

Review Essay

Constructing Otherness: Shulamit Volkov's Thematic and Historical Insights on Antisemitism

INTERPRETING ANTISEMITISM: STUDIES AND ESSAYS ON THE GERMAN CASE. By Shulamit Volkov.
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Introduction

Antisemitism is among the most enduring and complex social phenomena in European history, shaping and reflecting the theological, ideological, and political currents of the societies in which it manifests. Germany, as the epicenter of both modern antisemitic thought and the Holocaust, provides a particularly rich case for studying how antisemitism functions as more than a prejudice, acting instead as a deeply embedded cultural force. Shulamit Volkov's *Interpreting Antisemitism: Studies and Essays on the German Case* takes up this challenge, offering a sophisticated analysis of the historical, cultural, and ideological dynamics of antisemitism in Germany. By weaving together theoretical reflection, historiographical critique, and empirical investigation, Volkov not only deepens our understanding of antisemitism but also challenges us to reconsider its function in both historical and contemporary contexts.

This volume spans decades of Volkov's scholarly work, bringing together studies and essays that explore antisemitism as both a historical reality and a cultural phenomenon. At its core lies Volkov's groundbreaking conceptualization of antisemitism as a "cultural code"—a lens that moves beyond simplistic categorizations of antisemitism as religious, economic, or racial prejudice. Instead, Volkov argues that antisemitism served as a symbolic marker, signaling broader ideological alignments and cultural stances in nineteenth- and twentieth-century Germany. By framing antisemitism in this way, Volkov shifts the discourse from understanding antisemitism as a static, universal phenomenon to examining its adaptability and resilience within specific historical contexts.

Organized into four thematic parts, the volume explores the historiography of antisemitism, its role as a cultural code, its evolution, and its function within Nazism. An epilogue examines the persistence of antisemitism in postwar Germany, particularly its intersections with memory culture, politics, and discussions about the State of Israel. Grounded in meticulous historical analysis, Volkov's methodological approach also engages broader theoretical discussions on how antisemitism is understood and studied, bridging theory and empiricism. By integrating cultural history, intellectual history, and historiography, she provides an interdisciplinary perspective that enhances both historical scholarship and contemporary discourse on antisemitism.

This review examines Volkov's contributions, focusing on her concept of antisemitism as a cultural code and how this framework enhances our understanding of antisemitism's persistence and adaptability. By engaging with the book's thematic structure and interdisciplinary insights, I will assess its strengths, limitations, and significance for contemporary discussions on the cultural and ideological dynamics that sustain and reshape antisemitism over time.

A Structure of Insightful Inquiry

I. Preliminaries

The opening section of *Interpreting Antisemitism* establishes the foundational questions and methodological challenges framing the volume. In her first essay, Volkov critiques the historiography of antisemitism, engaging with historians Shmuel Ettinger and Jacob Katz. While Ettinger views antisemitism as a continuous cultural constant, Katz emphasizes its evolution in specific historical contexts. Volkov critiques both for privileging intellectual history, arguing that they overlook the social and material conditions that sustain antisemitism. She highlights its fluidity and versatility across diverse contexts, advocating for nuanced periodization and interdisciplinary approaches to better understand its enduring features and dynamic shifts (23). This perspective lays a historiographical foundation for addressing complexities, including modern antisemitism's manifestations in the Nazi era.

The subsequent essays explore case studies that reveal the multifaceted nature of antisemitism in late-nineteenth-century Germany. In “The Social and Political Function of Late Nineteenth-Century Antisemitism: The Case of the Small Handicraft Masters” (25–42), Volkov examines how economic discontent, political isolation, and modernization pressures drove small artisans, the *Mittelstand*, toward antisemitic rhetoric as both scapegoating and a tool for cohesion. She traces the evolution of their antisemitism from sporadic reactions to entrenched ideologies shaped by racial narratives and political shifts.

