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SUB-REPORT COMMISSIONED
TO ASSIST THE ALL-PARTY
PARLIAMENTARY INQUIRY
INTO ANTISEMITISM

50 DAYS IN THE SUMMER: GAZA,
POLITICAL PROTEST AND
ANTISEMITISM IN THE UK

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50 days in the summer: Gaza, political protest and antisemitism in the UK

A sub-report for the All-Party Parliamentary Inquiry Into Antisemitism

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On 12 June 2014, three Israeli teenagers were abducted in the West Bank, against a backdrop of heightened tension between the Israeli state and Palestinian forces, including a renewal of settlement-building in the West Bank and East Jerusalem. The abduction was followed by days of escalating violence, including a massive Israeli policing operation in the West Bank, the murder of a Palestinian teenager after the bodies of the kidnapped Israelis were found, and increasing numbers of rockets fired from Gaza into Israel. A series of Israeli air strikes on targets in Gaza on the night of 30 June-1 July marked the start of sustained Israel's military engagement, and Operation Protective Edge was launched on 8 July, comprising initially of airstrikes on targets associated with rocket fire (with around 200 people killed in the strikes), followed by ground engagement a week later. De-escalation began on 3 August, with Israel withdrawing ground troops from Gaza, and an open-ended ceasefire concluded this round of the conflict on 26 August. In total, over 2100 Palestinians were killed (with estimates of civilians ranging between 50% and 76% of the losses), along with 66 Israeli combatants, 5 Israeli civilians and 1 Thai national.

There were demonstrations against Israel's prosecution of the conflict across the world, including several in the UK, as well as other manifestations of protest, such as public calls for and acts of boycott, divestment and sanctions against Israel. There were some reports of antisemitic content in some of these demonstrations, against a broader context in which antisemitic incidents spiked dramatically. Over 130 antisemitic were recorded by the Community Security Trust (CST) in July, making it the highest monthly total since January 2009 (a previous period of war in Gaza and Israel's Operation Cast Lead).

This short report examines the 2014 protests, exploring the extent and degree of antisemitism in the anti-Israel protests, as well as the reporting of this antisemitism and its impact on the Jewish community. It focuses in particular on the 50 days of Operation Protective Edge.

The research questions which this report attempts to address are:

- What were the predominant discourses in the UK protests relating to Operation Protective Edge?
- Were antisemitic discourses present? If so, how prevalent were they?
- Are UK protests relating to Operation Protective Edge comparable in scale and in discourse to protests relating to other conflicts?
- How do these issues relate to mainstream and Jewish media reporting on the conflict and on the demonstrations?
- How do these issues and their media representation affect Jewish feelings about antisemitism?

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1. Defining antisemitism

Before proceeding, it is worth briefly describing how the term “antisemitism” is used in this report. Broadly, antisemitism is hostility to Jews as Jews. This can include antisemitic *attitudes or prejudices*, subjectively held about Jews. I have avoided commenting on this element of antisemitism in this report, as such attitudes are difficult if not impossible to demonstrate clearly beyond a handful of ideologically committed antisemites, usually associated with far right movements. Second, we can include antisemitic *discourse and themes*, patterns of speech and representation which have historically expressed hostility to Jews as Jews, an institutionally or culturally embedded repertoire on which members of our society draw whether consciously or not in representing Jews. Third, we can include antisemitic *actions or incidents*, in which hostility to Jews as Jews is expressed in acts of verbal or physical violence towards targets perceived as Jews. It is discourses and incidents on which this report concentrates, as these can be more readily identified empirically. Finally, we should also note *subjective experiences of antisemitism*, the hurt experienced by Jews in perceiving speech or incidents to be directed at them as Jews. This report does not focus on subjective experiences of antisemitism, although in the final section it offers some conclusions on why we need to take these seriously.

The importance of context in determining antisemitism

Before describing antisemitic messages in anti-Israel activism, there is a key qualification that needs to be highlighted: the importance of *context* in determining which messages are antisemitic. A word or image might be racist in one context but not another. This principle is well established in British case law around racially aggravated crimes. For instance, in the case *Director of Public Prosecutions v M* 2004, the Divisional Court held that the phrase “bloody foreigners” could, depending on the context, demonstrate hostility to a racial group”. This was cited in *Rogers vs Regina* 2007, when one of the judges, Baroness Hale, said: “The context will illuminate what the conduct shows.”¹ For example, the word “Zionist” means something very different in the name of the Zionist Federation than if a BNP member was to walk into a synagogue and shouts “Kill the Zionists”. This qualification was highlighted in the EUMC Working Definition of antisemitism of 2005, which lists a series of phenomena which, “taking into account the overall context”, could be seen as instances of antisemitism.² This emphasis on context is taken seriously by the CST as it monitors antisemitic incidents:

