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Suggested Citation:

APA: Berry, D.T. (2012). Blood on the Tongue: Reading Abjection in Nationalist Blood Libels From Nazi Germany to Hamas and the British National Party. Journal of Hate Studies, 10(1), 99-122. Retrieved from: http://journals.gonzaga.edu/index.php/johs/article/view/180.

Bluebook: Damon T. Berry, Blood on the Tongue: Reading Abjection in Nationalist Blood Libels From Nazi Germany to Hamas and the British National Party, 10 J. HATE STUD. 99 (2012), available at http://journals.gonzaga.edu/index.php/johs/article/view/180.

ALWD: Damon T. Berry, Blood on the Tongue: Reading Abjection in Nationalist Blood Libels From Nazi Germany to Hamas and the British National Party, 10 J. Hate Stud. 99 (2012), available at http://journals.gonzaga.edu/index.php/johs/article/view/180.
Blood on the Tongue: Reading Abjection in Nationalist Blood Libels From Nazi Germany to Hamas and the British National Party

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Abstract

The blood libel is usually known as the Medieval European legend about Jews killing Christians to consume their blood or otherwise use it in rituals. However, in this paper I explore more recent instances of the blood libel that have emerged in nationalist contexts. What I call the nationalist blood libel is more overtly politicized than its predecessors, as there is a relationship between the accusatory portrayals of groups signified as alien and what Arjun Appadurai in Fear of Small Numbers (2006) called an “anxiety of incompletion” inherent in the modern nation-state as a result of the political discourses of majority and minority. In this article I discuss specific instances of the nationalist blood libel in a Nazi publication and in a cartoon aired in 2010 by Hamas wherein “the Jew” is signified as an agent of abjection; of transgression and dismemberment. I also examine an example from contemporary Britain in which “the Islamist” has replaced “the Jew” in the narrative, as this subject is imagined as an existential threat to the British people and the nation. In reading these examples through Julia Kristeva’s theorization of abjection, I contend that the telling of the nationalist blood libel relates personal and communal fears about pollution and dissolution, and that this fear, though fundamentally threatening to subjectivity, nevertheless works to establish it. I therefore argue that this reveals the nationalist blood libel as a folk reification mechanism that allows the segmentation of friend/enemy camps and rationalizes anxieties along lines of protectionism, and thereby mobilizes affects into political and often violent action.

Keywords: abjection, Al-Aqsa TV, antisemitism, Arjun Appadurai, blood libel, British National Party, Der Stürmer, Hamas, immigration, Julia Kristeva, nationalism, taboo

The symptom: a language that gives up, a structure within the body, a non-assimilable alien, a monster, a tumor, a cancer that the listening devices of the conscious do not hear, for its strayed subject is huddled outside the paths of desire.

—Julia Kristeva, Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection
When one hears mention of the *blood libel* it is usually in reference to Medieval European legends of Christian children allegedly murdered by Jews who seek their blood for ritual use or to consume with matzo. The touchstone example, regarded as one of the earliest of such tales, was that of William of Norwich (Dundes, 1991). This young English boy was found murdered in the woods near Norwich in 1144, and his death was later attributed to the Jews who lived in the area. This story came to be recorded by Thomas of Monmouth in his volumes titled *The Life and Passion of Saint William the Martyr of Norwich*, which he completed by 1172/73 (Langmuir, 1990). In this work, Thomas blames the death of the boy on the Jews who he says killed the boy in a mockery of the crucifixion (Langmuir, 1990). Such accusations against the Jews of England persisted from 1150 to 1235. Then, as Langmuir (1990) describes, a “second type of ritual murder accusation appeared . . . that Jews killed a Christian child to acquire blood they needed for their rituals” (p. 240). This version of the libel was recorded as the story of St. Hugh of Lincoln, which became as important to the emergence of the libel in England as was the tale of William of Norwich (Holmes, 1991). So influential was this particular account that it was mentioned in Chaucer’s “Prioress’s Tale” from *Canterbury Tales*, which gave a fictionalized description of Jews who hired a murderer to kill a young Christian boy and then were themselves killed in retribution by order of the magistrate. Chaucer then tells the reader in an epilogue, “O yonge Hugh of Lincoln, slayn also with cursed Jewes, as it is notable, for it is but a litel while ago” (p. 49). Such accusations endured through the Medieval period in Western and Central Europe. However, these legends have persisted into the present and have emerged in places other than Europe.

The blood libel has been the subject of scholarship from historians and folklorists, using approaches as diverse as literary studies and Freudian projection theory. However, as one may suspect from a glance at the bibliography of this scholarship, most of the work done thus far is concerned primarily with the Medieval, Western, and Central European sources rather than modern instances or those from other locations. As a consequence, most of the scholarship has focused on the blood libel against the Jewish people. My contribution in this article is meant, in part, to address these omissions by drawing attention to instances of the blood libel that emerged in the context of relatively recent nationalist propaganda campaigns in various locations, and one example in which people other than Jews are signified as the offenders. I call such instances *nationalist blood libels*, as they have the nationalist concerns at stake in their deployment wherever and against whomever they appear. The specific examples I examine here are a
special edition of the Nazi newspaper Der Stürmer dedicated to the blood libel, a Hamas-sponsored cartoon that aired on Al-Aqsa TV in 2010, and an ongoing leaflet campaign conducted by the British National Party titled “Our Children are not Halal Meat,” in which Muslim men are accused of the “sexual grooming” of young British girls—an accusation that emerged in response to charges that one of these young girls was murdered, put through a mincer, and served to the public.

In examining the instances mentioned above, I seek also to identify anxieties that recitations of the nationalist blood libel narrate and identify how these anxieties are associated with what Appadurai (2006) described as “forces of social uncertainty” that are “allied to other fears about growing inequality, loss of national sovereignty, or threats to local sovereignty and livelihood” in the modern nation-state (p. 7). For this purpose I emphasize a combination of psychoanalysis and Saussurian semiotics adapted from an engagement with Julia Kristeva’s work on abjection. Following this line of analysis, I emphasize two related points. The first point is that the signification of the “the Jew” as the villain of the tale is dependent upon socially conditioned semic codes and is therefore arbitrary. In other instances of the blood libel “the Islamist” or “the Christian” may signify the enemy, as we will see in the cases from contemporary Britain and ancient Rome respectively. The identification of threat in the blood libel, as Bill Ellis (1983) has argued, is predicated on anxieties over groups regarded as foreign and therefore dangerous, and not on the essential identity of any group in particular. To the second point, I want to demonstrate that these tales disclose personal and communal anxieties about perceived aliens written through the modern versions of the blood libel. I therefore argue that recitations of the nationalist blood libel are psychodramas that narrate deep anxieties emergent from the discourses and structures of the nation-state.

