



## CALL FOR PAPERS

# Defining Antisemitism between History and Politics

International Workshop

Monday, May 30 –  
Wednesday, June 1  
2022  
at the Van Leer  
Jerusalem  
Institute

Defining antisemitism has become a battleground. Advocates and opponents of contending definitions confront one another in the printed press, online, and in social media. The working definition adopted by the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) in 2016 was endorsed widely but quickly became a site of controversy. In recent months this controversy has become more intense. In November 2020, 122 Palestinian and Arab academics, journalists, and intellectuals issued a statement that declared their opposition to antisemitism and to the IHRA's working definition thereof, which purportedly promotes the suppression of Palestinian rights. In March this year, the IHRA definition confronted a new challenge in the form of two alternative definitions: the Nexus Document, "Understanding Antisemitism at its Nexus with Israel and Zionism," and the Jerusalem Declaration on Antisemitism (JDA).

This conference aims to provide a space for scholars from different disciplines (including political science, law, philosophy, linguistics, and history) to examine the current debate over definitions of antisemitism and to explore what is at stake in this debate. In this conference we wish to address one of the most controversial issues, namely, the relationship between different forms of criticism of the State of Israel – its existence, its constitutional foundations, its identity as a Jewish state, its history, policies, or practices – and antisemitism. The conference will address questions pertaining to definitions of antisemitism from diverse historical, theoretical, methodological, and political points of view. It aims to give historical and theoretical depth to a heated political debate.

At the same time, the issues raised by the debate over the definition of antisemitism ramify widely. By addressing not only the relationship between antisemitism and antizionism but also these broader questions, this conference aims to promote new scholarly perspectives and better understanding of current debates and discontents.

How does one account for the relatively recent appearance of public/formal/legal definitions of antisemitism and their turning into a subject of intense contention?

How do these different definitions shape and reshape the meaning of antisemitism and how do they affect social and political relations between Jews and various non-Jewish groups?

To define or not to define? Are definitions necessary for combating discrimination, prejudice, and hate?

What functions do we expect a definition of antisemitism and its attendant examples to perform? How has the question of definition developed in different national contexts, within intergovernmental bodies and in civil society?

What's in a "definition"? What role do tropes, analogies, and examples play in definitions of antisemitism?

How have definitions of antisemitism emerged and changed over time?

As a matter of practice, what has been the role of the IHRA working definition in identifying, recording, and combatting antisemitism?

As a matter of practice, what has been the role of the JDA definition, if any, in providing an alternative to the IHRA definition to be used in social, political, and educational settings to frame the debate on antisemitism?

What implications does the striving for a definition have for other racisms, forms of hate speech, racialization, and political hostility? Do we need a portfolio of definitions? Why is it that Islamophobia, alongside antisemitism, has been the main site of similar activity and controversy?

What impact do definitions and, more broadly, the regulation of speech have on the public sphere in liberal societies and on the tension between freedom of speech and its social and legal regulation?

How do definitions address or affect possible entanglements between criticism of Israel and antisemitism?

In what ways is the debate over the definition of antisemitism related to the Palestine Question?

In what ways does this debate over definitions relate to other controversies, such as those over colonialism and postcolonialism? Does this debate express structures of political power and processes of marginalization? Who is eligible to participate in this discussion over definitions and whose voices are heard/not heard in it?

Scholars of all disciplines are invited to submit proposals for lectures to be delivered at the conference. Proposals (500–700 words) and a curriculum vitae should be submitted by email to [dafnas@vanleer.org.il](mailto:dafnas@vanleer.org.il) by **November 15, 2021**

**Academic Committee:**  
Prof. Alon Confino  
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