'Hitler had a valid argument against *some* Jews': repertoires for the denial of antisemitism in online responses to a survey of attitudes to Jews and Israel

Author: Daniel Allington, University of Leicester (da225@le.ac.uk)

If you would like to share this text with others, please direct them to this web page:
http://www.danielallington.net/2018/03/hitler-denial-antisemitism-online-jews-israel/

Abstract

Discourse analytic research suggests that, in contemporary liberal democracies, complaints of racism are routinely rejected and prejudice may be both expressed and disavowed in the same breath. Historical and quantitative research has established that – both in democratic states and in those of the Soviet Bloc (while it existed) – antisemitism has long been related to or expressed in the form of statements about Israel or Zionism, permitting anti-Jewish attitudes to circulate under cover of political critique. This article looks at how the findings of a survey of anti-Jewish and anti-Israeli attitudes were rejected by users of three Facebook pages associated with the British Left. Through thematic discourse analysis, three recurrent repertoires are identified: firstly, what David Hirsh calls the 'Livingstone Formulation' (i.e. the argument that complaints of antisemitism are made in bad faith to protect Israel and/or attack the Left), secondly, accusations of flawed methodology similar to those with which UK Labour Party supporters routinely dismiss the findings of unfavourable opinion polls, and thirdly, the argument that, because certain classically antisemitic beliefs pertain to a supposed Jewish or 'Zionist' elite and not to Jews in general, they are not antisemitic. In one case, the latter repertoire facilitates virtually unopposed apologism for Adolf Hitler. Contextual evidence suggests that the dominance of such repertoires within one very large UK Labour Party-aligned group may be the result of action on the part of certain 'admins' or moderators. It is argued that awareness of the repertoires used to express and defend antisemitic attitudes should inform the design of quantitative research into the latter, and be taken account of in the formulation of policy measures aiming to restrict or counter hate speech (in social media and elsewhere).

Keywords: anti-Semitism; anti-Zionism; denial of racism; attitudes; Zionism; Israel; Jews; Labour Party; Facebook; social media

1 Introduction

Although antisemitism has historically exhibited markedly different traits from other forms of racism, all forms of racism have exhibited related adaptations to the anti-racist social norms of contemporary liberal democracy. Arising from a long-term investigation into social media use on the British Left, this article presents a qualitative analysis of interpretative repertoires (Lebzelter, 1978, Potter and Wetherell, 1987) mobilised in response to a report on contemporary British attitudes to Jews and Israel (Staetsky, 2017). It argues (a) that scholarship on what have been called 'the New Racism' (Barker, 1981) and 'the New Antisemitism' (Taguieff, 2004) provides a useful explanatory frame for much of the discourse in question insofar as both describe a situation in which prejudice is denied even as it is expressed, but (b) that the understanding of racism as prejudice against *all* members of a particular group makes it particularly easy to deny antisemitism, which is more typically expressed through insinuations about the supposedly disproportionate power of a Jewish or 'Zionist' *elite*.

The report that aroused the responses analysed below was based on survey research commissioned by the Community Security Trust and released on 13 September 2017 by the Institute for Jewish Policy Research. It received highly positive coverage in the conventional media, but was treated as a problem by some on the Left in online responses that ranged from attempts to misrepresent or downplay its findings to assertions that people agreeing with antisemitic statements should not be considered antisemitic because the statements are true. It is here argued that close attention to such assertions may help to inform both policy – by revealing the discursive loopholes that purveyors of hate speech may exploit – and future quantitative research – by elucidating ways in which attitudes are expressed without the pollster's prompting. However, it also argues that the online success of such repertoires may in at least some cases also be attributed to the deliberate technological exclusion of individuals inclined to oppose them – a problem which would require other remedies.

2 Antisemitism and the Left

As Bonefeld argues, 'Christian antisemitism… accused the "Jew" as the assassin of Jesus and a trafficker in money' but '[m]odern antisemitism uses and exploits these historical constructions and transforms them', nurturing paranoid fantasies of 'the "rootless and invisible" power of the destructive Jew' (2014: 209, 200). Thus, while the white racist looks upon non-white people as potential slaves, the anti-Semite looks upon Jews as a threat from which non-Jews must be protected (Bonefeld, 2014: 200): as Fine and Spencer write, Jews have been accused of damaging non-Jewish society through infliction upon it of 'economic harms' such as 'usury and financial manipulation', 'political harms' such as 'betrayal and conspiracy', and 'moral harms' such as 'greed and cunning' (2017: 2). The classic statement of modern antisemitism is the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion* (originally published 1903), which alleges that a secretive 'Zionist' elite is engaged in a conspiracy to control the world (see Cohn, 1967 for the international history of this proven forgery, and Lebzelter, 1978: 21-27 for further detail on the English-language edition). In a nutshell,

> antisemitism differs from other forms of racism because it uses conspiracy theories to claim that Jews are a powerful, controlling influence in society. Whereas racism tends to depict non-white people as dirty, poor, diseased, and even subhuman, antisemitism accords Jews massive power, wealth, political influence, and media control (Nazism did both, by comparing Jews to rats and vermin while also claiming that there was a global Jewish conspiracy).

What is sometimes described as the New Antisemitism, i.e. antisemitism since the founding of the State of Israel, is continuous with older forms of antisemitism in that conspiracy theory and the medieval 'blood libel' – the accusation of child murder by Jews – have become the defining themes of its discourse on Israel and Zionism (Hirsh, 2017: 206). Many examples of such discourse are provided in Jaspal's (2014) interviews with young Muslims in the UK. In the following, the final two sentences contradict the first by invoking Islamic and medieval European beliefs about *Jews* in order to justify a view of *Israelis* apparently derived from the representation of Zionists in the *Protocols*:

> Hating Jews is one thing and hating Israelis is another – they've got nothing to do with each other […] Israelis are a cruel, they're an evil group of people. They just want to get rich. Look all over the world and you can see them controlling it all, manipulating governments for their own selfish ends […] The Koran has warned of their betrayal […] Historically, they have been involved in murdering kids and innocent people, so it's nothing new now, is it?