In the third essay, Volkov examines the German Social Democratic Party (SPD), which resisted antisemitism by embracing Marxist class analysis, proletarian solidarity, and the rejection of scapegoating as a mechanism for unification. Unlike the fragmented *Mittelstand*, which found cohesion in antisemitism, the industrial working class aligned with the SPD’s ideological resistance, reflecting the interplay of historical, sociological, and ideological factors. Together, these essays bridge micro-level case studies with macro-level critiques, illustrating how antisemitic ideologies functioned within specific social, economic, and political contexts. Volkov’s analysis underscores the grassroots adoption and top-down dissemination of antisemitism, offering a nuanced understanding of its continuity and resilience.

These preliminary chapters provide a critical foundation for the book, framing its examination of antisemitism’s historiography, social dimensions, and ideological resistance. They set the stage for the volume’s broader analysis of antisemitism’s evolution and persistence, anchoring the book’s cohesive structure and purpose.

II. Cultural Code and Its Derivatives

Part II is the heart of Volkov’s argument, introducing her influential concept of antisemitism as a “cultural code.” Moving beyond traditional models, she argues that antisemitism in Imperial Germany functioned as a symbolic marker, signaling broader ideological and cultural affiliations. The chapter “Antisemitism as a Cultural Code: Reflections on the History and Historiography of Antisemitism in Imperial Germany” (61–84) offers profound insights into how antisemitism became an embedded cultural code, transcending immediate political and social functions. Through meticulous examination of historiographical debates, social dynamics, and ideological transformations, this chapter elucidates the mechanisms by which antisemitism infiltrated diverse strata of society, ultimately shaping a collective worldview that persisted across decades.

A key aspect of Volkov’s chapter is her critical engagement with the historiography of antisemitism, expanding upon earlier critiques. She challenges narratives that treat Nazism as an aberration or draw an unbroken line

from medieval antisemitism to the Holocaust. Expanding on Hannah Arendt’s caution against framing antisemitism as an “eternal hatred,” Volkov explores its historical specificity, arguing that modern antisemitism functioned as a “*Weltanschauung*”—a worldview—deeply intertwined with German nationalism, cultural pessimism, and anti-modern sentiment (Rürup 1975, 91; Volkov 66).

By framing antisemitism as a cultural code, she moves beyond the political failures of antisemitic parties, as outlined by scholars like Richard Levy, to reveal its broader social integration (Volkov 62). This shift from formal institutions to cultural practices underscores antisemitism’s resilience as a symbolic language in Imperial Germany.

Volkov further describes how antisemitism functioned as “a way of communicating an acceptance of a particular set of ideas and a preference for specific social, political, and moral norms” (72). It became a shorthand for rejecting modernity, capitalism, socialism, and liberalism, while affirming an idealized vision of “pure Germanism” and conservative values (69). This abstraction allowed antisemitism to transcend individual grievances, uniting a society grappling with the upheavals of industrialization and modernization. Figures like Wilhelm Marr and Otto Glagau exemplify this transformation, portraying Jews as embodiments of cultural anxieties rather than merely economic scapegoats (62).

The essay’s strength lies in its nuanced portrayal of antisemitism functioning simultaneously as ideology, propaganda, and cultural ethos. Volkov illustrates that antisemitism was more than mere prejudice; it was a lens through which Germans interpreted societal upheavals. Integrated into institutions and cultural arenas—from political parties and professional associations to literature and education—it became endemic, permeating unions, cultural groups, and trade organizations as an assumed part of societal fabric (64). Even as overtly antisemitic political parties dissolved, antisemitism persisted. Volkov notes: “The decline of the Antisemitic political parties can therefore be considered not as a sign of the overall slackening of German Antisemitism but merely as an indication of its changing form” (64). This challenges historiographical views that link political failure with ideological decline, highlighting the fluidity and persistence of antisemitic thought.