The hatred is showing clear trends. Shouting “Free Gaza” on a pro-Palestinian demonstration is not antisemitic: but obviously is when yelled at a random Jew in the street, or when daubed on a synagogue wall. The same goes for screams of “child murderer”, shouted at Jews or pinned on a synagogue.³

Context matters: protesting Palestine, targeting kosher delis and synagogues

Three very clear examples of why context matters as much as content in determining antisemitism occurred during the Gaza conflict. On August 20, there was an incident in Bushey Heath relating to a group of marchers, in one report connected to a Socialist Workers Party youth march for jobs. In one report, a Palestinian flag was produced outside a kosher deli; in another report the flag was produced outside a synagogue.⁴ Clearly, a Palestinian flag is a symbol of Palestinian national self-determination, and not in any way antisemitic. The presence of the same flag at a protest at the Israeli embassy in Kensington would be uncontroversial. But if it was brought out in front of a kosher deli or synagogue, then its meaning changes with the context: a synagogue or a kosher deli represents Jews as Jews, and not Israel.

A second example was in early August (shortly after an anti-Israel demonstration in nearby Brighton), when Hove Synagogue was daubed with the graffiti slogan “Free Gaza”.⁵ Again, “Free Gaza” is a valid and legitimate expression, and if the graffiti was found on the Israeli embassy would be an act of protest against Israeli actions. However, by targeting a synagogue, which represents Jews as Jews and not Israel, its meaning becomes different. Here, it is either attributing responsibility for violence in Gaza to British Jews, or it is designed to offend British Jews, or both: it is unambiguously antisemitic. Around the same weekend, a note saying “Child murderers” was attached to the door of Kingston, Surbiton and District Synagogue in Surrey.⁶ Here, the message, potentially legitimate criticism if directed at Israel, changing due to its location (is it an accusation against the synagogue?), but, as with Hove, the context makes its meaning unambiguously antisemitic once it targets a synagogue.

Unacceptable speech versus illegal speech

A second important qualification is that not all incidents of antisemitic speech to be discussed here constitute forms of expression that are or should be illegal. Designating speech offensive, racist or morally or politically problematic is not the same as suggesting it should be illegal. Arguably, a securitised crime prevention emphasis can obscure a discussion of more common, more ambiguous and less conscious forms of racism which are wired into mainstream British culture. Many of the instances described below are not clear-cut, but it is helpful to discuss them openly as a step towards understanding and politically combating racism.

2. Protesting Israel’s actions

There were a series of protests against Israel’s actions during the 50 days of 2014’s conflict. Weekly from 12 July, protestors marched in central London, either to or from the Israeli embassy. The demonstrations were organised by a coalition of organisations, usually left-wing or Islamic or, most typically, both. These include the Stop the War Coalition (StWC), Palestine Solidarity Campaign (PSC), Palestine Forum in Britain (PFB), Friends of Al-Aqsa (FOA), Campaign Against Nuclear Disarmament (CND) and British Muslim Initiative (BMI). Police figures for the marches were consistently over 10,000, with organisers claiming several tens of thousands and even over 100,000. There were also protests against the way in which the BBC reported the conflict, including 2 July in London, and counter-demonstrations against Israel solidarity demonstrations, such as 20 July in London. There were demonstrations, too, in major provincial towns, such as Liverpool.

Alongside these public demonstrations were other acts of protest, including renewed calls to boycott Israel, direct action to implement boycotts, and acts of boycott. Some examples included: demonstrations outside John Lewis in May to protest its stocking of SodaStream products due to the latter’s presence in the West Bank, a 15 June protest outside BAFTA against Israeli-sponsored film festival SERET 2014, pickets outside Israeli-linked businesses such as Barclays, Tesco and Marks & Spencer in July and August, a boycott motion to the National Union of Students, the picketing and then cancellation of an Israeli independent theatre production at the Edinburgh Fringe⁷ and, most controversially, the Tricycle Theatre’s decision not to host a Jewish film festival due to Israeli funding, discussed below.

Messages present in protests about Israel

As with most protests and most political social movements, UK activism against Israel's actions is heterogeneous, involving a range of actors who have diverse motivations and views. Consequently, a range of messages were present at the summer 2014 protests.

We can get a good picture of these messages from the archive of Demotix, an online website for citizen photojournalists, which has particularly strong coverage of protests and demonstrations in the UK. This archive includes 311 stories and 5776 images of Israel related demonstrations in 2014. Of these, the majority were from London, with others in Belfast, Manchester, Brighton, Glasgow, Liverpool, Birmingham and Edinburgh.