> (quoted in Jaspal, 2014: 168, ellipses in original)

While antisemitism is popularly associated only with the Far Right, there exists a parallel tradition of left wing antisemitism – indeed, the word 'antisemitism' was coined by a left-wing antisemite, Wilhelm Marr (1880). There was a distinct strain of antisemitism within 19th century British anti-Imperial politics, and the USSR began to embrace anti-Zionist and anti-Jewish policies in the 1920s, becoming openly antisemitic in the last years of the Stalin regime (Rich, 2016: 199-203, Shindler, 2012: 73-76, 60-62, 140-141). From the end of World War II, the USSR tended to attack even anti-Zionist Jews as 'Zionists' because 'the parallels with Nazi Germany would have been too striking' had they been identified as 'Jews' (Laqueur, 2006: 175), and the Far Right also began to attack 'Zionists' as the alleged exploiters and fabricators of a supposed Holocaust myth (Lipstadt, 1993: 51, 55-98, 95), blurring distinctions between left- and right-wing antisemitism.

The contemporary Left defines itself as anti-imperialist, anti-colonialist, and anti-racist but typically views Jewish communities as 'white' and Israel as the 'forefront of the neo-colonial world order' – a conjunction which supports traditionally antisemitic 'fantasies of [Jewish] world domination' (Edthofer, 2015: 48). Left wing antisemitism has been much discussed since Jeremy Corbyn's 2015 election as leader of the Labour Party (see especially Fine and Spencer, 2017, Hirsh, 2017, Rich, 2016). Until that time, Corbyn had been a minor member of a small and somewhat marginal group of Labour Party representatives who 'combined an anti-American aversion to "Western imperialism" with a forthright, often polemical anti-Zionism' (Vaughan, 2013: 15). In early 2016, Ken Livingstone – a more prominent member of that group and a long-term ally of Corbyn – publicly claimed that Adolf Hitler had supported Zionism (Fisher, 2016a), and it was revealed that Jackie Walker, the then vice-chair of the pro-Corbyn campaigning organisation, Momentum and the partner of one of Corbyn's closest friends, had described Jews as 'major financiers of the slave trade' (Fisher, 2016b). In 2017, a vast pro-Corbyn banner was erected that attacked a rival politician by depicting her wearing Star of David earrings (Yong, 2017), and a Labour Conference fringe meeting heard calls to expel the Jewish Labour Movement and permit debate on 'the Holocaust, yes or no' (Morris, 2017: 8), prompting the UK Equality and Human Rights Commission to announce that 'the Labour Party needs to do more to establish that it is not a racist party' (Hilsenrath, 2017: n.p.). In 2018, independent researcher David Collier (2018) published evidence showing that Corbyn had been an active member of a secret Facebook group that promoted Holocaust denial and antisemitic conspiracy theories (although he was not one of the individuals posting such material there), and a former Chief Rabbi stated that he would not hold discussions with Corbyn until he saw 'clearer signs of resolute action by [the] party

and its leader' (Justin Cohen, 2018). Antisemitic social media discourse on the Corbyn-supporting Left has been the object of sustained attention from voluntary sector organisations such as the Community Security Trust (see e.g. CST, 2017) and the Campaign Against Antisemitism (see e.g. CAA, 2017), and is regularly exposed by the Twitter accounts @GnasherJew and @LabourAgainstAS.

3   Quantitative research on the relationship between anti-Jewish and anti-Israeli attitudes

There have been a number of quantitative studies investigating the relationship between anti-Jewish and anti-Israeli or anti-Zionist attitudes. The largest was carried out by Kaplan and Small (2006), who presented over 5000 respondents across Europe with anti-Israeli and anti-Jewish statements, and found agreement with to the former to predict agreement with the latter (for smaller studies with similar findings, see Florette Cohen *et al.*, 2009, Frindte *et al.*, 2005, Jaspal, 2015, Swami, 2012, Weinstein and Jackson, 2010). In Staetsky's (2017) study, whose reception is analysed here, used a sample of just over 4000 people in the UK, including booster samples from the Far Left, the Far Right, and the Muslim community. It found a strong correlation between anti-Israeli and anti-Jewish attitudes across all groups, with the anti-Jewish statement receiving most frequent agreement among those with strong anti-Israel attitudes being 'Jews exploit Holocaust victimhood for their own purposes' (assented to by 48% of that group; see Staetsky, 2017: 36).

Staetsky's research was positively covered in the UK national and London media, the English-language Israeli media, and the Anglo-Jewish media (see Dysch, 2017, Harpin, 2017, Kelner, 2017, May, 2017, Phillips, 2017, Philpot, 2017, Pollard, 2017, Strimpel, 2017). However, both the pro-Corbyn online tabloid *The Canary* and the website of the Israel-critical organisation, Jews for Justice for Palestinians, presented the research positively but reported it selectively in order to create the false impression that the finding was that only those on the political right were likely to be a problem for British Jews (see JFJFP, 2017, Micner, 2017). This was in effect a denial of racism.

4   Qualitative research on the denial of racism

Discourse analysts have argued that '[d]enial of racism… is a key feature of modern racism' (Nelson, 2013: 89) and provided a detailed account of the ways in which '[t]hose who wish to express negative views against out-groups' now 'take care to construct these views as justified, warranted and rational', in the process 'denying, mitigating, justifying and excusing negative acts and views towards minorities' (Augoustinos and Every, 2010: 252). It has been found that denials of racism often involve attempts to prevent racism being inferred from the expression of a negative attitude towards a particular group (van Dijk, 1987: 91), and may be made both on the speaker's own behalf and on behalf of 'absent others, including groups with which the speaker identifies' (Condor *et al.*, 2006: 459), as when white people deny the racism of white people or politicians reject the idea that the populations they represent might be racist (van Dijk, 1992: 89, van Dijk, 1993: 77, 82). This is what we appear to see in the left wing deflection of Staetsky's (2017) findings onto the Far Right alone.