Additionally, Volkov’s essay extends beyond Imperial Germany, laying the groundwork for understanding the cultural continuity that enabled Nazi antisemitism to flourish. She emphasizes that while the Nazis radicalized antisemitism, they heavily relied on cultural foundations established during the *Kaiserreich*. This reinforces her argument that the cultural coding of antisemitism in Imperial Germany created fertile ground for its later manifestations.

In sum, “Antisemitism as a Cultural Code” is the cornerstone of *Interpreting Antisemitism*, offering a deeply analytical

and historically grounded perspective on antisemitism's transformation into a pervasive cultural phenomenon. Its interdisciplinary approach illuminates the mechanisms of ideological entrenchment and provides critical tools for understanding how hate becomes normalized within a society. By tracing the continuity from Imperial Germany to the Nazi era, this chapter underscores antisemitism's enduring relevance to discussions of prejudice, ideology, and cultural identity.

The subsequent essays further support Volkov's claim that antisemitism functions as a cultural code, revealing how it adapts to and aligns with shifting societal and ideological contexts. The chapter "The Written Matter and the Spoken Word: On the Gap Between Pre-1914 and Nazi Antisemitism" (85–106) examines the shift from symbolic expressions of antisemitism to the systematic violence of the Nazi era, highlighting historical factors that enabled this transformation. In "Antisemitism and Anti-Feminism: Cultural Code or Social Norm?" (107–120), Volkov examines parallels between antisemitic and anti-feminist rhetoric, showing how both defended traditional hierarchies and resisted social change. Finally, "Readjusting Cultural Codes: Reflections on Antisemitism, Anti-Zionism, and the Critique of Israel" (121–136) explores how antisemitism, as a cultural code, has adapted to contemporary contexts. It now signals broader affiliations with anti-modern, anti-colonial, or anti-imperialist worldviews, within which anti-Zionism is situated.

This final essay is especially relevant given the recent surge in antisemitism across North America, functioning as both a reflective conclusion and a refinement of Volkov's foundational thesis. In this chapter, she examines the transformation of antisemitism into anti-Zionism, challenging static interpretations and reframing anti-Jewish prejudice as a dynamic phenomenon influenced by modern historical and societal shifts.

Her central argument insists that antisemitism, while persistent, cannot be understood as a monolithic force progressing along a linear path inevitably culminating in the Holocaust. She writes,

This antipathy, I argue, is neither always the same, nor does it follow a pattern of rising intensity. The nineteenth century, accordingly, ought not to be considered a "rehearsal for destruction", nor Nazism the peak of an ongoing, linear development. It did build upon "the longest hatred", of course, but finally introduced—as had happened in the past—a radical new variation upon the old theme. (132)

Here, Volkov argues that antisemitism is not a static or cyclical phenomenon that simply repeats over time or escalates predictably toward events like the Holocaust. Instead, she emphasizes that Nazi antisemitism marked a radical departure from earlier forms. Under the Nazis, antisemitism transformed from a symbolic cultural code—used to signify broader social or political affiliations—into a policy of annihilation. Reframing Nazi antisemitism as a historical rupture underscores the

necessity of examining antisemitism in specific contexts. By distinguishing the instrumental roles of antisemitism in Imperial Germany from its genocidal application under Nazism, she disrupts deterministic narratives and highlights the transformative power of ideology.

Furthermore, Volkov warns of the danger when antisemitism, initially serving as a symbolic marker within a cultural context, shifts imperceptibly into overt hostility and violence. She questions whether contemporary anti-Zionism and criticism of Israel, especially within leftist movements, have similarly evolved. What once might have been a code signaling opposition to imperialism or colonialism may now have lost its symbolic nature, becoming a direct expression of resentment or hatred toward Jews (132).

She highlights that in today's context, with prolonged conflicts in the Middle East and the intertwining of US and Israeli policies, opposition to Israel may no longer merely represent a stance against broader issues but could reflect genuine hostility. Unlike in the past, Jews and the State of Israel now have the agency to respond. Volkov urges proactive efforts to demonstrate a commitment to peace and address legitimate concerns rather than solely blaming others or focusing on the prevalence of antisemitism (133).