Analysing these images, it is immediately clear that the overwhelming majority of messages present at these protests (including the messages promoted by the demonstration organisers) were *not* antisemitic. Typical messages included:

- "Free Palestine: End Israeli Occupation" (Palestine Solidarity Campaign)
- "End Israeli's attacks on Gaza" (Palestine Solidarity Campaign)
- "Gaza: End the occupation" (Stop the War Coalition)
- "Gaza: End the siege" (Stop the War Coalition)
- "Gaza: Stop the massacre" (Stop the War Coalition, in August)
- "We will not forget you Gaza" (Palestine Forum in Britain)
- "Free Palestine: End military occupation" (Palestine Forum in Britain)
- "Freedom for Palestine" (Socialist Workers Party)

These messages were completely visually dominant in the demonstrations, with organisers producing and distributing large numbers of placards to marchers. However, while these non-antisemitic messages were predominant in the demonstrations, there were also a number of incidents of messages with some antisemitic content, particularly among hand-made placards brought by individual protestors, as the next section will describe.

3. Antisemitic discourses and impacts in anti-Israel protests

With qualifications about context and about the distinction between unacceptable speech and illegal speech foregrounded, and noting that the overwhelming majority of messages circulating in anti-Israel protest in 2014 were *not* antisemitic, we turn now to instances where they were. We will focus on five antisemitic themes most clearly instanced: variations on the historic blood libel, malicious uses of Holocaust comparison, attributions of Jewish collective responsibility or dual loyalty, and images of Jewish power.

Variations on blood libel, focusing on Israeli "child murder"

A significant percentage of the casualties of the 2104 Gaza conflict were children: around 500 among the more than 2000 dead. Images of dead or injured children were prominent in protest discourse in this period. For instance, several banners at anti-Israel demonstrations in July 2014 portrayed images of Palestinian children killed in Israeli air strikes,⁸ as well as images of splattered blood or bloodied hands.⁹ At the London 21 July demo, one banner read "Al-Assad=Israel Both of them kill children",¹⁰ at the London August demonstration a protestor carried a bloodied bundle representing a slaughtered child;¹¹ and at a Cambridge demonstration at the end of August one banner read "Submit to servitude or we murder your children: Israel's 'democracy'".¹² Images of bloodied children and accusations of child murder featured prominently in social media discourse during the conflict, including in many of the hundreds of thousands of images circulating under the #GazaUnderAttack hashtag in July.¹³

It is clearly not in itself antisemitic to accuse Israel of targeting children or to draw attention to the high numbers of child casualties of the conflict. However, the prevalence of these images, and in particular the emphasis on blood, does mean that these images can evoke the historical “blood libel” against Jews – the accusation, deeply embedded in European Christian antisemitism, that Jews murder gentile children to use their blood for ritual purposes. In particular, British Jews, sensitive to the use of the blood libel in triggering pogroms historically, may be likely to experience accusations of child murder through this lens. Among the antisemitic incidents tracked by the CST in this period, variants of the blood libel appear. In July, for instance, “Baby murderers” was shouted at a synagogue in Liverpool, and we have already seen the example of “Child murderers” pinned to Kingston synagogue; in these examples, the targeting of a synagogue (as a symbol of Jews rather than of Israel) draws out how the child murder allegation can be used (and certainly experienced) in antisemitic ways.

Jewish collective responsibility/dual loyalty

Two related themes that have been central to modern antisemitism are collective responsibility and dual loyalty. “Collective responsibility” is the holding responsible of all Jews, as Jews, for the actions of some Jews or of the Jewish state – a feature common to other forms of modern racism too, including anti-Muslim racism which holds all Muslims responsible for Islamist terrorism. “Dual loyalty” is the accusation that Jews are insufficiently loyal to the nation-state within which they dwell, as they are also loyal (or more loyal) to the Jewish nation or, today, to the Jewish state of Israel – again, an accusation which has parallels for other diasporic minorities in modern nation-states. Such accusations held against Jews are antisemitic in that they target Jews as Jews

Discourses of Jewish collective responsibility for Israel’s actions or of British Jews’ dual loyalty to Israel and the UK were not prominent at the demonstrations themselves. There were some particularly striking examples where demonstrators turned on visible Jews in proximity to marches, as with these two incidents reported to the CST:

Demonstrators on a march through central London assaulted and verbally abused a Jewish woman who expressed her support for Israel as they walked past. Marchers surrounded her, called her a “Jew Zionist” and stole her phone. Later the same afternoon, demonstrators from the same march verbally abused another Jewish woman who was with her two young children, telling them to “Burn in hell.”¹⁴

Such discourses also circulated in relation to the demonstrations, in the media and in social media. One clear example was in the aftermath of an antisemitic graffiti attack on Hove synagogue discussed elsewhere in this report. Local media reported a “spokesman for the Brighton and Hove Palestine Solidarity campaign” as saying

The real issue here is that there needs to be a political solution to the occupation of Gaza and the West Bank. We would like the members of the Brighton Jewish community who do not agree with Israel’s policies to stand up – as 150 in Brooklyn did the other day, and many others have done - to show that there is not a divide between Jews and non-Jews.¹⁵

In these reported comments, the PSC spokesperson is calling upon British Jews, with no connection to the conflict, to “stand up” and disassociate themselves from Israel, implying some responsibility for its actions; it is a demand to show they are good, loyal Jews. Experience of this kind of injunction – which positions the minority as fundamentally other to the British mainstream – is familiar to British Muslims, and is a clear instance of the discourses of collective responsibility and dual loyalty that have a long history in racist expression.