II. Abjection and/or the Anxiety of Incompleteness

In Fear of Small Numbers (2006) Appadurai discusses the pressures of modern globalization, which he describes as conditioning the emergence of what he calls an “anxiety of incompletion” that precipitates acts of nationalist or ethnic violence (p. 8). For Appadurai, this arises in part from tensions in modern liberal societies typified by discourses of majority and minority, and in which numbering and normalizing populations are crucial structural processes. This of course tips into Foucault’s theorization of the biopolitical, especially as it relates to defense of society from certain “abnormal” or ill-fitting persons, such as is detailed in his lectures collected in Society Must Be Defended (2003) and Abnormal (2004). However, I am not concerned here with regimes of surveillance and discipline of populations, but
with the anxieties that provoke such regimes. For that reason I turn to Kristeva’s adaptation of semiotics and psychoanalysis in her conception of the abject to read these blood libel narratives.

In *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, Kristeva (1982) describes the abject as neither subject nor object, but nevertheless something: It is not me and not that, but not nothing either (p. 2). Kristeva defines the abject as having one quality: “that which is opposed to ‘I’” (p. 1). But the abject is also crucial in subject/object distinctions that emerge later in subjective development—a clear adaptation from Jacques Lacan’s (2002) analysis of the “mirror stage.” This has direct implications for the formation of the “I,” or one’s subjectivity, which is imagined to be stable and distinct from others. This sense of self emerges in relation to the abject even as the abject constantly assails one’s narcissistic attachment to selfhood. The abject then is fundamentally an ambiguity in the dialectical relations of subject/object that form one’s subjectivity and notion of self (Kristeva, 1982, p. 9). By this ambiguity the abject threatens the desired stability of the ego by transgressing the boundaries of the subject, reminding one of the ego’s unstable subjectivity. The abject as such stands as a sign, as a reminder of the perpetual danger of de-subjectification and the tendentiousness of objectification required in the dialectics of subject/object, of self/other.

The abject, according to Kristeva (1982), continually imperils subjectivity and establishes it. But the abject is not itself material. It is only represented in materials that are signified as abject. To put it another way, the abject is visible only when materials or objects become abjected. Examples of abjected materials provided by Kristeva (1982) are substances that are of the body but cannot be regarded as the body, such as urine, feces, blood, semen, and pus (pp. 3, 48). For Kristeva (1982), these materials share a common quality: They transgress the body’s limits, leaking from the assumed stability of the skin, and thereby signal an inherent instability of the embodied subject (p. 8). These materials impose upon the subject the recognition of ambiguity in the supposed firm boundaries of the subject, such as the skin of the body, by which one has come to understand the self as distinct from that which is other. Abjected materials pass from the interior, through the membrane separating the body and the non-body, and then stand as some other—as an alien from within the intimate spaces of one’s self. It is “not lack of cleanliness or health that causes abjection,” Kristeva explains, but that which “disturbs identity, system, order” (p. 4).

Kristeva (1982) locates the abject before signification within the symbolic order, before the symbolic order can “make sense” of it. It is “pre-nominal, pre-objectal,” which is to point out that it is actually “trans-objectal” (p. 11). To state it more strongly, the abject is before and stands
outside of meaning. Thus, to become visible to the subject, the abject requires an imposition of the symbolic order to bestow upon it a position therein from which meaning can be derived. The feelings generated by the abject (affects described as anxiety, nausea, and revulsion) are given meaning in part as a defense against its disruptive power. Kristeva’s example from childhood memory of the non-object/non-subject something is of the skin of the milk touching her lip when she drank it, which produced in her a “sensation” of revulsion and “spasms of the stomach,” though she knew well that the skin was harmless “as a nail paring” (pp. 2-3). These responses occurred before her conscious awareness could grasp the feeling and convince her of the object’s benignity. This is because these affects emerge before consciousness in both her development as a being and in that moment of experience. The affective response is not to the material, which is known to be harmless. The reaction is not to something that has transgressed boundaries. Rather, the anxiety and revulsion emerge from the crossing of the boundary itself, which stirs within the subject the fear of being undone, of the leaking out of one’s self, and thereby signaling a loss of one’s self as distinct from other objects in the orderly world of subject/object.

The abject is experienced, and then that experience is ascribed to the agency of some object that then becomes abjected by being signified as the offending and offensive object. The abject is made familiar to the subject by its placement within a given symbolic order; by signifying it as the skin on the milk, blood, urine, feces, the alien, the criminal, the monster. This references a looping effect in which the locus of the feeling is lost in the ascription of blame for the feeling to some object. The fear of de-subjectification provoked by the abject is assigned a causal agent, allowing the formerly un-named anxiety to be addressed, shunned, and destroyed. The subject’s self-security can then be reestablished as its person can be realigned within the contours of a body with stable borders, restoring the subject/object distinction. Kristeva (1982) argues that in this way, however frightening or unsettling it may be, the abject has a generative function in that it produces the “I” and acts as “my safeguards” and “the primers of my culture” (p. 2). The personal and the communal function of the abject is of course represented in these two statements. The pre/non-objectal disturbs the boundaries of the bodied subject—communal and personal, but by doing so it also brings forth boundaries through the establishment of taboos and laws developed to keep it at bay.

In religion, the demarcation of “defilement, taboo, or sin” is where the abject “breaks in” (Kristeva, 1982, p. 48). The boundary-making function, observes Kristeva (1982), “accompanies all religious structuring and reappears, to be worked out in a new guise, at the time of their collapse” (p. 17).
It is identified as firmly other and therefore acts to re-establish and reaffirm the boundaries of community that are perpetually assailed and threatened by destabilization. The abject then takes on culturally prescribed codings according to various symbolic systems. That is to say that, as with the personal experience with the abject, the primordial non-object/non-subject which is yet not nothing either, is forced into the realm of the symbolic order, into representation, via the operation of boundary mechanisms such as taboos and notions of defilement. These mechanisms work through signification to establish causality in the feeling of anxiety by depositing anxiety provoked by the abject into the agency of some imagined other—a fictive object. The fear of pollution, horror at transgression, anxiety over dismemberment, and penetration of the communal body by some foreign element—all of which are aroused by the abject—can then come into expression through the signification of some other which pollutes, transgresses, dismembers, and penetrates. It is the predator among the children, the stranger in the community, the “non-assimilable alien” who lives among us (Kristeva, 1982, p. 11). In this way the abject establishes and polices the community subject as well as the bodied subject. Narcissistic attachment to stable identity and the imperilment to this presented in the ambiguity of the abject work in the individual and communal subjects to establish these subjects, a function completed in acts of signification.