If you read only one part of Volkov's *Interpreting Antisemitism*, make it the second section, "Cultural Codes and Its Derivatives" (Chapters Four to Seven). This section presents her core thesis: antisemitism functions as a cultural code—a symbolic marker tied to ideological struggles rather than merely an expression of hatred. Volkov examines its intersections with societal issues, its adaptability to changing contexts, and its transformation into systemic violence, as seen in Nazi policies.

By rejecting reductionist narratives that view the Holocaust as inevitable, she highlights the contextual factors behind this shift and warns against normalizing symbolic hostility, which can escalate into violence. Her analysis of anti-Zionism within leftist movements demonstrates the fluidity of such codes, offering a framework to understand the resurgence of antisemitic rhetoric today.

The significance of this section lies in bridging historical analysis with contemporary issues. Volkov's insights extend beyond academic study, serving as critical tools for understanding how prejudice operates within broader ideological and social frameworks. By examining antisemitism's persistence and evolution, Volkov challenges simplistic narratives and reveals the complex ways prejudice adapts to societal changes. Her work is a crucial reminder of the importance of historical depth in addressing pressing contemporary issues.

III. Revisions and Related Themes

In Part III of *Interpreting Antisemitism*, Volkov turns her attention to historiographical debates and thematic explorations

that either revise earlier approaches to antisemitism or examine its intersections with other social phenomena. This section functions as a bridge between the conceptual framework established in Part II and the more focused analysis of antisemitism within National Socialism that follows in Part IV.

In “Nationalism, Antisemitism, and German Historiography” (137–146), Volkov critiques historians who downplay the connection between nationalism and antisemitism, arguing that antisemitism was integral to constructing German national identity. She demonstrates how antisemitism evolved from latent prejudice to a central feature of nationalism, serving as a unifying force for exclusionary ideologies and highlighting its relevance amid contemporary global nationalism.

The essays “Language as a Locus of Confronting Jews and Judaism in Germany” (147–158 numbers) and “German Jews: The Temptation of Racism” (159–188) explore how cultural tools like language and racial theories marginalized Jews. Volkov illustrates how linguistic nationalism both idealized ancient Hebrew and excluded contemporary Jews, reinforcing their alienation. She also reveals how racial ideologies infiltrated Jewish identity, complicating efforts at assimilation and deepening societal barriers.

The section’s final essay, “Interim Balance: Continuity and Discontinuity in the History of German Antisemitism” (173–188), provides a reflective summation of the key debates surrounding whether Nazi-era antisemitism represented a radical departure from past prejudices or an extension of enduring traditions. Volkov critiques simplistic positions on both sides, advocating for a nuanced understanding that acknowledges the deep historical roots of antisemitism while recognizing the unique conditions that shaped its evolution under National Socialism. She offers a compelling analysis of the relationship between religious and modern racial antisemitism, arguing that Nazi antisemitism was not merely a continuation of past forms but a radical transformation that elevated hatred to an official state policy—an unprecedented development in modern history (179). Drawing on Saul Friedländer’s concept of “redemptive antisemitism” (Friedländer 1997, 87), Volkov demonstrates how Nazi ideology synthesized disparate threads of historical prejudice, including medieval religious hostility, Enlightenment-era conspiracy theories, and modern racial pseudoscience. This synthesis underscores that while Nazi antisemitism built upon existing prejudices, it fundamentally transformed them, creating a unique and destructive ideological framework.

As Volkov explains, “secular Antisemitism, moving the focus of hatred from Judaism to the Jews, did not *replace* religious hatred but rather *overlapped* it” (182). This overlap was crucial in shaping the Nazi worldview. “Racism,” she writes, “did not obliterate religious hatred, social envy, cultural fears,

or national prejudices; it added another layer” (182). Nazi antisemitism, therefore, was not entirely unfamiliar, nor was it a mere reiteration of the past. Instead, “it was a *new* amalgamation” of these elements (182).