5   Social media responses to the Institute for Jewish Policy Research survey

5.1   The data collection

During the longer term project from which this research emerges, it was observed that individual participants in left-wing social media spaces would often adopt far more extreme positions than

those taken by left-wing media outlets. When it came to responses to Staetksy's (2017) report, and to media reports of that report, this was again the case. Comments on three Facebook posts were collected, each from a page or group associated with a different organisation identified with the broad Left. Data were collected on 14 September, i.e. the day after the report's launch.

The first site of data collection belonged to Free Speech on Israel, and was selected because the latter had organised the notorious Labour Party conference fringe meeting discussed above. In autumn 2017, the Free Speech on Israel Facebook group (henceforth, FSOIfb) had just under two thousand members. The second site belonged to the anti-racist and anti-fascist advocacy organisation, HOPE not hate, and was chosen because it could be expected to provide a particularly hostile environment for *overt* expressions of racism. In autumn 2017, the HOPE not hate Facebook page (henceforth, HNHfb) had just under a quarter of a million followers. The third site was The Labour Party Forum (henceforth, TLPF), which appears to be the largest unofficial Labour Party group on Facebook, and was chosen because of its potential to reflect the views of rank-and-file Labour Party activists. In autumn 2017, TLPF had over 40 000 members.[1] (It is not to be confused with the separate Labour Party Forum, which has fewer members and no definite article.) FSOIfb and HNHfb are fully public; TLPF is technically 'closed', but with its tens of thousands of members cannot be considered a private space in any meaningful sense: the number of individuals with access to it vastly exceeds the circulation of most academic journals, for example. It has elsewhere been found that political Facebook groups tend to be characterised by opinionated but uninformative discussion that promotes increased political engagement whilst having no positive impact on political knowledge (Conroy *et al.*, 2010); although HNHfb deviated from this pattern in that it featured wall posts written to a relatively high journalistic standard, user comments in all three tended towards the emotive and the partisan, showing little appreciation of the complexities of modern racism and antisemitism, which were often portrayed as vices of which only the political Right could be guilty.

Comments collected from HNHfb were posted in response to the organisation's own report on the research (Khan-Ruf, 2017), a link to which was posted without additional text. Comments collected from FSOIfb were posted in response to the BBC's report (May, 2017), also shared without additional text. Comments collected from TLPF were posted in response to the same BBC article, but this had been shared with the following additional text, which from the outset positioned the research as problematic:

> Baffled (as usual)
>
> I take it that antisemitism is hatred of Jews for their Jewishness in some way. How, then, is the belief "Jews think they are better than other people" sufficient to be a manifestation of antisemitism?
>
> (TLPF)

In the discourse that arose on all three sites, the dominant position was one that rejected the research in its entirety. There follows a thematic discourse analysis (Clarke, 2005, Taylor and Ussher, 2001) of comments that rejected the research, seeking to identify the 'interpretive repertoires' – i.e. 'lexicon[s] or register[s] of terms and metaphors drawn upon to characterise and evaluate actions and events' (Potter and Wetherell, 1987: 138) – that were mobilised, to group them, and to relate

---

[1] I have some limited first-hand experience of interaction on TLPF, having briefly been a member of it while still a member of the Labour Party. (I received an instant lifetime ban for attempting to share a link to an article that was critical of Jeremy Corbyn and his supporters.)

them to patterns observed in scholarship on antisemitism and other forms of racism. Apparent expressions of Jew-hate that could not be grouped in this way (e.g. 'Zionists are vermin', HNHfb, or 'I studied Zionism at University and consider them the most conniving bastards on the planet', TLPF) were excluded. This analysis is followed by a closer study of how one of the repertoires was mobilised within one specific commenter's discourse, paying attention to sequential development of his argument and to the social and technological processes contributing to the manufacture of a 'left wing' social media space within which an apologist for Nazism could face so little opposition. Orthographic irregularities have been retained in quotations, and individuals' identifying details have been redacted.

5.2   Recurrent repertoires

5.2.1   Repertoire 1: the Livingstone Formulation

Anti-racism is often opposed on grounds of its supposed threat to free speech (Goodman, 2010: 12, Goodman and Burke, 2010: 337, van Dijk, 1992: 89, Wodak, 1992: 66); in the specific case of antisemitism, this opposition often alleges a threat to free speech on the subject of Israel, or to the free speech of the Left: a manoeuvre that Hirsh (2007: 54-58) dubs 'the Livingstone Formulation'. Many instances were observed, with eleven entirely unambiguous examples on HNHfb. The Livingstone Formulation has been extensively documented (see especially Hirsh, 2017: chapter 1); here it took forms such as the following:

> This post does what the Zionists always try to do, conceal criticism of Isreal behind a blanket of Antisemitism. (FSOIfb)

> I would love to debate with s Zionist why they hold the Palesinians hostage instead of working with them but the accusation of being a anti Semite prevents any discussion on Israel (HNHfb)

> unfortunately the Israeli right wing is seeing fit to weaponise Judaism to interfere in the workings of *our* Labour Party (TLPF)

The most extreme examples were seen on HNHfb. One HNHfb commenter extended the Livingstone Formulation to cover all accusations of conspiracy theorising ('anti Semite and conspiracy theory both words created to disregard the terror they inflict on humanity') and, when challenged, proceeded to lay out an antisemitic conspiracy theory ('I'm so happy world can see what the fuck.is really going on. Israeli secret intelligence service. = Isis'), subsequently doubling down with the old allegation of Jewish control over the media ('Secret is out despite your media control').