Abjection can then be read in various significations of the transgressor, the polluter, the dismemberer, the alien—abjected agents who perform abject horrors. In the blood libel legend of the Medieval Christian West, “the Jew” was thus signified. “The Jew” cannot, however, be confused with an actual Jewish person or the historical Jewish people. The object so named is fictive and only indicates that which came to signify what was otherwise unnamable. The abjected figure of “the Jew” comes to signify the threat of defilement and dismemberment by an alien presence in that particular semic code. But this fictiveness is hidden from the signifying agent. This is why “signifying is worse than lying,” as Charles Long (2004) reminds us, “because it obscures and obfuscates a discourse without taking responsibility for doing so” (p. 1). The blood libel legend of the Christian West sutured the abject to the constructed social and religious subjectivity of the Jew according to the signifying Christian as that which both produced and rejected the foundational object of Christian subjectivity: Jesus. The abjected Jew became the focus for the Christian community as at once an object to be drawn into the fold via conversion and punished for being too close. The Jew in the Christian imagination was both enviable and repulsive, loved and hated. Signification in conversion stories of the Medieval Christian romance and hideous libels organized communities along the lines of clean insider/outside relations. In the play between these two
forms of narrative, “the Jew” who could not be subsumed into the signifying community was destroyed or ghettoized. The same could be said of the use of “the Infidel” as a signifier in the calls for crusade throughout Christian history. Even if this call to revenge upon the abject happens only in narrative form, as with Chaucer’s fictional tale, the resolution is the same: elimination of the abjected object.

Suturing the abject to some entity enables the libel’s cathartic function, which promises a re-bounded, secure identity in the destruction of the abjected being(s). It may be said then that violent representations inform acts of violence upon the body such as Appadurai (2006) describes. The story authorizes, rationalizes, and encourages participation in “bodily violence” that “becomes the vivisectionist tool to establish the reality behind the mask” in establishing “sharp lines between normally mixed identities” (p. 89). In logics of the purity and pollution, aggression and extermination become rational self-defense in an effort to protect the community or the state against intractable and vile enemies without, and very often within. But the story comes before the violence; signification precedes action, and abjection precedes them both.

III. “TO JEW OR DIE” VISITED: THE LIBEL AND ABJECTION IN DER STÜRMER

The first example of the nationalist blood libel for this study comes from the infamous Nazi Party paper Der Stürmer, and specifically from the special Ritualmord-Nummer, or “Ritual Murder Issue,” released in May 1934. Der Stürmer attacked Jews throughout its years of publication with various allegations with which anyone acquainted with the history of antisemitism in Europe may be familiar. Jews were accused of lecherousness, deficient hygiene, and excessive greediness. However, the issue under consideration here expressly focused on that most pernicious of charges: the accusation that in their rituals, Jews used gentile blood that they obtained through murder. After some contextualization of this issue and a brief outline of the history of the publication, I will examine the text and images produced for the issue. This brief history and contextualization is intended to establish the nationalist character of the publication, and thereby demonstrate the departure of the nationalist blood libel from older religious moorings. Of special concern for the purposes of my analysis here is the front-page image of the special edition, which has gained some international recognition since it was translated into English and redistributed by an American antisemitic organization called Christian Vanguard in 1976 (Bytwerk, 2001, figure 16).

Der Stürmer was established as an organ of the völkisch movement in
1922 under the guidance of Julius Streicher, who was also the editor of Deutscher Sozialist at that time (Showalter, 1982). Streicher was a veteran of World War I and was awarded the Iron Cross First class, along with a score of other decorations, for his service. However, it was an invitation to a nationalist political meeting in the summer of 1919, one of many of such meetings of right-wing parties, that marked the beginning of his political career in antisemitism and inaugurated his public activity in the völkisch movement. After some experimentation in the various parties, and having navigated the shifting relations between the Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei (NDASP) and other nationalist parties, Streicher was established as a member of the Nazi regime. Shortly after establishing himself as a loyal party member, Streicher was appointed regional commander of Franconia in 1925. Streicher, though a controversial person even within Nazi circles, was deeply influential and was important to the popularity of the Nazi ideals and antisemitism. He even enjoyed a favorable reference in Hitler’s opus Mein Kampf, where he was praised for his steadfastness and loyalty to Hitler and the völkisch movement (Bytwerk, 2001).

Publication of Der Stürmer, as mentioned, began in 1922, but it ran into financial trouble in 1923 after the failed Beer Hall Putsch. However, Streicher was able to resurrect the paper in 1924, and by 1927 it was circulating 14,000 copies per week (Bytwerk, 2001, p. 52). Circulation continued to increase through 1934, the year the special ritual murder edition was published, and during which time circulation was 113,000 copies per week (Bytwerk, 2001, p. 57). This public success was matched by statements of approval from no less than Heinrich Himmler, who wrote, “Julius Streicher and his weekly newspaper the Sturmer [sic] were responsible for a good part of the education about the enemy of mankind” (as cited in Bytwerk, 2001, p. 171). Streicher’s influence via his publication was even compared favorably with that of Goebbels by the minister of finance under Hitler, Lutz Graf Schwerin von Krosigk (Bytwerk, 2001, p. 172).

The popularity and social impact of Der Stürmer has been accounted for by Randall L. Bytwerk (2001) and Dennis E. Showalter (1982) in terms of the paper’s focus on the emotionally charged pleas that were an important part of Streicher’s rhetorical strategy. According to Showalter (1982), Der Stürmer’s appeal “to psychic realities and visceral images,” using the Jew as “the focal point for a broad spectrum of social, economic, and psychic anxieties calculated to evoke responses from respectable people,” accounts for its success (pp. 168, 234). Bytwerk (1982) repeats this thesis in some ways in writing about Streicher’s simple and direct appeal to emotion in dramatic propaganda that was “armed with tantalizing charges and amazing stories” (30). For both authors the emotional content of the paper explains its influence and popularity, but they also rightly understand that
attraction did not occur in a vacuum. The popularity of the paper grew at a
time of national crisis. Economic and demographic pressures are identified
in both studies as contributing factors, but especially significant was the
immigration of Ostjuden, or “Eastern Jews,” into German cities. The fear
of alien influence in the midst of relative hardship and national insecurity as
the result of financial distress and the loss of WWI, not to mention per-
ceived and actual governmental failures, was sutured in the antisemitic
imagination to the fictive person of the Jew, who could be construed as
being to blame for any misfortune that the German people suffered.
Nowhere was this more apparent than in the pages of Der Stürmer.