Holocaust comparison

According to the CST,

101 antisemitic incidents [out of the 302] recorded in July involved the use of language or imagery relating to the Holocaust, of which 25 showed evidence of far right political motivation or beliefs. More commonly, reference to Hitler or the Holocaust was used to taunt or offend Jews, often in relation to events in Israel and Gaza, such as via the twitter hashtag #HitlerWasRight.¹⁶

This kind of discourse was part of a continuum of expressions emphasising the Holocaust within protests on the street. At the 12 July demonstration, hand-made banners included “Rabid evil mass murderer Hitlers clone [sic]” and “Stop the Palestinian Holocaust now – Fascist Israel will not escape justice.”¹⁷ A hand-made banner at a July demonstration read “Save Gaza!!! Hitler you were right!; another read “Genocide Apartheid Holocaust 2014. ☆ Baby Killers”.¹⁸ At the 12 July demonstration, veteran far right activist and David Irving associate James Thring was pictured in a T-shirt reading “Auschwitz Iraq Dachau Palestine” and a banner reading “Holocaust of Gaza”.¹⁹ In August 2014, film footage was posted on YouTube of protestors in London making comments such as “I’m not condoning Hitler’s actions at all, but I think it’s even worse perhaps”, “Hitler probably had more mercy”, “If you look at the Warsaw Ghetto, this is identical” and “What they’re doing is no different”.²⁰

These discourses spill into mainstream discourse too. For instance, in September a Liberal Democrat councillor in Cambridge argued that, as “a critical step to keep fresh the moral intensity of our revulsion for acts of genocide”, the Holocaust Memorial Day event in the city should “include testimony from the people of Gaza”.²¹ Why are these sorts of statements antisemitic in the specific context of an anti-Israel demonstration? The Holocaust comparison – rarely if ever used in demonstrations against other states or conflicts – is manifestly false in terms of the reality of the two situations. The same is true of images of Hitler or of swastikas, which are rarely if ever used in demonstrations against other conflicts, despite the manifest asymmetry between Hitler’s actions and Israel’s. The sheer disproportion in the comparison itself belittles the enormity of the Shoah.

Given the number of instances of violence and bloodshed in human history, including those in which the British state has been involved, to single out Hitler and the Holocaust as the frame for understanding the actions of the Jewish state is not neutral. The centrality of Hitler and the Holocaust to modern Jewish experience is significant in judging whether such analogies are appropriate. Many of these examples can be understood as examples of “Holocaust inversion”, the turning of the Holocaust against its victims. As Lesley Klaff writes, “What has been called ‘Holocaust Inversion’ involves an *inversion of reality* (the Israelis are cast as the ‘new’ Nazis and the Palestinians as the ‘new’ Jews), and an *inversion of morality* (the Holocaust is presented as a moral lesson for, or even a moral indictment of ‘the Jews’).”²² At times, it may be intentional on the part of protestors, knowing that the comparison will be experienced as hurtful and inflammatory to Jewish spectators. Klaff notes that the Shoah “is now being used, instrumentally, as a means to express animosity towards the homeland of the Jews.”²³ As the CST’s Dave Rich has written, “it plays on Jewish sensibilities in order to provoke a reaction. Another word for that is Jew-baiting.”²⁴ But, even where it is not intentional, it is experienced as hurtful by British Jews, for whom the Holocaust is a part of the community’s (and often of Jewish families’) living memory.

Images of an all-powerful “Jewish lobby”

Accusations of Jewish power, often understood as tentacular, hidden power, have been a staple of modern antisemitism. Images of shadowy Jewish omnipotence, circulated for example in the notorious forgery *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, were central to Nazi antisemitism and later to Soviet antisemitism.

A small number of banners at anti-Israel demonstrations featured imagery of Jewish power. For instance, the 23 August London protest had one banner in which a large hand from outside the frame pushes a blue Star of David into an image of David Cameron and the House of Commons, with the slogan "Complicit in genocide"; an accompanying banner read "David Cameron Zionist – Shame on you".²⁵ Again, this discourse spills into the mainstream. Comedian Alexei Sayle, interviewed in July, claimed that

[Israel] is a state that is endlessly again indulged by the power, by Western powers, by governments everywhere because they're frightened of it, frightened of it physically in some ways and of its kind of anger and of the power that it wields and its influence.²⁶

Claims about Israeli power are not in themselves antisemitic, but when they draw on the repertoire of discourses associated with hidden Jewish power, as in these instances, they can be seen as mimetically perpetuating classic tropes of hostility to the figure of the Jew.