The argument that claims of antisemitism are made in bad faith was sometimes made without any specific reference to Israel (e.g. the following comment, which combined that argument with the myth of Turkic rather than Semitic ancestry for Ashkenazi Jews: 'anti-semite....the perennial cry of the Khazarian mongoloids', HNHfb; for more on such uses of the Khazar myth, see Collier, 2017a: 81, Collier, 2017b: 54). Where this occurred, it was not included in the above count. The general argument appeared to be that the research itself had been carried out in order to prevent criticism of Israel. This may have been the implication of the claim that 'their purposes and timing, around the time of the London Arms Fair, are painfully transparent' (HNHfb; this conspiracy theory was not counted as an instance of the Livingstone Formulation).

5.2.2   Repertoire 2: 'leading questions'

Some commenters derided the research as 'propoganda' (FSOIfb), '[c]omplete cobblers' (HNHfb), '[r]ubbish' (HNHfb), 'absolute tripe' (HNHfb), 'drivel' (HNHfb), or 'total bullshit' (HNHfb). Others

attacked it using technical vocabulary ('conflation', 'validity', 'unfounded assumptions', 'extrapolate'), but in doing so either misrepresented the analytic methodology (which treated agreement with anti-Jewish and anti-Israeli attitudes as separate variables, and therefore neither conflated them nor made assumptions about the relationship between them) or misused the terminology (there was no extrapolation involved):

> the conflation of Israel and Judaism in the survey suggests that the survey validity is weak (FSOIfb)

> Their research appears to have deliberately conflated the two. (FSOIfb, posted in reply to the comment 'Are we getting Anti-Semitic mixed up with Anti-Zionism?')

> unfounded assumptions that dislike of Israel means hatred of the Jewish people. (HNHfb)

> you can't extrapolate that from these statistics (HNHfb)

In a similar vein, one commenter alleged that 'The details reveal almost no anti Semitism but around 30% concerned with the direction of Israeli politics towards Palestine' (FSOIfb; in fact, what was found was 30% agreement with anti-Jewish statements that made no mention of Israel or Palestine). A number alleged that the survey questions were designed in order to *trick* respondents into providing answers that could be construed as antisemitic:

> It was designed to illicit responses ,that could be used politically (FSOIfb)

> A devious set of questions in the Questionnaire, resulting in plenty of phoney statistical responses! (FSOIfb)

> many of the questions it asked could be interpreted differently (HNHfb)

> full of loaded questions (HNHfb)

> it's a very misleading headline, which can be summed up as "We asked a bunch of overly generalised, leading questions, and then sensationalised the results to produce a shocking headline." (TLPF)

> As a former Senior Research Manager with one of the most respected social research organisations in the country, I would never have let any researcher get away with such leading questions. (TLPF)

This repertoire was not specific to the denial of racism and appeared to be a rehearsed response to quantitative research whose conclusions are found inconvenient: on TLPF, opinion polls suggesting that the Labour Party would not win a general election were routinely denounced as 'push polls' or as having asked 'leading questions'. However, while the 'leading questions' allegation was in the final quoted case above supported only with a vague and unsubstantiated claim of authority, the warrants provided for a number of others proved specific to the denial of antisemitism.

5.2.3   Repertoire 3: 'some Jews'

Several commenters explained what they thought was wrong with the survey questions – which was in most cases that the anti-Jewish statements with which respondents had been invited to agree or disagree were essentially true, but phrased in such a way as to make those agreeing with them seem racist rather than realist. This claim was also made by individuals who had *not* alleged that the survey questions were loaded. Here are some particularly clear examples:

> Agreeing that 'Jews use the holocaust for their own purposes' makes you anti-Semitic even though this is demonstrably so in the case of Israeli attacks on its critics and in jusification for its policies (FSOIfb)

> "Do Jews exploit holocaust victimhood for their own purposes". Some undoubtedly do as evidenced by Norman Finkelstein in his 'The Holocaust Industry'. But the question doesn't allow for 'some', it offers only 'Jews' as a whole. (FSOIfb)

> I for example believe that many ZIONISTS (not Jewish persons in general) play the "Holocaust victim card" a lot. (HNHfb)

> Questions like "do Jews use the holocaust to further their political goals" however only a moron would take to mean "Every single Jew ever". After all, not every Jew is in a position to do so. In fact the vast majority aren't. It's not asking about a genetic trait, it's asking about the actions of individuals, and a small group of individuals at that. That being Jewish people in political office. And do some of them use the holocaust, and accusations of holocaust sympathy or denial as a shield against political criticism? Yes. (HNHfb)

> Another question was "Do you believe that Jewish people have too much control in the media?". There are a small group of very influential people within the American media who happen to be Jewish, The anti-Palestinian bias in American media is grossly disproportionate to the rest of the world and controlling the undisputed narrative is most certainly a symptom of too much power distributed amongst too few. (HNHfb)

The argument that the anti-Jewish statements were essentially true can be related to a tactic used by Holocaust denier David Irving, who has argued that it cannot be antisemitic to assert 'that Churchill was paid by the Jews, that the Jews dragged Britain into the war, that many of the Communist regimes have been dominated by Jews subsequently, and that a great deal of control over the world is exercised by Jews' because these are simply 'four separate facts which happen to be true' (Evans, 2002: 144). The assertion of a true proposition cannot be evidence of bigotry: that is the commonplace idea to which the argument appeals. But Irving's assertions, like the statements used to assess levels of anti-Jewish and anti-Israeli opinion by Staetsky (2017), are false. Asserting the truth of false propositions about an ethnic group in order to deny the racism of those who agree with them is in itself an expression of racism.

In the above, this implication was ducked through insistence that those who hold such beliefs may hold them only in relation to *some* Jews, when true antisemitism would involve holding them in relation to *all* Jews. However, the implicit theory of racism as prejudice against *all* members of a group is incompatible with much of the racism that is directed against Jews: as we have seen, antisemitism since the publication of the *Protocols* has centred around allegations regarding an elite group that by definition cannot encompass every Jewish person (for example the 'Zionist billionaires' evoked by Far Right British politician Nick Griffin, 2013: 3). The dangers of this way of thinking became particularly apparent in the discourse of one particular TLPF member.