According to Showalter (1982), the pervasive anxiety over the influx
of Eastern European Jews was used successfully by Der Stürmer to alienate
Jews who had been a part of German life for many centuries and who had
integrated into German society (p. 85). Streicher also referenced a deep
reservoir of antisemitism in Germany, making “extensive use of fear propa-
ganda, focusing on the Jew as the concrete object of whatever diffuse anxie-
ties might be current in Nuremberg and Germany” (Showalter, 1982, p. 58).
Showalter argues that the Jew in Der Stürmer was an abstraction that
“could be offered as totally alien, totally evil, a symbol of everything evil,
there remained the . . . [Jewish] people one knew” (p. 59). In this way the
paper worked to further demonize the Jewish Germans as the enemy by
situating Germany and Germans as imperiled by this internal alien. The
Jew was therefore continually cast in a variety of roles in such propaganda.
He was caricatured to embody everything from a failing government system
to the financial precariousness of everyday life. The caprice of fortune, so
often imagined to be going ill against the German and by contrast well with
the Jews, was linked to the fictive Jew as the causal agent for German suf-
ferring. The Jew was caricatured as a powerful and corrupting influence in
national life as any distinctions between the “Eastern Jews” and German
Jews were diminished.

The relevance of reading abjection in relation to Der Stürmer should
be to some degree self-evident. If we understand abjection as a psychic
operation that describes a pre-conscious anxiety of destabilized subjectivity,
recognized through elements of the body that become signified as an alien
object outside the body, and that abjection “links the lived experience of the
body, the social and culturally specific meanings of the body” (Grosz, 1994,
p. 192), we can easily see Der Stürmer’s abjecting function. It identified
the agent of unease and precariousness for the anxious German reader. It
identified the pollution of the national body as the Jew, and thereby signi-
ified what was felt by suturing the fictive Jew to this anxiety. One can even
see this narratizing of pollution in stories that drew attention to the presence
of foreign hops mixed with German hops for making beer, which was of
course blamed on unscrupulous Jewish hop dealers (Showalter, 1982). That which passed into the German body was feared tainted by foreign elements, a pollution caused by Jewish agents. Here the signified Jew is responsible for contaminating the German’s personal body even as he pollutes the national German body itself—he’s doubly abjected.

A reading focused on abjection is relevant to the whole of Der Stürmer, but especially so in the case of the special ritual murder issue under consideration here. The title of the issue reads, as translated from the German, “Jewish Murder Plan against non-Jewish Humanity Revealed.” On the cover page there is an image that is somewhat iconic in which two figures bear the typical stereotype of the Der Stürmer Jew. The text in this edition is unremarkable to anyone familiar with the history of the libel in European history. The majority of the writing is dedicated to recounting specific cases of Jewish ritual murder. The narrative of the piece is occasionally embellished with excerpts from antisemitic statements from Voltaire, von Molkte, and Martin Luther’s Von den Juden und ihren Lügen, or, The Jews and Their Lies. Additionally, there are reproductions from across European geography and history of various images of ritual murder from woodcuts, and even postcards accusing Jews of such acts. Collectively these images are meant to bolster the argument through these roughly chronological vignettes of cases of alleged murder of non-Jews by Jews. However, the image on the cover read through Kristeva’s abjection allows one access to the anxiety of incompleteness that Appadurai (2006) recognizes as precipitating nationalist violence like the Sho’ah (pp. xi & 8-9).

In many ways the chapter from Powers of Horror titled “Ours to Jew or Die,” wherein Kristeva (1982) assesses the antisemitism of the novelist Louise-Ferdinand Céline, does much of the work necessary to connect abjection to antisemitism. Kristeva (1982) wrote that in antisemitic discourse “an object appears—an object of hatred and desire, of threat and aggressivity, of envy and abomination”: The abjected object, the Jew, is produced as he is evoked and performs his function in antisemitic discourse (p. 178). “That object, the Jew,” she writes (1982), “gives thought a focus where all contradictions are explained and satisfied,” allowing the therapeutically ascription of anxiety to some guilty agent (p. 178). The same can be said for the depictions in Der Stürmer, as the Jew is represented simultaneously as massively powerful and feeble, enviable and reviled. He is the object of envy for his supposed racial solidarity and cunning and is simultaneously reviled for his alleged dirtiness and huckstering. Kristeva (1982) writes of “Céline’s pamphlets” that they “are the avowed delirium out of which the work emerges to venture into the obscure regions at the limits of identity” (p. 180). Thereby the work of writing comes face to face with that which disrupts identity. It evokes and confronts the thing that disrupts the
clean, delineated sense of self by exposing the rifts in self-narrative and desire. And so operates Der Stürmer, and especially the image produced for the cover of the special issue under consideration here. As with the discourse from Céline, “when a scription on the limits of identity comes face to face with abjection, it enters into competition with biblical abominations and even more so with prophetic discourse” (Kristeva, 1982, p. 186).

In the illustration, the biblical imagination plays on the ritual prohibition against consuming blood in Jewish religion as well the Christian tradition of the Eucharist—the taking in of the body and blood of the savior. The ritual-murder abomination is imagined as one committed against Christian bodies to be sure, but as Mary Douglas reminds us, it is a mistake to “treat bodily margins as isolated from all other margins” (as cited in Kristeva, 1982, p. 69). The connection to the communal is the interpretive key to reading the portrayal of the Jew as a murderer and blood drinker in the nationalist blood libel. Surrounding this particular image is script describing the suspicion “the world over” that Jews commit “ritual murder.” The text around the image, including the common banner running across the bottom of each issue, “The Jew is Our Misfortune,” signifies profound anxiety over the presence of this abjected other who is the causal agent of suffering. The Jew is further described as a “devil” that has “for millennia” conducted “secret rites” with human blood. And above the image is written the title of the illustration: “Judenopfer,” or “Jewish Sacrifice.” Thus we have what Kristeva describes in her assessment of Céline’s pamphlets: a confrontation with biblical abomination. In this case we see the accusation of consumption of blood, which is forbidden in the Scriptures, and allegedly authorized through the Talmud. In coding the alleged murders as ritual acts, the signification follows and confirms the boundaries as established by taboo and not simply by morality in some abstract sense. The murders are perpetrated against individuals, but they have communal implications. In reminding the reader that “the Jews are [their] misfortune,” the authors establish the Jews as utterly other, signified as “Mördervolk” (“The Murder-Folk”) and murderers of the Folk. The fictive Jew and Jewish community evoked in the publication are sutured to death and thereby signified as death itself.