Spillovers from BDS actions to antisemitic incidents

I have already noted boycott activities against outlets for Israeli products promoted by the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) movement closely linked to most of the main anti-Israel organisations in the UK. These activities include pickets of these outlets, which are clearly a legitimate form of political protest, although they may contribute to feelings of insecurity, of being under attack, for Jewish employees and customers of the businesses targeted. As well as pickets, however, are instances of direct action which are more ambiguous, and beyond these examples of threats and harassment which clearly exceed democratic protest.

For instance, in July it was reported that police in Manchester were investigating threats made to Kedem, a shop selling Israeli cosmetics:

Kedem, in Manchester, reported phone calls, at one point every five minutes, from callers threatening to burn down the shop, beat up or kill staff... a man told a Kedem employee: "You would be wiped out right now... if [your owner] puts more videos on Facebook I will f*** him up... I will kill you with it." Another man calls to say "I will burn your shop down" and in a separate post to the shop's Facebook page, a pro-Palestinian campaigner wrote of the store's owners "I hope he burns in hell like the rest of the Jews."²⁷

Although such direct action would not be endorsed by most proponents of BDS, it is significant that the same shops were targeted in the same period by protestors. The *Jewish Chronicle* reported that "The store has been the scene of daily fierce protests by anti-Israel campaigners, six of whom have been arrested during tense stand-offs with pro-Israel supporters over the Gaza conflict."²⁸

Some of the supermarket protests did include antisemitic incidents. The CST reported that "We have seen protestors claiming that all UK supermarkets are owned by Jews".²⁹ In August, demonstrations targeted Tesco stores in Rochdale, Sale, Luton and Blackburn as well as Hodge Hill, Birmingham. In Birmingham, up to 100 protestors entered the store, removing Israeli items from shelves and throwing it around the store; due to the level of aggression on the protest, police were called and one protestor arrested for assaulting a police officer.³⁰ Although in the Manchester and Birmingham incidents the threats did not explicitly target the store or its employees as Jews, the intensity of the antagonism and the context within a significant spike in antisemitic incidents likely contributed to a sense of Jewish insecurity.

Circulation of discourses and activists across ideological lines

One feature of antisemitism which has become increasingly apparent since the start of the Second Intifada in 2000 (and sometimes described as one of the hallmarks of a “new antisemitism”) is the cross-pollination between different ideological traditions around hostility towards Israel. This cross-fertilisation is bi-directional: far right antisemitic movements increasingly borrow the language of anti-Zionism as a cover for their racism, and far right antisemitic ideas have in turn increasingly gained traction amongst anti-Zionists. For example, as seen above, anti-Zionists have taken up the old Christian antisemitic “blood libel” myth that Jews use the blood of non-Jewish children in their rituals, while neo-Nazis have taken up ideas from the anti-Zionist movement, such as the idea of an all-powerful “Israel lobby”.

The shading into each other of these different discourses can be seen in a number of incidents tracked by the CST in this period. To give just one instance, a Rabbi walking in north London was verbally abused by a group of youths who shouted “Free Palestine”, “F*** the Zionists”, “F*** the Jews” and “Allah Akhbar”; here, legitimate expressions of anti-Israel sentiment (“Free Palestine”) take on a different meaning alongside more ambiguous expressions (“F*** the Zionists”) and outright antisemitic expressions (“F*** the Jews”).

We can see some of the vectors of this cross-pollination in the street demonstrations. James Thring’s presence at the 12 July demonstration was mentioned above. Thring has been described by anti-fascist investigative magazine *Searchlight* as an associate of veteran British antisemite Lady Jane Birdwood, Russian fascist Vladimir Zhirinovskiy, French far-right activist Serge Thion and Holocaust revisionist and David Irving, and was pictured at the demonstration with David Irving’s supporter Lady Michèle Renouf.³¹

This cross-fertilisation is especially evident on social media, especially on Twitter, as individual posts or memes under which several tweets cluster are easily dis-embedded from their original source and travel in un-expected directions. In many cases, anti-Israel activists in perfectly good faith re-circulate material from far right provenance. Thus casual and unwitting low-level forms of antisemitism circulating in the wider culture can reinforce and draw people towards more ideological forms of antisemitism.

Anti-racist social media activists have sought to track some examples of this. Often it is less well-known figures, with no profile outside of social media, who can serve as key vectors for this kind of circulation – while prominent offline antisemitic commentators such as David Duke might ring alarm bells for many anti-Zionists, more anonymous social media accounts which cultivate anti-establishment and anti-austerity online milieux are less immediately obvious. Two examples of ideologically antisemitic accounts heavily retweeted far beyond the extreme right are Ian R Millard³³ and Charles Edward Frith³⁴. Both of these accounts promote Holocaust denial, Nazi philosophy and conspiracy theories alongside intense criticisms of Israel; both are skilled at producing bite-size easy-to-copy and easy-to-digest visual material. Large numbers of anti-Israel activists, including accounts associated with the Palestine Solidarity Campaign and the Stop the War Coalition, interact and recirculate memes originating from such accounts.