6   From defending the Left to defending Hitler: denial of antisemitism in sequence and in context

6.1   The triumph of denial

One of the two TLPF members who made repeated attempts to challenge the consensus view – here referred to as GM1 – mentioned Ken Livingstone's statements about Adolf Hitler and Zionism. This

prompted another group member – here referred to as GM2 – to defend first Livingstone ('What Ken Livingstone said, was factually correct') and then Hitler. GM2 was one of the most frequent contributors to TLPF: searching the forum for his name reveals 15 posts that he made in 2017, with an average of 34 and a maximum of 183 'likes' per post, as well as a great many very lengthy comments on his own and other members' posts, often with the manifest aim of arguing that statements perceived as antisemitic were true (as when made by Ken Livingstone and Jackie Walker) or possibly true (as when made by right-wing politician Nigel Farage). On this particular occasion, GM2 argued as follows:

> Hitlers hatred of Jewish people stems from Jews involvement in the global banking industry, and the use of usury which was allowed by Judaism, but banned by Catholics and Muslims.
>
> Basically the same reason that saw Jews kicked out of England By Edward I.
>
> The situation was escalated by the ant nazi boycott of 1933
> https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anti-Nazi_boycott_of_1933
>
> It was not the simplistic situation that we were taught in school where history is written by the victors. As I currently see it (always open to better info) Hitler had a valid argument against _some_ Jews, and it was the fact that he extrapolated it to all Jews which led to the horrific parts of history that came next.

In the above, both Nazi antisemitism and its medieval precursor are rationalised as an understandable response to Jewish involvement in banking and moneylending – much as in Far Left terrorist Ulrike Meinhof's argument that '[a]ntisemitism is really a hatred of capitalism' and that the Holocaust happened because '[f]inance capital and the banks, the hard core of the system of imperialism and capitalism, had turned the hatred of men against money and exploitation, and against the Jews' (Bonefeld, 2014: 205). But an argument even closer to that seen above had been made by one British Nazi-sympathiser as early as 1934, when the latter presented '[t]he way in which *a small number of Jews* had managed to gain control of [Germany]'s industrial, commercial, and intellectual resources' (emphasis added) as having 'caused' what he euphemistically called Hitler's 'grave misgivings' about Jews (Fry, 1934: 93). GM2 innovated with respect to these earlier apologists by presenting Hitler as a misunderstood figure ('history is written by the victors') and presenting the international boycott of German products that began in 1933 not as a *response* to the Hitler regime's escalating persecution of Jews but as a *provocation*. Crucially, he presented his views as supported by evidence and open to review – and thus as non-prejudiced, even though his 'info' was nothing more than propaganda.

GM1 responded 'Either way [NAME REDACTED] we agree the Jews were scapegoate[d]', to which GM2 replied as follows:

> I wouldn't phrase it that way, because in the same way that it's wrong to blame the Jews on mass for what Jewish Bankers did, you're basically letting Jewish Bankers off the hook by saying all Jews were scapegoats. You're over generalising in the opposite direction. Some of them genuinely were guilty of screwing over the general population of Germany, just as Bankers are guilty of screwing over the populations of the world today.
>
> […]
>
> […] there was a fundamental problem with Judaism allowing Jews to loan money at interest to non jews. Note, they knew this practice was dodgy, they didn't allow loans at interest between Jews. So Judaism as a whole took the blame... and that was categorically unfair on

those Jews who weren't involved, or simply didn't understand enough about the issue to appreciate how harmful what they were involved in could be to a society.

We wouldn't blame everyone who works in a bank (even the cleaners) today for the crimes of global banking, and likewise it was unreasonable to blame all Jews, or even all those Jews who worked in the finance industry. So I'd agree that huge numbers (the vast majority) of Jews suffered for something that wasn't their fault.

But that doesn't mean that all Jews were innocent of the charges laid at their door. Some of them actually had done what they were accused off. But most of them did a runner early on, and simply went and set up their banks in the US instead, leaving the rest of their creed to face the music.

This received the response: 'We do not see eye to eye. I will not discuss this further with you.' There followed several short exchanges between GM1 and GM2, at the end of which, GM2 wrote 'the problem you've got here, is that what I've just written is very factual.' What he had written was not, of course, factual; the real problem was that there was nobody present to support GM1 in disagreement with it. After GM2's triumphant finish, no comments were made on that particular sub-thread. The above-quoted discourse on Hitler and the Jews was thenceforth allowed to stand without further challenge. It was never deleted. GM2 was neither removed from nor censured by the group. As he wrote in his penultimate comment, which also received no answer, 'pmsl': an acronym for 'pissing myself laughing'. And well he might have laughed. To all appearances, he had 'won' the argument. His views had prevailed.