In some ways the portrayal of the Jew in this image is novel in relation to the other images reproduced elsewhere. This is important to notice insofar as we are dealing with different kinds of imagination at work in the production of the abjected Jewish object in the context of nationalist aspirations. This presentation of the blood libel is one that reflects anxieties over demography as the Jew’s offense is not centered on the crucifixion of the Lord, but an assault on the people. There is an effort to keep the crucifixion, a staple in the European libel legend, in the picture; but it is drastically
Figure 1: A scan of the cover of Der Stürmer’s blood libel issue provided by Randall Bytwerk. (Permission to use this image was not granted. Follow this link to view the flyer: http://www.bnp.org.uk/news/%E2%80%9COur-children-are-not-halal-meat%E2%80%93-dramatic-new-leaflet-launched)
minimized in the frame. One may read this as an attempt to keep the historical narrative intact or in some sense present while shifting the signification of the Jew from a hater of Christianity and cursed of God to a predator of the population who is alien to the nation. The subjects evoked as the victims in the illustration are clearly Aryan children and young women who are drawn with thin, light hair and angular features. In this image the blood flows not from the Cross, but from the necks of the babes and potential mothers. The illustration is one that tells a particular story of the blood libel centered on demographic precarity rather than religious offense. This dynamic is demonstrated by the minority of two Jews dominating the multitude of Aryans taking the center rather than the crucifixion, as we have in the narratives of William of Norwich and Hugh of Lincoln.

In the illustration the communal stakes of the Nazi blood libel are most apparent in the portrayal of the Jewish characters working together to dominate the ethereal Aryan children and young women. The figural Jews are solid, contrasting each other in white and black solid shapes. One holds the knife that has cut the wispy necks of the victims while the other catches the blood. They are on the Earth with only the miniature crosses in the background to challenge their dominant presence. They act in the world and on the helpless Aryan subject(s). That the Jew in this illustration is monstrous is obvious, but his monstrosity comes not from the hideous visage of the face, here contorted by hate and scorn. It comes rather from his commanding presence and power over his victims. The Jews act in unison, which adds to the terror they evoke and further marks them as everything the Aryan is not in the illustration: powerful, united, solid.

The Aryans, on the other hand, are floating, unable to act on the ground. These ghostly organisms have no solid being comparable to the figural Jew. They melt into air. The cuts on their necks and the blood pouring onto the plate have more substance than they themselves can enjoy. It is not incidental that in the illustration, the line work used to outline the Jew is similar to that used to mark the blood. A parallel is drawn between the abject substance of the blood and the abjected Jew; but there is also a contrast between the powerful and terrible presence of the Jew and the soft, nearly shapeless Aryans. This highlights the simultaneous repulsion and envy that Kristeva notices (1982, 1986) in Céline’s literature, as well as the anxiety that the abject invokes: the fear of dissolution, the loss of selfhood. In other issues of Der Stürmer the Aryan man is illustrated as the liberator who forces the Jew into a subordinate position by acts of violence. But that virile Aryan figure is missing here. The Aryan male can only be a child in the nationalist blood libel. He is helpless, unable to protect the women and children, or even himself. One can imagine that this absence of the protective masculine figure expresses the fear of what may befall the women and
children in his absence. That reading is too simple. As I read it, this assumed absence actually signals the presence of that very masculine figure in impotent form.

The image on the cover of the blood libel issue read in this way is then not working simply to mobilize resentment against the Jew, but to work toward a catharsis as it puts the unnamable anxiety of the abject into meaningful and recognizable form so that deliverance from the threat now named can be promised. The primary function of the tale is to name the abject, allowing the identification of anxiety along the lines of the culturally situated coding of the Jew. Kaja Silverman (1983), in following her analysis of the work of Roland Barthes, writes in *The Subject of Semiotics*,

The cultural codes organize linguistic segments of novels, short stories, and poems in the form of proverbial statements and commonplaces, but they also dictate the range of possible narratives, character types, and conflicts, as well as sorts of knowledge likely to be repressed, and the conditions under which that knowledge will ultimately divulged. (p. 251)

The visual sign, following Peircean semiotics, likewise operates as semic code, and therefore functions to define “person and place in ideologically symptomatic ways” (Silverman, 1983, p. 255). Here the conjunction between semiotics and psychoanalysis, so important to Kristeva’s work, unpacks the very anxieties that Appadurai (2006) regards as causal in instances of ethnocidal and nationalist violence, of which the Sho’ah/Holocaust remains a paradigmatic example. However, as we proceed we will see that this anxiety is coded similarly even as it appears in different nationalist contexts. In the next example we see the blood libel against the Jew differently situated in the setting of contemporary Palestine/Israel.

### IV. “I SMELL JEWS”: THE LIBEL AND ABJECTION ON AL-AQSA TV

A cartoon aired on Al-Aqsa TV by Hamas on January 1, 2010, demonstrated without doubt that the blood libel is far from extinct from political discourse. This instance even got attention from Jon Stewart on *The Daily Show*. However, this cartoon was not an anomaly for the region. Several such cartoons have been aired since the medium has been available. Scholars have done work on the use of the blood libel tropes, detailing instances of Stürmeresque representations (Stav, 1999). But to extend the reading of the image from the ritual murder issue of *Der Stürmer*, I will focus on this 2010 cartoon, wherein we find similar demographic anxieties that map onto the anxiety of incompletion described by Appadurai (2006). However different the contexts may be, the abjected Jew stands in a similar position as the signified transgressor, the taboo breaker, the alien, and the murderer of
The cartoon opens with a crow perched on a sign that bears the insignias of the Palestinian Authority (PA) and the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF). The cartoon’s main plot actually serves to demonstrate the subservience of the PA to Israeli military power over and against the wishes and lives of Palestinians. A series of vignettes throughout the cartoon establishes the narrative of the PA’s impotence to protect the Palestinian population in the face of Jewish aggression. After the caricatures of the IDF and a PA border guard are established, the scene shifts to an old Jewish man and his son, both of whom are settlers. The father is old, bent over with age, with a long white beard and a black suit. His ears are pointed and he has a sharp, vampiric tooth that comes over his top lip when his mouth is closed. His son is lanky, with payot dropping alongside his face. And he carries an Uzi. In a menacingly gravelly voice the father says to his son, “Son, the five most delicious things in this world are three . . . ” The son interrupts, “I know.” They then say in unison, as with a single voice, “Palestinian blood.” The father commands the son, “Go, son. Drink their blood, and come back safely.” The son then agrees to do this in compliance with the father’s wishes. Upon receipt of a map of Hebron, he goes to the border checkpoint where the PA and IDF characters await.

