entangled History* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2022). She is co-head of the steering committee of NORFAS (Network for Nordic Fascism Studies).