Part III of *Interpreting Antisemitism* provides a nuanced analysis of antisemitism’s role in German history, focusing on its intersections with nationalism, historiography, language, and racial theories. This section highlights the need to examine both enduring traditions and the contextual factors shaping their expression, offering a deeper insight into the ideological and structural forces underlying one of history’s most catastrophic periods.

IV. In the Context of National Socialism

In Part IV of *Interpreting Antisemitism*, Volkov explores the specific manifestations of antisemitism within National Socialism, bridging the theoretical insights of earlier chapters with the historical realities of the Holocaust. This section examines historiographical debates, the psychological and ideological dimensions of Nazi antisemitism, and its broader structural role within National Socialism.

In “Old and New Approaches to the History of National Socialism” (189–206), Volkov critiques Daniel Goldhagen’s *Hitler’s Willing Executioners* (1996) for oversimplifying German antisemitism and highlights the challenges of reconciling German and Jewish historiographies. She notes the gradual shift toward collaborative scholarship that transcends the “victim” and “perpetrator” divide, fostering a more nuanced understanding of collective memories (191). Additionally, the essay “Antisemitism as Explanation: For and Against” (207–220) critiques the overreliance on antisemitism as the sole explanatory framework for the Holocaust. Volkov emphasizes its interplay with historical contingencies, drawing on Saul Friedländer’s work to present antisemitism as a dynamic, context-dependent factor rather than a cause of singularity (213).

In “A Comment on Brutal Antisemites and Brutal Antisemitism” (221–224), Volkov engages with Jonathan Littell’s *Les bienveillantes* (Littell 2006) to explore the irrational, pathological dimensions of Nazi ideology. She argues for integrating these darker psychological elements into analyses of National Socialism to better understand its blend of bureaucratic efficiency and hallucinatory fanaticism.

The essay “Revisiting Friedländer on Nazi Antisemitism” (225–234) re-examines Friedländer’s work, particularly the concept of Nazi antisemitism as a collective “craze” rooted in an obsessive fixation on the “Jewish danger” (Friedländer 1978, 92; Volkov 226; 231). While praising Friedländer’s contributions, Volkov critiques his reliance on psychohistory and his dismissal of explanations linking the Holocaust to modernity or material interests. She argues for balancing the

pathological and calculated aspects of Nazi antisemitism to fully grasp its uniquely destructive force. In the final chapter, “Historiography in the Loop: Explaining Nazi Antisemitism” (233–244), Volkov reflects on the historiographical evolution of antisemitism studies, balancing perspectives of continuity and rupture. She highlights Friedländer’s integration of traditional Christian antisemitism and modern ideological factors while advocating for methodological reflexivity and interdisciplinary approaches to deepen Holocaust scholarship (239).

Part IV concludes by emphasizing the need for nuanced, integrative frameworks that balance ideological, psychological, and historical contexts. Volkov’s critical engagement with key debates underscores the importance of historiographical evolution in preserving the Holocaust’s moral and historical significance.

Epilogue: Germany after 1945 or the Return of Cultural Code

The epilogue concludes Volkov’s work by reflecting on the persistence of antisemitism in postwar Germany. Despite denazification efforts by the Allies, many former Nazis regained bureaucratic positions, undermining the moral renewal envisioned. Antisemitism endured, symbolizing opposition to democratic values and serving as a litmus test for Germany’s commitment to democracy (245). Leaders like U.S. High Commissioner John McCloy emphasized positive relations with Jews as essential for domestic stability and international acceptance, while Chancellor Konrad Adenauer publicly condemned antisemitic incidents (246). Volkov underscores how antisemitism persisted as a cultural code, complicating efforts to reconcile memory politics with meaningful dialogue.