The settler then wanders through the border area, firing his Uzi randomly, saying, “I am getting loooost! [sic].” The IDF guard commands the PA guard to “get him.” However, the guard is too late. The settler fires his Uzi into a crowd of playing Palestinian children with a grin on his face. The next frame shows the dismembered and bloody bodies of Palestinian children formerly at peaceful play. One pigtailed girl has had her head completely removed, severed from her body, which still clutches a teddy bear. The settler stands with a satisfied grin, blood dripping from his lips. When the PA guard arrives he exclaims in horror, “You Jew who got lost, you’ve killed my people before my eyes. I will respond with . . .”, as he pulls a dove from behind his back and holds it aloft, “more peace. Are you done?” The abject criminal licks the blood from his lips, consuming the last drop of Palestinian blood. The guard then bears the settler safely upon his back through the checkpoint and back to his home, singing all the way, “Salma, oh Salma, we’ve returned in one piece.” After the Jew is deposited back in his house, the guard receives a sharp kick from inside the house that sends him off screen. We meet the PA guard again, later, as he beats a Palestinian child for stone-throwing. The cartoon then ends with the young boy saying to this PA guard, “I smell Jews. Are you going to turn me in to the Jews, man? You are no kin of mine. You are a spy.” The final scene closes and “to be continued” is spelled out on the screen.
The blood, the severed head, the taboo of drinking blood, the abjected Jew passing through territorial boundaries, the ambiguous identity of the guard sensed in the olfactory of the Palestinian child, the live settler returning in one piece, bleeding and dismembered Palestinian children—all abjection. The narrative here, though there is an absence of ritual directly, references a more diffuse blood libel that is anchored not in Christian references, but in nationalist wishes and anxieties. As such the libel is still tied to space and notions of belonging to a place or, one might say, citizenship. The geography, as with the ghetto in Chaucer’s tale, is segmented with multiple subjects: the PA, the IDF, the children-Palestinians, the settler-Jews. The Palestinian is stuck in the socio-political landscape, pierced through with an overpowering relation to an imposed geography of stateless nationhood that keeps him in the land but gives him no power over it; he is whole, yet not happy. This unhappiness is compounded by the passing through of “the Jew” who seeks blood in a taboo act, revealing the powerless and permeable state of the Palestinian personal and communal subject.

This fixedness of the Palestinian is contrasted with the mobile Jew who is feared and envied for his power, a power that the Palestinian aspiring to nationhood desires. The wanderer, this armed settler, this alien presence, receives the urging of the father to drink the blood of the Palestinians and obeys. It could be that the lack of the father for the Palestinian children in the cartoon emphasizes the intactness of “the Jew” who operates in relation to the father. The armed settler easily passes through the boundary and enters the space of the Palestinians, freely shooting his Uzi. He rends the bodies of the children, and then in an expression of jouissance consumes the taboo substance, culminating the drama of the libel vignette. The severed neck of the Palestinian girl signifies that the children are cut off, voiceless, as they leak their life into the dirt. There is no song here, no praise of the martyr—only the subservient voice of the PA guard inquiring whether the consumption enjoyed by “the Jew” is complete. The permeation of the children’s blood into the dirt on the ground and into the mouth of the Jew figures the permeation of “the Jew” himself, who is unclean both in presence and in act. He is doubly abject, as he is abjected in deed and in being.

The leaking and severed bodies of the Palestinian children stand opposite the returning settler, who is safe and “in one piece” (perhaps he is safe because he is in one piece), with his subjectivity intact and therefore content. The Palestinian children never know this feeling. But it is not just “the Jew” who is constructed as whole, but also the PA guard who proclaims, “We’ve returned in one piece.” Here, in the ambiguous subjectivity of the guard, the threat of “the Jew” as abject reaches its height. The abject becomes most dangerous in infecting whole subjectivities, making them
foreign to themselves. The horror of the abject is not simply that it crosses over boundaries, but that it crosses through you.

In the scene after the murders, the PA guard puts on a mask to assail a house occupied by a boy accused of stone-throwing. Both his activity and his mask thrust him into ambiguity as the Palestinians observe his action and attire and are puzzled by him. Is he a thief? Is he from the security forces? Can he be from the resistance? This ambiguity is pushed further when the guard apprehends the small boy. The boy yells, “The Jews hurt my arm yesterday.” The guard responds to the complaint by grabbing the boy’s hand and gnawing on his arm. The guard proclaims, “The Jews broke it, I will finish it off.” The ambiguous identity of the guard is established as the boy exclaims, “I smell Jews. Are you going to turn me in to the Jews? You are no kin of mine. You are a spy.” The horror of “the Jew” is matched only by that PA guard whose ambiguity allows even more detailed suture to abjection—the fear of corruption to the point of a loss of identity, community, and kin. The abject severs and discontinues; indeed, it rends and causes leakage. But the abject can also make you serve it, and transform even you to become it. You can lose yourself to it.

The consumption of the abjected fluid serves to demonstrate the degree to which “the Jew” has come to signify as abject; and, as a consequence, how fully the abject has been made manifest and then can be signaled and, perhaps, eventually overcome with the assertion of one’s identity over and against the alien enemy. That is, of course, if you are not lost to it. The various subjects in the cartoon demonstrate all these possibilities—the traitor, the alien, the criminal, the monster. What remains is the fear of being overwhelmed and losing one’s self.