Presumably this re-circulation occurs without ideological antisemitic intent, but it legitimates and normalises ideologically antisemitic discourse. Those already exposed to casual forms of Holocaust inversion in anti-Israel context are more receptive to Holocaust denial; those already exposed to causal forms of Jewish power allegation are more receptive to complex ideologically driven conspiracy theories.

4. Understanding the impact of antisemitism in the anti-Israel movement

So far, this report has argued that antisemitism is not a predominant presence in anti-Israel protest, but is nonetheless a feature of it. It has argued that antisemitic intent or motivation is not necessarily a feature of much of the antisemitic discourse that is in circulation. But if antisemitism is not predominant or not a motivation for action, is it a big issue?

Separating intent from impact

The re-circulation in good faith of social media material generated by ideological antisemites is one example of how antisemitic intent is not necessary to contribute to a climate of antisemitism. In another example, although wholly un-intended, in protesting or removing Israeli products from supermarkets, the effects of BDS activists' actions impact on British Jews, given that many kosher products are of Israeli origin.

In the most dramatic such incident of 2014, staff at the Holborn branch of Sainsbury's removed *all* products from the kosher section (whether from Israel or not). When a customer asked a member of staff where the kosher products were, he claimed that a staff member replied: "We support Free Gaza."³⁵ The store gave a different version of the reason, explaining that there was a Palestinian Solidarity Campaign demonstration outside the shop and the manager removed the products as a "precautionary measure" to protect items from protesters in case of damage:

We have had similar demonstrations at stores where people have gone in and removed goods, though no great damage was done. A decision was taken by a store manager faced with a challenging situation outside the store.³⁶

However, whichever account is correct (fear of intimidation by BDS activists, or a political statement by a staff member), the concrete, objective result of the incident was injurious to Jews as Jews rather than to Israel and can therefore be seen as "objectively" antisemitic whatever the intent.

Something similar occurred in August when Tricycle Theatre in Kilburn, London, withdrew from hosting part of the UK Jewish Film Festival while it was partially funded by the Israeli embassy. In a statement, the theatre's director said: "The festival receives funding from the Israeli embassy and, given the current conflict in Israel and Gaza, we feel it is inappropriate to accept financial support from any government agency involved."³⁷ However well-meaning and free from racism the intentions of the theatre were, the fact remains that it was a British *Jewish* film festival that was effectively proscribed by this act of boycott. In this instance, then, understanding the motivation of the perpetrators is irrelevant to determining that the incident was "objectively" antisemitic in that it targeted British Jews.

These examples of clear-cut antisemitic *impact* in the absence of any evidence for antisemitic *intent* are significant, and tell us something important about contemporary antisemitism and how we should respond to it. It is well-established in discussing other forms of racism that *racist intent is not necessary for a statement or action to be racist*. Acting in good faith, believing oneself to not be racist, and being ignorant of what constitutes racism do not exempt us. In fact, anti-racists have long argued that racism is so pervasive that those of us living in racist societies are all often unconsciously racist. We are not aware of the implications of our words and actions, of the connotations they have, of the harm they might cause.

The issue that matters, in other words, is racist deeds and words, not racist people. Combating racism does not require an inquisition into our souls; it requires attention to the impact of our actions. This principle is taken further in the concept of "institutional racism", defined initially by

Black Power activist Stokely Carmichael, whose words were drawn on in the Macpherson report in 1999, which defined it as: “The collective failure of an organisation to provide an appropriate and professional service to people because of their colour, culture, or ethnic origin. It can be seen or detected in processes, attitudes and behaviour which amount to discrimination through *unwitting prejudice, ignorance, thoughtlessness and racist stereotyping which disadvantage minority ethnic people.*” The key word here is “unwitting”: it is not racist intent that matters, but the harm done.

In responding to allegations to antisemitism, then, it is important *not* to focus on judging the deep subjective, internal motivation of the alleged perpetrator (an impossible task), but rather on the concrete, objective, external impact. This should allow a more open and less freighted discussion of antisemitism, as something that anyone might unwittingly fall into, regardless of their moral integrity or personal goodwill.

Feelings of insecurity

One of the effects of such “objectively” antisemitic impacts is the heightening of “subjective” experiences or perceptions of antisemitism from British Jews. Several UK Jewish commentators clearly articulated a personal sense of a shift in climate in summer 2014, a deepening antisemitic mood. In July, Emma Barnett in the *Telegraph* wrote that “Some British Jews are fasting for peace; some are angry at one or both sides; but many are just scared – scared not just about events in Gaza, but events in Europe.”³⁸ In August, Hilary Freeman in the *Mail on Sunday* reported a whole series of online and offline antisemitic encounters related to Gaza, concluding “in the past month, since Israel began its bombardment of Gaza... I and many of my friends have begun to question whether, as Jews, we are really as safe and accepted in this country as we previously believed.”³⁹ Even some non-Jewish commentators – such as journalist Ted Jeory, told “F**k off Jew” by young East Enders standing beneath a black flag and a Stop the War banner presumably brought back from a demonstration – reported such experiences.⁴⁰ Are these merely statistically insignificant unverified anecdotal experiences? The findings presented above suggest that antisemitism is not the most prevalent message within anti-Israel protest, but that it is nonetheless present.