The 1960s marked a deeper reckoning, particularly through high-profile events such as Adolf Eichmann’s trial in Jerusalem and the Auschwitz trials in Frankfurt, forcing Germans to confront their complicity in the Holocaust (247). Yet latent antisemitism persisted, even as studies in the 1980s showed a decline in “hard-core antisemitism” (248). Volkov also addresses the rise of left-wing antisemitism, particularly critiques of Israel framed as anti-colonialism, which often blur the line between legitimate criticism and anti-Jewish prejudice. Moreover, contemporary controversies, such as debates over the Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS) movement, illustrate the difficulty of distinguishing political critique from antisemitism in a society burdened by Holocaust memory (250).

A central theme of the epilogue is Germany’s *Erinnerungskultur* (memory culture), which seeks to commemorate the Holocaust and remove antisemitism from public discourse (249). Despite these efforts, antisemitism persists, as

evidenced by incidents like the 2019 Halle synagogue shooting on Yom Kippur (252). Such events highlight the ongoing challenges of addressing both right-wing extremism and left-wing antisemitism masquerading as political critique. Volkov also engages with broader historiographical debates on antisemitism, including its intersections with racism and other forms of oppression. While acknowledging the shared imperative to combat all forms of hatred, she insists on the unique historical and cultural context of antisemitism, which requires a distinct analytical approach.

Significance of Interpreting Antisemitism

Volkov’s *Interpreting Antisemitism: Studies and Essays on the German Case* represents a groundbreaking contribution, distinguished by its innovative approach. The discussion below highlights its key areas of significance, followed by my critiques.

a. Antisemitism as a “Cultural Code”

In *Interpreting Antisemitism*, Volkov introduces the concept of antisemitism as a “cultural code,” framing it as a symbolic language embedded in societal discourses. This perspective moves beyond traditional binary explanations, offering a multidimensional framework for understanding antisemitism’s persistence and evolution.

Volkov argues that antisemitism operates as a dynamic system of meaning, adaptable to diverse social, cultural, and political contexts. By framing it as a cultural code, she demonstrates its dual role in reflecting and reinforcing societal ideologies. This adaptability is evident in how antisemitic narratives shift in response to political, technological, and cultural changes, often manifesting through conspiratorial tropes or critiques of power structures, even in contexts where overt Jew hatred is socially unacceptable.

A key contribution of Volkov’s framework is its emphasis on both the continuity and transformation of antisemitism across eras. Rather than a static prejudice, antisemitism emerges as a recurring narrative capable of evolving to fit new circumstances. Volkov traces its transition from religious frameworks in pre-modern Europe to modern racial and political iterations, including contemporary expressions in left-wing anti-Zionism and right-wing populism. By intersecting with ideologies like nationalism, socialism, and anti-colonialism, antisemitism gains broader appeal and becomes embedded within diverse political agendas.

This cultural code framework also broadens the scope of antisemitism studies, encouraging exploration of its intersections with larger cultural and ideological systems. It highlights how prejudice is perpetuated through its integration into societal structures, making it more challenging to combat.

Addressing antisemitism thus requires tackling its entrenchment within multiple narratives rather than treating it as an isolated phenomenon.

Volkov's conceptualization represents a major shift in antisemitism studies, challenging scholars to move beyond simplistic explanations and examine the intricate mechanisms that sustain prejudice. Her framework lays the groundwork for more effective strategies to dismantle antisemitism by targeting its cultural and symbolic roots, providing an invaluable tool for future research and critical reflection.

b. Interdisciplinary Insights and Pedagogical Value

Volkov's interdisciplinary methodology significantly enriches her analysis of antisemitism, blending cultural history, sociology, political theory, and historiography to position antisemitism within broader cultural and social contexts. This approach highlights its multifaceted nature, as seen in her exploration of how antisemitism intersects with anti-feminism to reveal the mutual reinforcement of prejudices that sustain systemic exclusion. Her detailed analysis of language and symbolism further illustrates the mechanisms by which rhetoric legitimizes and perpetuates hatred, offering valuable tools for examining antisemitism across diverse contexts.