As we saw in the special issue of Der Stürmer, the Jew here is abjected so that the abject may be identified and then militated against, and perhaps overcome in violent struggle. Thus the cathartic function of these narratives emerges as signifying the enemy. In this way the abject functions, as Kristva (1982) notes, as a mechanism of subjectivity (p. 208). As the illustration and cartoon coded the abject along the lines of the Jew and the traitor, it also produced the authentic German and Palestinian as not the Other. I am authentically this and not that, one could now say, because I know the enemy and therefore myself. Subject and object are firm here. But this declaration of authenticity is not simply a mechanism over and against “the Jew” as some essential being. The function of the abject is ubiquitous, as it “assumes specific shapes and different codings according to the various ‘symbolic systems’” (Kristeva, 1982, p. 68). This opens the possibility for signifying the abject as other than “the Jew” in the blood libel. In the next example, deployed by the British National Party, the imagined “Islamists” is coded as abject in the narrative. This affirms not only Kristeva’s state-
ment above, but also Appadurai’s (2006) statement about “the forms in which global dramas of war, peace, and terror arrive at different national and regional locations in different guises and take on highly specific synaptic connections to local anxieties and images” (p. 101). In other words, not only is it appropriate that we should expect different signifiers emerging in recitations of the nationalist blood libel, it is also almost inevitable that this would be the case across disparate national political conditions.

V. A SLIGHT INTERREGNUM: SIGNIFYING “THE CHRISTIAN” ABJECT AND LESSONS DERIVED

If we think of “the Jew” as a sign standing in representation of the abject in reflection of semiotic theory, we can see that any object could be signified within the structure of the blood libel narrative as the offender. This is of course the point of semiotics in general—to understand signification. Further, since the abject can never be directly described as a non-object in discourse, it must be sutured to an object. In the cases above it was sutured to “the Jew”; but this does not need to be the case, as if Jews cause abjection. Folklorist Bill Ellis (1983) points to the broader application of the blood libel in his article “De Legendis Urbis: Modern Legends in Ancient Rome.” In this article he discusses the libel’s deployment against early Christians. What is particularly helpful for my point here is that Ellis notices that besides the antiquity of this libel and its use against peoples other than Jewish people, in each case the accusation played on the “anxieties and taboos of the existing majority rather than knowledge of the scapegoated group,” and the accused were in each case “ethnic or religious minorities” (p. 201).

Most of the rumors about Christians involving themselves in obscene rites were circulating between 112-200 C.E., a time when the central and regional governing authorities were having difficulty “keeping the Pax Romanorum” (Ellis, 1983, p. 204). Ellis (1983) comments that it was the “conservative classes,” the religious majority, who sought to scapegoat the “newly insurgent minorities” for the troubles facing the Empire (p. 204). This of course should remind one of the socio-historical context in which Streicher’s paper appeared: social instability coupled with a suspect alien among the population. In this regard, Ellis makes two points concerning the libel against Christians. First, these “urban legends” are not new, and second, what is “modern” about these legends is only the “identity of the culprit” (p. 207). Those viewed as foreign in society are regarded as threatening or somehow responsible for or capitalizing on social and political instability and disintegration. This is true for “the Christian” in second century Rome and “the Jew” in the period from 1144 to the present. It is
especially true in nationalist regimes in which the presence of others within national geographical spaces is viewed as an intrusion and a violation of law and sovereignty. The abject, which is of course the true source of that anxiety, is then sutured onto whatever object, and all too often excised through social rituals of violence. In any case we must begin by analyzing the practice of naming the abject onto an other as a symptom of subjective and communal anxieties. This is of course where psychoanalysis is most useful. In this regard, when we speak of the blood libel we should not speak of “modern legends,” as Ellis admonishes, “only modern texts” (p. 207).

VI. READING THE “ISLAMIST” ABJECT: THE LIBEL FROM THE BNP

The assertion that Islam is a “cult” and that “Islamists” are dangerous is unfortunately common since the events signified as “9/11,” and in Britain’s “7/7.” Such statements resulted in the rejection of Rod Parsley, Pastor of World Harvest Church in Ohio, to be a McCain ally in 2008 (Ross, 2008). But there is a lesser-known story that goes a bit closer to the point at hand. It comes from a report in The New York Times detailing the events of August 31, 2010, in which acts of harassment and violence were perpetrated against the worshipers inside the small town of Waterport, New York. It was noted therein that one of the young men charged as a result of the police investigation claimed in questioning that he thought the Islamic Center was a “cult house” where people “drank blood” (Otterman, 2010, para 10). However one case of accusation against Muslim men has captured the imagination of nationalists in England more than any other case.

The disappearance of a British teenager named Charlene Downes generated much tabloid interest, some mainstream media attention, and specific public activities on the part of the British National Party. Soon after Miss Downes was reported missing, she was thought to have fallen prey to “grooming” for sex with older men, then murdered and ground into the kebab meat at the shop of the accused murderer, one Mr. Albattikhi. The following trial was a fiasco, and Mr. Albattikhi, a man of Jordanian extraction, was set free (Smith, 2009). This drew the attention and anger of those who felt that justice had not been served. Subsequent reports were made about groups of “Asian” men sexually exploiting young British girls. One recent case reported by SKYNews in 2012 referred to the trial of five men in Liverpool tried on charges of facilitating prostitution. The reporter speaking about the case emphasized that “all of the men were Pakistani in origin” and all the girls were “white and vulnerable” (McCarthy, 2012).

The right-wing British National Party, however, took the reaction to these reports further than most in its ongoing campaign to expose “Muslim
pedophiles,” and to proclaim “our children are not kebab meat.” In this effort, the reference to the Downes case and the anxieties that young, white British girls are being sexually exploited were combined into one message. In a pamphlet launched in 2011, the Downes case that inspired the activity in the first place was obscured by the general reference to Halal meat—a clear reference to practices that links the feared religious minority to scriptural abominations. It is worth noting that there was a similar recurrent theme in Der Stürmer of Jews sexually enslaving and exploiting German girls, and treating them as kosher meat (Schowalter, 1982, p. 99). The BNP flyer sublimates the fear of consumption into a dramatic silhouette of a girl weeping. The image is overdetermined by the verbosity around it which, according to an article titled “‘Our Children are not Halal Meat’—Dramatic New Leaflet Launched’” (n.d.), proclaims that “young white girls” are being “exploited for sex by Muslim men” (para. 4). To bolster this claim, a quote is added from Chief Detective Inspector Alan Edwards stating, “These girls are being passed around and used as meat” (pull-out quote). The specter of the biblical abomination merges again with the claim, “Young girls and their families in Oldham are sacrificed on the altar of Political Correctness” (para. 8). And though the language is highly metaphorical in this case, the message carries similar anxieties found in the examples from the Der Stürmer and the Hamas cartoon. The abominable Muslim alien preys on the life of the feminine youth, the very life-bearers of the people.