While Julius (2010: 449) argues that 'there have… always been leftists ready to find reasons to tolerate the Jew-hatred of others – say, as the primitive, spontaneous anti-capitalism of the masses', the argument that GM2 made went beyond that, positioning the Holocaust as retribution for Jewish misbehaviour. More disturbingly still, that argument was combined with the suggestion that the majority of those specific Jews who were in GM2's view 'guilty of screwing over the general population of Germany' and therefore implicitly *deserved* the treatment that Hitler meted out to Jews in general (the 'music' that others 'face[d]' in their place) were supposedly able to escape to the United States and therefore to join the ranks of the '[b]ankers [who] are guilty of screwing over the populations of the world today'. Holocaust survivors are thus presented as culpable for the murder of Holocaust victims, and indeed for further transgressions committed since that time. It is as Hirsh (2017: 58) writes: '[t]he Jews of the Holocaust still symbolise absolute powerlessness, the oppressed; but the Jews who survived the Holocaust, particularly those who found sanctuary in Israel or the US, fit better into another ready-made way of thinking about Jews: disproportionate power.' Jews – not *all* Jews, but *some* Jews – are blamed for the persecution of Jews, from 13th century England to Nazi-controlled Europe – and while it is allowed that *most* Jews have not deserved persecution, all that their worst persecutors are admitted to have been guilty of is 'extrapolat[ing]' a 'valid argument against _some_ Jews… to all Jews'. Moreover, it is the Jewish religion that is presented as being ultimately at fault, for permitting the lending of money at interest despite the supposed knowledge that this is somehow 'dodgy'. In other words, while GM2 does not advocate persecution of *all* Jews or suggest that *all* Jews are or have been moneylenders, he suggests that persecution of Jews is understandable because there is something *intrinsically Jewish* about moneylending (and therefore about capitalism) and thereby promotes the fundamentally antisemitic idea that antisemitism has a Jewish cause. It is this idea that underlies what Fine and Spencer (2017) call 'the Jewish Question'. There were other cases in the data where such causes seemed to be implied, e.g. in the vague accusation that 'They comb with a fine tooth comb looking for examples instead of looking inward to see why there might be a problem' (FSOIfb). But in the

above discourse, the idea that Jews, and not antisemites, are responsible for antisemitism was stated outright – in a manner fine-tuned for a left-wing audience.

6.2   Stage-managing the triumph of denial

Although GM2 was observed to make similar remarks to the above many times throughout the course of 2017, it took until 11 December for him to be banned from TLPF. This was done by agreement of two admins, here referred to as A1 and A2, in explicit response to GM2's comments on another group member's post about the previous day's firebomb attack on a synagogue in Gothenburg. In defence of a group member who appeared to blame the victims for this attack, GM2 had asked 'do you accept that if [NAME REDACTED]'s comment were phrased "politically correctly" there is some truth to it?' After this, GM2 had returned to the theme of his above-quoted discourse by arguing both that '_some_ Jews in Europe just took over a massive part of the global banking and monetary system' and that 'the Nazi's were just a poltical party, who became rather successful and a world power.... and oppressed others who opposed them' (ellipsis in original). This positioned the persecution of Jews by Nazis as response to supposed oppression of Nazis (or perhaps Germans or Europeans) by Jews: not by *all* Jews but by *some* Jews, i.e. those Jews who had allegedly attained disproportionate power through banking. A third admin – one of two to whom GM2 appealed for a second opinion and to whom I shall refer as A3 (the other did not make an appearance, perhaps not receiving the alert in time) – was unable to prevent GM2's expulsion (being outnumbered) but stated that she 'didn't see [him] make any anti semitic comments in this thread.'

On 14 December, A3 banned one of the individuals who had argued against GM2, here referred to as GM3. This could be viewed as retaliation against A1 and A2's action against GM2: on the same thread, another prominent Corbyn-supporting member of the forum who frequently interacted with A3 described GM2 as a 'brilliant debater who was booted out the other day' and warned her fellow members: 'Be careful what you say on this topic the admin is ready to pounce'. A3 banned GM3 on the grounds that he had 'liked' the comment 'Very happy news. Good to see Corbyn is distancing himself from antisemites' on an article about Jeremy Corbyn's distancing himself from the Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions campaign against Israel (for more on which, see Fine and Spencer, 2017: 123, Hirsh, 2017: chapter 4, Rich, 2016: 71-73) and that he had added the further comment 'It's important to show we don't tolerate racists.' These were the sorts of remarks that A3 – and A4, the admin who arrived to back her up with the words 'This waa [GM3]'s last chance. Never should have let him back in' – evidently found unacceptable, in contrast to GM2's (c.f. van Dijk's observation that '[a]ccusations of racism... tend to be seen as more serious infractions than racist attitudes or actions themselves' 1992: 89). It seems that this was one of the rare occasions on which the right thing to do was to disagree with Corbyn: A4's response had been the apparently more normative 'Terrible and misguided news.'

This provides a clue as to why GM1 and GM2's discussion unfolded as it did: the TLPF membership was effectively being purged of many of those who argued most effectively against the sorts of repertoires mobilised in the data we have seen, while those who mobilised such repertoires were protected. A1 and A2 were observed to remove group members for making antisemitic comments, but the likelihood of their becoming aware of any such behaviour was diminished with every expulsion of a group member inclined to report instances of antisemitism – whether to them or to the Labour Party (or indeed to the police). As Hirsh (2017: 37) observes, it is not those who express antisemitic attitudes but those who oppose them that the contemporary Left expels from the 'community of the good'.

7   Conclusion

Building both on research into antisemitism and on research into other forms of racism, this article has emphasised the continuities and divergences between the two bodies of scholarship, firstly through literature review and secondly through analysis of interpretive repertoires observed to be employed in three social media spaces identified with the British Left. It has argued that one of these repertoires is afforded particular power by the nature of contempory antisemitism: the folk theory of racism as an attitude expressed in the form of beliefs about *all* members of a particular group makes racism expressed in the form of beliefs about *elite* members of a group laughably easy to deny. If racist beliefs about Jews or 'Zionists' working in politics, the media, and – especially – finance are understood not to be racist because they apply not to the whole group, but only to those of its members who work in finance, politics, or the media, then it becomes socially acceptable to assert the truth of those beliefs. And if those beliefs are taken to be true, then, as we have seen, it becomes possible to position the supposed international conspiracy of elite Jews not as an antisemitic fantasy but as the root cause of Jew-hate, and thereby to present even those who have exhibited the most extreme animosity towards *all* Jews – for example, Adolf Hitler – as ultimately motivated by a rational desire for retribution against the guilty. Contextual evidence has been argued to suggest that, in at least one of the groups studied here, the expression of antisemitism was additionally protected by collective curation of the set of individuals permitted to speak (and, crucially, to report the speech of others to those who might be able to take action) on the part of some (although not all) of the admins. This gives some indication of one means by which a social media space can become an 'echo chamber', in the sense of a media environment in which an ideologically restricted set of discourses is reiterated, legitimated, and insulated from rebuttal (Jamieson and Cappella, 2010: chapter 5).