As with the relationship between crime and fear of crime, the prevalence of antisemitic incidents does not directly correspond to fear of antisemitism although personal and second-hand experiences can translate directly into increased fear. All of the incidents discussed above, regardless of whether they were motivated by antisemitic intent, were subjectively experienced as antisemitic by the Jews who were the direct targets, but also by most members of the wider Jewish community who experienced them second-hand within families and communities and in particular through the Jewish media.

During the conflict period, antisemitism was almost as high up the news agenda in the Jewish press as Israel/Palestine itself, or any other topic. For example, in 2014, the *Jewish Chronicle* website contained 329 stories categorised under the topic Antisemitism, compared to 212 categorised under Gaza. At the same time, reports of heightened antisemitism from other countries – most notably France – add further fuel. And because British Jews now consume global Jewish media online (including English-language Israeli and American newspapers and blogs), external representations of European antisemitism ricochet further domestically.

This amplification has two effects. First, it changes the subjective experience of legitimate and ambiguous expressions of intense anti-Israel hostility. For instance, in the example cited above of the rabbi targeted with the slogans “Free Palestine”, “F*** the Zionists” and “F*** the Jews”, through the juxtaposition the first (clearly non-antisemitic) slogan is experienced as part of a climate of antisemitism. Second, consumers of the Jewish media, bombarded with a huge volume of

accounts of antisemitism connected to anti-Israel protest, are likely to see perceive antisemitic content being a more significant feature of anti-Israel activism than is the case. In this sense, the disproportion in attention from the mainstream media, political activists and the left to Israel is multiplied by the disproportion in attention from the Jewish press on antisemitism.

The heightened insecurity of British Jews since the 1990s and especially in the current century can be located within a broader shift in British Jewish leadership and culture. In the 1930s, for instance, in a period when British Jews largely stood outside mainstream UK society, Anglo-Jewish leaders publicly minimised the threat of antisemitism and fascism domestically and in Europe, stressing instead secure British citizenship and belonging – where today, despite the mainstreaming of the community, its leadership and media maximises such threats.⁴¹ In this context, there is a need for responsible reportage of antisemitism, which might calm and reassure rather than amplify insecurity; the Jewish media has a duty not to report antisemitism hyperbolically or give undue weight to the presence of antisemitism within anti-Israel activism.

But there is also a need for mainstream Britain to understand and take seriously the insecurity of the community. The principle that the victims of racism should have at least some say in defining racism is reflected in British law. The Macpherson Report recommended that a racist incident be defined as *“any incident which is perceived to be racist by the victim or any other person”*, and reported, recorded and investigated as such. The offence taken by someone who sees themselves as a victim can never be a sufficient criteria for convicting someone of a racially motivated or aggravated crime, but the victim’s voice should be heard, and constitutes at least prima facie grounds for taking the allegation seriously. In a context of widespread insecurity for a particular minority community, this seems all the more important.

5. Understanding the intensity of anti-Israel protest

The sociologist David Hirsh has argued that there is a *“zeitgeist”* which allows antisemitism to circulate in anti-Israel contexts with relatively little censure or even notice. Frequently, allegations of antisemitism are not taken seriously or in good faith, but presumed to be vexatious and politically motivated. Hirsh names this process as *“the Livingstone Formulation”*, the practice of responding to claims of antisemitism by alleging that those making the claim are only doing so to prevent Israel from being criticised: *“crying antisemitism”* or *“playing the antisemitism card”*.⁴² Thus, to give just one instance, when the Anti-Defamation League published a report into antisemitism, an op ed in the *Guardian* responded that *“Anti-Semitism should not be waved around like a propaganda tool”*.⁴³ This sort of dismissal of allegations of other sorts of racism would not find a likely outlet in left-leaning newspapers such as the *Guardian*, yet has become the norm for anti-Jewish racism. How has this kind of thinking become the common sense of significant sections of British public opinion? The role of the left-leaning media is one factor.

Disproportionate attention to Israel/Palestine in comparison to other conflicts

It is clear that the war in Israel/Palestine receives a disproportionate amount of attention in the UK press, across the political spectrum, while other conflicts go unreported. Although it is simplistic to and perhaps obscene to reduce the significance of a conflict to casualty figures, the Gaza conflict was far from the bloodiest conflict in 2014: compare it to death tolls for the year of over 70,000 in Syria, over 50,000 in South Sudan, over 18,000 in Afghanistan, over 10,000 in Mexico’s drug war, over 7,000 in Yemen, over 5,000 in each of northern Nigeria, Pakistan and the Central African Republic, over 4,000 in Ukraine, or nearly 3,000 in Libya.