Here the libel touches most deeply on the erotic as the flyer reveals the sexualized aspects of the blood libel. As the Christians were imagined to be engaging in orgies in their feasts, and the Jew was imagined by Streicher to be sexually expert and unusually well-endowed, so the Muslim male is imagined to be sexually voracious as he allegedly satisfies his pedophilic lusts upon young white girls. “The erotic cult of the abject,” writes Kristeva (1982), “makes one think of perversion” (p. 55). The taboo consumption of the blood is displaced by the anxiety over forbidden, miscegenist sexual enjoyment as the girls are transformed into morsels of ritually pure meat fit for Muslim pleasure. And, as with the narratives from Der Stürmer and Hamas, there are overt references to anxieties of impotence related to these crimes. In the quote at the bottom of the pamphlet from the leader of the BNP Nick Griffin, he asks readers to consider how they would “feel” if their child fell prey to these “perverts” and the authorities “refused to lift a finger” (“‘Our Children are not Halal Meat,’” n.d., para. 10). The eroticized Muslim pedophile is a means to evoke authentically British, masculine action and self-identification. The anxiety over sexually and religiously taboo activity becomes a call for reaffirmed borders between “us” and “them,” of affirming belonging with a vote, or perhaps more. Mr. Grif-
Such expressions of anxiety about the presumed disruptive Muslim presence in Britain are of course not unique to far right parties and tabloids. Almost contemporary with the beginning of the BNP’s campaign against “Muslim pedophiles,” the Royal United Studies Institute, or RUSI, published a controversial study by Robert Salisbury, the Marquess of Salisbury and Privy Councilor, and Professor Gwyn Prins (2008). This paper focused on what they regarded as national security threats from British Muslims as a result of a “mis-placed [sic] deference to multiculturalism” that has “failed to lay down the line to immigrant communities” (p. 23). This article was reported as the “consensus” from a series of private meetings convened between 2006 and 2008 (p. 22). Given the participation of high officials in the military, Royal government, and the academy, the authors concluded that Britain was at risk because of a “loss in the United Kingdom of confidence in our own identity, values, and constitution,” coupled with “a lack of self-confidence” that stands in stark contrast to the presumed confidence and firm identity of “Islamist terrorist enemy, within and without” (p. 23). In response to this threat they make many proposals, but these suggestions are preceded by this statement: “Our common understanding of and allegiance to the United Kingdom must be restored” (p. 26).

In the face of dissolution of the normative British subjectivity, described in the RUSI report (Prins & Salisbury, 2008) as a loss of identity, and the precarity imagined to be produced by the presence of the internal/external Islamist enemy, British citizens are urged to reify their nationalist subjectivity. This of course was the move the BNP made in their flyer in calling upon British citizens to vote. The motivation for this effort in both cases is the presence of the abjected Islamist who allegedly has the very self-confidence desired by the RUSI authors and the BNP. This makes “the Islamist” all the more monstrous, as he is at once envied and reviled for his self-confidence. As was the case with the abjected Jew in blood libel discourse from Der Stürmer and Hamas, the abjected Muslim for RUSI is simultaneously envied and feared for his firmness of identity. “The Islamist” is signified as abject and thereby made to stand in for the anxieties intrinsic to modern British liberal society, especially in reference to pressures that are the result of post-colonial demographic shifts. “The Islamist” is imagined by the BNP and other nationalists as the cause of, as Appadurai (2006) has articulated it, the “exacerbated uncertainties” and “new incentives for cultural purification” that have been produced as a result of the loss of the “illusion of national economic sovereignty or well-being,” as well as “uncertainties about identity” produced by “global flows” (p. 8).
In this article I set out to read anxieties of incompletion described by Appadurai (2006) as they present, like symptoms, in instances of what I call nationalist blood libels, and to tie these anxieties to “forces of social uncertainty” in the modern nation-state that are “allied to other fears about growing inequality, loss of national sovereignty, or threats to local sovereignty and livelihood” (p. 7). In engaging with Kristeva’s theorization of abjection, I sought to demonstrate that the signified object of anxiety can be described along various cultural codes of the outsider or alien: “the Jew” in Der Stürmer and the Hamas cartoon, “the Christian” in court cases in Rome, or “the Islamist” more recently in the United States and Britain. In this way I intended to contribute something to understanding factors that inform acts of hate speech in general. More specifically, I wanted to draw attention to the relationship between hate-speech and the “darker sides of globalization” that run through the social relations of the nation state by demonstrating connections between personal uncertainties and the “insecurity in the affairs of states” amid global mobility (Appadurai, 2006, p. 101). In this context, individual acts of injurious speech are not divorced from high level and high stakes discussions of policy, as we see very clearly in the case of “the Islamist” in the RUSI report (Prins & Salisbury, 2008).

In this way we can see that “predatory identities” described by Appadurai (2006) developed in tense relation to uncertainty can easily become the basis for savage acts of violence (p. 51). This is unfortunately a familiar problem to those who observe the history of genocides and inter-ethnic conflicts. This violence, Appadurai argues, “can create a macabre form of certainty and can become a brutal technique (or folk discovery-procedure) about ‘them’ and, therefore about ‘us’” (pp. 6, 8). That is to say that this violence contributes to subject formation, which is of course the function of the abject as described by Kristeva (1982, 1986). I therefore argue that the nationalist blood libel operates as a folk reification-procedure that allows the segmentation of friend/enemy camps, rationalizes anxieties along lines of protectionism, and translates affects via signification into speech acts that in turn facilitate acts of violence. The eroticized and horrifying tales of the consuming enemy connect the personal crises of subjectivity to the larger communal identity as it is writ large as a national drama. Therefore, following Kristeva (1986) in “Psychoanalysis and the Polis,” I assert that my task here was not to “make an interpretive summa in the name of a system of truths,” but to “record the crisis of modern interpretive systems” and to affirm that there is a crisis “inherent in the symbolic function itself and to perceive as symptoms all constructions” (p. 319). I will
venture a bit further than Kristeva by offering a possible response to the problem presented in nationalist blood libel by citing Butler (2005):

We must recognize that ethics requires us to risk ourselves precisely at moments of unknowingness, when what forms us diverges from what lies before us, when our willingness to become undone in relation to others constitutes our chance of becoming human. (p. 136)

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