The power of what has here been analysed as the 'some Jews' repertoire has implications both for regulation of hate speech and for research design. If the idea that racial prejudices are racist only when articulated in relation to whole groups (*all* Jews) but not when articulated in relation to sub-groups (*some* Jews) can be invoked to justify the most extreme forms of racial persecution, then that is an idea that should be specifically disavowed in regulatory and legal definitions of hate speech. And if certain racial prejudices are most readily articulated in relation to specific sub-groups, then that should be acknowledged in the design of research into the distribution of such prejudices. For example, it may be that surveys of antisemitic attitudes would receive more informative answers if they asked not about 'Jews' in general but about 'some Jews', 'Jews in the media', 'Jews who hold political office', 'Jewish bankers', 'Zionist billionaires', or 'the Israel lobby'. Only through quantitative research can we learn the extent to which particular expressions meet with assent within particular populations – but qualitative research is necessary if we are to understand the linguistic forms by which particular attitudes are customarily expressed.

8   References

Augoustinos, M. and Every, D. (2010). Accusations and denials of racism: managing moral accountability in public discourse, *Discourse & Society*, **21**, 3: 251-256.

Barker, M. (1981). *The new racism: conservatives and the ideology of the tribe*. London: Junction Books.

Bonefeld, W. (2014). *Critical theory and the critique of political economy: on subversion and negative reason*. London: Bloomsbury Academic.

CAA (2017) *Antisemitism in political parties*. Campaign Against Antisemitism. https://antisemitism.uk/politics/

Clarke, V. (2005). 'We're all very liberal in our views': students' talk about lesbian and gay parenting, *Lesbian and Gay Parenting Review*, **6**, 1: 2-15.

Cohen, F., Jussim, L., Harber, K. D. and Bhasin, G. (2009). Modern anti-Semitism and anti-Israeli attitudes, *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, **97**, 2: 290-306.

Cohen, J. (2018), Lord Sacks: I wouldn't sit down with Corbyn until Labour tackles anti-Semitism: former Chief Rabbi exclusively tells Jewish News that the party's actions have not been 'consistent' with a zero tolerance approach to racism, Jewish News, 8 March, http://jewishnews.timesofisrael.com/lord-sacks-70-interview-corbyn/

Cohn, N. (1967). *Warrant for genocide: the myth of the Jewish world-conspiracy and the Protocols of the Elders of Zion*. London: Eyre & Spottiswoode.

Collier, D. (2017a), Jew hate and Holocaust denial in Scotland, Jewish Human Rights Watch, https://www.jhrw.com/single-post/JEWHATEHolocaustDenialInScotland

Collier, D. (2017b), The Palestine Solidarity Campaign: delegating hate,

Collier, D. (2018), Exclusive: Jeremy Corbyn with hard-core antisemites, say what about the Mavi Marmara?, Beyond the Great Divide, 7 March, http://david-collier.com/exclusive-corbyn-antisemitism/

Condor, S., Figgou, L., Abell, J., Gibson, S. and Stevenson, C. (2006). 'They're not racist...': prejudice denial, mitigation and suppression in dialogue, *British Journal of Social Psychology*, **45**, 441-462.

Conroy, M., Feezell, J. T. and Guerrero, M. (2010). Facebook and political engagement: a study of online political group membership and offline political engagement, *Computers in Human Behaviour*, **28**, 1535-1546.

CST (2017), Antisemitic discourse in Britain, 2016, Community Security Trust,

Dysch, M. (2017), Report reveals the complex nature of antisemitism in the UK, Jewish Chronicle, 12 September 2017, https://www.thejc.com/news/uk-news/report-reveals-the-complex-nature-of-antisemitism-in-the-uk-1.444174

Edthofer, J. (2015). Israel as neo-colonial signifier? Challenging de-colonial anti-Zionism, *Journal for the Study of Antisemitism*, **7**, 31-51.

Evans, R. J. (2002). *Telling lies about Hitler: the Holocaust, history, and the David Irving trial*. London: Verso.

Fine, R. and Spencer, P. (2017). *Antisemitism and the Left: on the return of the Jewish question*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.

Fisher, L. (2016a), Livingstone labelled a pin-up for prejudice, The Times, 2, 15 June, 21,

Fisher, L. (2016b), Momentum set to expel chief in antisemitism row, The Times, 1, 1 October, 36,

Frindte, W., Wettig, S. and Wammetsberger, D. (2005). Old and new anti-Semitic attitudes in the context of authoritarianism and social dominance orientation: two studies in Germany, *Peace and conflict: journal of peace psychology*, **11**, 3: 239-266.

Fry, M. (1934). *Hitler's wonderland*. London: John Murray.

Goodman, S. (2010). 'It's not racist to impose limits on immigration': constructing the boundaries of racism in the asylum and immigration debate, *Critical Approaches to Discourse Analysis across Disciplines*, **4**, 1: 1-17.

Goodman, S. and Burke, S. (2010). 'Oh you don't want asylum seekers, oh you're just racist': a discursive analysis of discussions about whether it's racist to oppose asylum seeking, *Discourse & Society*, **21**, 3: 325-340.

Griffin, N. (2013), What lies behind the English Defence League? Neo-cons, ultra-Zionists, and their useful idiots, British National Party, 29 May

Harpin, L. (2017), JPR report: those considering themselves to be most left-wing have strongest anti-Israel attitudes Jewish Chronicle, 13 September, https://www.thejc.com/news/uk-news/jpr-report-those-considering-themselves-to-be-most-left-wing-have-strongest-anti-israel-attitudes-1.444233

Hilsenrath, R. (2017), @EHRC (Equality and Human Rights Commission official Twitter account), 26 September, https://twitter.com/EHRC/status/912611809613553665/photo/1

Hirsh, D. (2007). *Anti-Zionism and antisemitism: cosmopolitan reflections*. New Haven: Yale Initiative for the Interdisciplinary Study of Antisemitism.