While Volkov's primary focus is German antisemitism, her conceptualization of antisemitism as a cultural code invites comparative applications beyond Germany. This adaptability broadens the scope of antisemitism research, allowing scholars to explore its manifestations in other national and cultural settings. Her methodological emphasis on the interplay between continuity and change offers a robust framework for understanding how antisemitism evolves while remaining deeply entrenched in societal structures.

For scholars and students, Volkov's work provides a rich resource for academic study and discussion. Her thematic structure and in-depth case studies—such as her analyses of antisemitism within the German Social Democratic Party (SDP) and critiques of left-wing anti-Zionism—connect theoretical arguments to concrete historical contexts. By integrating meticulous archival research with broader theoretical reflections, Volkov sets a methodological standard for addressing sensitive and complex historical topics. This precision and conceptual depth make her work a valuable model for navigating the challenges of historical analysis and fostering a deeper understanding of prejudice in both historical and contemporary settings.

c. Relevance to Contemporary Issues

Volkov's concept of antisemitism as a "cultural code" gains further relevance through her ability to connect historical analysis with contemporary issues. Her focus on the adaptability of

cultural codes highlights how explicit antisemitism has often given way to subtler forms, such as coded language and indirect expressions of prejudice. These insights are crucial for understanding current phenomena, including the conflation of anti-Zionism with antisemitism, the rise of far-right populism, and the persistence of antisemitic stereotypes in popular culture. Volkov's approach strikes a careful balance, recognizing the legitimacy of certain political critiques while exposing their misuse to sustain prejudice.

Her exploration of postwar Germany's antisemitism deepens this analysis by examining the complexities of addressing prejudice within modern democracies. Through her study of Germany's *Erinnerungskultur* (memory culture) and its interplay with political symbolism and international dynamics, Volkov illuminates the challenges of confronting historical injustices in an increasingly interconnected world.

Critiques and Limitations

While Volkov's framework of antisemitism as a "cultural code" is groundbreaking, it is not without its conceptual challenges. The breadth of the concept sometimes risks rendering its analytical boundaries ambiguous, raising questions about its precision. What criteria definitively distinguish a cultural code from other ideological frameworks or forms of prejudice? While Volkov effectively demonstrates how antisemitism operates symbolically within various societal contexts, the fluidity of the concept can lead to interpretive challenges, particularly when attempting to apply it across different historical and cultural landscapes.

One difficulty lies in differentiating a "cultural code" from a broader ideological framework. For example, Christianity in Europe, with its deeply ingrained traditions and sociological dominance, functioned as a pervasive ideological system for centuries, and Christian anti-Judaism was an integral component of this framework (Baum 2006). The theological and cultural constructs of Christianity provided a lens through which Jewish communities were viewed, demonized, and marginalized, shaping societal attitudes and legal structures. If we understand Christianity as an ideology with sociological influence, how does a "cultural code" differ in its operation or impact? Is the distinction primarily one of scale, or does the cultural code serve as a more symbolic and adaptable mechanism within broader ideological systems?

Volkov's use of the term suggests a fluidity and adaptability that traditional ideological frameworks might lack, emphasizing how antisemitic tropes persist and evolve even when overt religious or ideological justifications wane. This adaptability allows the cultural code to manifest in new forms, aligning with contemporary discourses and anxieties, such as those around nationalism, economic insecurity, or political identity. However, the lack of a clear delineation between a cultural code

and ideology raises questions about whether the former is a distinct category or a subset of the latter.