Hirsh, D. (2017). *Contemporary Left antisemitism*. Abingdon: Routledge.

Jamieson, K. H. and Cappella, J. N. (2010). *Echo chamber: Rush Limbaugh and the conversative media establishment*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Jaspal, R. (2014). *Antisemitism and anti-Zionism: representation, cognition, and everyday talk*. Abingdon: Routledge.

Jaspal, R. (2015). Antisemitism and anti-Zionism in Iran: the effects of identity, threat, and political threat, *Contemporary Jewry*, **35**, 211-235.

JFJFP (2017), This week's postings@JfJfP.com, Jews for Justice for Palestinians, 17 September http://jfjfp.com/?p=95102

Julius, A. (2010). *Trials of the diaspora: a history of anti-Semitism in England*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Kaplan, E. H. and Small, C. A. (2006). Anti-Israel sentiment predicts anti-Semitism in Europe, *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, **50**, 4: 548-561.

Kelner, S. (2017), Low levels of anti-Semitism in Britain? I'm still vigilant, i, 22,

Khan-Ruf, S. (2017), Study shows nearly one in three Britons hold 'antisemitic views', HOPE not hate, 14 September, http://www.hopenothate.org.uk/2017/09/14/study-shows-nearly-one-three-britons-hold-antisemitic-views/

Laqueur, W. (2006). *The changing face of anti-Semitism: from ancient times to the present day*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Lebzelter, G. C. (1978). *Political Anti-Semitism in England, 1918-1939*. Basingstoke: Macmillan.

Lipstadt, D. (1993). *Denying the Holocaust: the growing assault on truth and memory*. New York / Oxford / Singapore / Sydney: Free Press / Maxwell Macmillan International.

Marr, W. (1880). *Der Weg zum Siege des Germanenthums über das Judenthum* Berlin: Otto Henkes Verlag.

May, C. (2017), Over a quarter of British people 'hold anti-Semitic attitudes', study finds, BBC News, 13 September, http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-41241353

Micner, T. (2017), The level of antisemitism in Britain has been exposed. But it's not what you might think., The Canary, 13 September, https://www.thecanary.co/uk/2017/09/13/level-antisemitism-britain-exposed-not-might-think/

Morris, N. (2017), New anti-Semitism row prompts calls for tougher action, i, 1, 27 September, 8,

Nelson, J. K. (2013). Denial of racism and its implications for local action, *Discourse & Society*, **24**, 1: 89-109.

Phillips, M. (2017), Britain's alarming antisemitism problem, Jerusalem Post, 15 September, 19,

Philpot, R. (2017), Devastating UK survey finds half of Britons agree with anti-Israel statements, Times of Israel, Online edition, 12 September 2017, https://www.timesofisrael.com/devastating-uk-survey-finds-half-of-britons-agree-with-anti-israel-statements/

Pollard, S. (2017), Anti-Zionism often masks Jew-hating, whatever the hard Left may argue, Daily Telegraph, Online edition, 13 September, http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2017/09/13/anti-zionism-often-masks-jew-hating-whatever-hard-left-may-argue/

Potter, J. and Wetherell, M. (1987). *Discourse and social psychology: beyond attitudes and behaviour*. London / Beverly Hills / New Delhi: SAGE.

Rich, D. (2016). *The Left's Jewish problem: Jeremy Corbyn, Israel and anti-Semitism*. Biteback Publishing.

Shindler, C. (2012). *Israel and the European Left: between solidarity and delegitimisation*. London / New York: Continuum.

Staetsky, L. D. (2017), Antisemitism in contemporary Great Britain: a study of attitudes towards Jews and Israel, Institute for Jewish Policy Research, 13 September

Strimpel, Z. (2017), Why, for the hard Left, Israel remains the source of all evil, Daily Telegraph, Online edition, 16 September, http://www.telegraph.co.uk/women/politics/hard-left-israel-remains-source-evil/

Swami, V. (2012). Social psychological origins of conspiracy theories: the case of the Jewish conspiracy theory in Malaysia, *Frontiers in Psychology*, **3**, August: 1-9.

Taguieff, P.-A. (2004). *Rising from the much: the new anti-semitism in Europe*. Chicago: Ivan R. Dee.

Taylor, G. W. and Ussher, J. M. (2001). Making sense of S&M: a discourse analytic account, *Sexualities*, **4**, 3: 293-314.

van Dijk, T. (1987). *Communicating racism: ethnic prejudice in thought and talk*. Newbury Park / London / New Delhi: SAGE Publications.

van Dijk, T. (1992). Discourse and the denial of racism, *Discourse & Society*, **3**, 1: 87-118.

van Dijk, T. (1993). *Elite discourse and racism*. Newbury Park / London / New Delhi: SAGE Publications.

Vaughan, J. R. (2013). 'Keep left for Israel': Tribune, Zionism, and the Middle East, 1937-1967, *Contemporary British History*, **27**, 1: 1-21.

Weinstein, L. and Jackson, C. (2010). College student antisemitism and anti-Israeli sentiment, *College Student Journal*, **44**, 2: 565-567.

Wodak, R. (1992). Turning the tables: antisemitic discourse in post-war Austria, *Discourse & Society*, **2**, 1: 65-83.

Yong, M. (2017), Bear Pit banner showing Theresa May wearing Star of David earrings slammed as anti-Semitic, Bristol Post, Online edition, 6 June, http://www.bristolpost.co.uk/news/bristol-news/bear-pit-banner-showing-theresa-94646