Moreover, Volkov's discussion of left-wing antisemitism, particularly its intersections with anti-Zionism, also reveals both strengths and limitations. Her nuanced approach recognizes the fine line between legitimate political critique and antisemitic rhetoric. Still, it could benefit from a more comprehensive exploration of how leftist ideologies intersect with antisemitic expressions in the modern era. This is especially relevant in contemporary debates, where anti-Zionist discourses can sometimes invoke longstanding antisemitic stereotypes—such as portraying Jews as disproportionately powerful or malevolent.

Volkov's cultural code framework provides a valuable lens to uncover these dynamics in greater detail, emphasizing the symbolic adaptability of antisemitic narratives within broader ideological discourses, particularly those rooted in anti-colonialism or social justice. Building on Volkov's insights, future scholarship could deepen our understanding of the intersections between left-wing ideologies and antisemitism. Investigating how cultural codes evolve within progressive movements could provide essential frameworks for addressing these challenges. Volkov's conceptualization not only illuminates the persistence of antisemitic narratives in unexpected contexts but also lays the groundwork for impactful research that bridges historical analysis with urgent contemporary debates.

Finally, while Volkov's work is a masterpiece of intellectual rigor, its dense theoretical framework, and specialized focus may pose challenges for non-specialist readers. The intricate arguments and extensive historiographical references are invaluable for academics but might limit accessibility for those outside scholarly circles. Consequently, while the book is a critical resource for experts, its insights may not fully reach broader audiences who could benefit from its profound analysis of antisemitism's enduring cultural and ideological impact.

Conclusion

Interpreting Antisemitism: Studies and Essays on the German Case is an exemplary and thought-provoking contribution to the study of antisemitism, offering a nuanced analysis of its cultural, political, and historical dimensions within the German context. By framing antisemitism as a dynamic cultural code, Volkov provides an insightful framework for understanding the nature of antisemitism and the ways in which it adapts to shifting political and societal contexts.

This book is an essential resource for scholars and students of Jewish history, German history, Holocaust studies, and the study of antisemitism. Its interdisciplinary approach and depth of analysis make it a cornerstone text in these fields, challenging readers to move beyond reductive interpretations and engage with the structural and symbolic mechanisms that

sustain antisemitism over time. Volkov's innovative conceptualization broadens the scope of inquiry, encouraging a critical examination of how antisemitic narratives intersect with broader cultural and ideological discourses.

Interpreting Antisemitism is also an indispensable resource for those engaged in Jewish-Christian relations. Since the landmark declaration *Nostra aetate*, Jewish-Christian relations have been deeply intertwined with efforts to combat antisemitism and foster interreligious dialogue. Volkov's interdisciplinary approach to understanding antisemitism as a cultural code offers invaluable tools for scholars in this field, encouraging a deeper exploration of the narratives and structures that perpetuate anti-Jewish sentiment in both historical and contemporary contexts.

Crucially, our work must extend beyond addressing religious antisemitism to engage with the secular and historical realities that shape antisemitism in diverse contexts. These secular factors often fall outside the bounds of traditional religious or theological language but are no less significant in understanding and combating prejudice. By incorporating works like Volkov's into their study and practice, scholars and theologians in Jewish-Christian relations can develop more nuanced and comprehensive approaches to combating antisemitism, fostering justice, reconciliation, and mutual respect.

This interdisciplinary engagement underscores the shared responsibility to address the cultural, historical, and ideological forces that sustain antisemitism. In doing so, it ensures that interreligious dialogue remains a vital and effective tool for understanding and overcoming prejudice in all its forms.

Interpreting Antisemitism transcends traditional historiography by functioning not only as an academic exploration of antisemitism but also as a moral call to engage deeply with the cultural and ideological forces that perpetuate it. The essays and studies in this volume provide readers with critical tools to analyze and address the enduring challenges of antisemitism in both academic and societal contexts. By bringing together decades of Volkov's scholarship, this collection greatly enriches academic discourse, encouraging reflection and dialogue essential for combating antisemitism and fostering a more nuanced and inclusive understanding of Jews and Judaism.

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