Newspaper articles on war, conflicts, terrorism and human rights, by selected countries, 2014

	Syria	South Sudan	Afghanistan	Nigeria (Boko Haram insurgency)	Ukraine	Israel/Palestine
Number of deaths in 2014	76,021 ⁴⁴	>50,000 ⁴⁵	>18,000 ⁴⁶	>5,000 ⁴⁷	4,771 ⁴⁸	2,200 ⁴⁹
Right of centre						
<i>Daily Mail and Mail on Sunday</i>	35	5	58	38	59	34
<i>The Daily Telegraph (London)</i>	144	26	148	120	140	131
<i>The Express</i>	23	2	28	35	30	41
<i>The Sun</i>	160	16	123	172	148	46
<i>The Times (London)</i>	266	53	229	220	187	195
Left of centre						
<i>The Guardian (London)</i>	190	117	217	232	79	351
<i>The Independent (London)</i>	67	13	58	64	126	115
<i>The Mirror and The Sunday Mirror</i>	112	20	139	89	83	79
Left press						
<i>Socialist Worker</i>	94	1 ⁵⁰	40	17	41	130
<i>Morning Star</i>	178	4	76	21	184	391

Source: LexisNexis search, plus Google Advanced search of web editions for *Socialist Worker* and *Morning Star*

The disproportionate focus on Israel (but not the under-reporting of conflicts in Africa) is most marked in upmarket print media; the *Mirror* and *Sun* tabloids are exceptions. It is also most marked on the political left, with the left of centre broadsheet *The Guardian* standing out along with the far left *Morning Star* and *Socialist Worker*. Significantly, a large number of the Israel/Palestine articles were concentrated during the 50 days of conflict over the summer, during a normally “quiet” news period in the UK, when Israel/Palestine dominated the news agenda on a daily basis. Journalists embedded in Gaza in this period (*The Independent’s* Kim Sengupta, *The Telegraph’s* David Blair, *The Guardian’s* Peter Beaumont, as well as Channel 4’s Jon Snow) filed daily reports of the damage inflicted on Gaza, which then circulated widely on social media.

As with anti-migration sentiment in the context of a mainstream media which gives disproportionate column inches to immigration, it is impossible to make clear statements about the causal direction between anti-Israel hostility and the undue attention given to Israel/Palestine by the print media (and especially among left and broadsheet newspapers). This disproportion in coverage is what makes Israel seem exceptional in the imagination of protestors. The disproportionate attention to Israel/Palestine in the left press may be a factor in the disproportionate focus on it in terms of public protest. As noted above, the Demotix database contains 311 stories on Israel-related demonstrations in the UK in 2014 – compared to 115 on Syria-related demonstrations, 18 on demonstrations relating to the Boko Haram insurgency and none on demonstrations relating to South Sudan.

The ideological effects of disproportionate focus

A heightened and exceptional emphasis on Israel’s crimes among all the world’s conflicts is what allows the obscenity of the Holocaust comparison to go unnoticed. The intensified moral atmosphere around Israel/Palestine is what makes a call to Jews to apologise for or disassociate themselves from Israel seem acceptable. It is also what enables an exceptional prima facie dismissal of allegations of antisemitism instead of taking them seriously.

And, in turn, this zeitgeist is the context in which the cross-pollination between far right and anti-Israel activism described above occurs, inoculating otherwise anti-racist social media users against noticing the presence of far right and other ideologically grounded promoters of antisemitism in their milieux. Thus culturally embedded casual antisemitism, instead of being challenged, is drawn into an ideological frame and far right discourse is mainstreamed.

Conclusions

This report has shown that antisemitism was not a central element in anti-Israel protests in summer 2014, but that nonetheless antisemitism was present – typically instanced in accusations of Jewish dual loyalty, holding Jews as Jews collectively responsible for Israel’s actions, making inappropriate Holocaust comparisons or portraying Jews as a shadowy power behind the geopolitical scenes. In some cases, the antisemitism was clear and unambiguous, in other cases placing instances in context – understanding when they target Jews as Jews, rather than Israel – enables us to determine when some ambiguous incidents are antisemitic. The prevalence of such images can be explained in part through a zeitgeist among anti-Israel activists which minimises or tolerates anti-Jewish racism, a zeitgeist which is reinforced by the disproportionate focus on Israel/Palestine within the left and in the mainstream media. In this context, widespread casual antisemitism is both fed by and fuels more ideological antisemitism, increasingly circulating in social media in the convergence or cross-pollination between far right and anti-Israel activists.

Crucially, these instances do not always or necessarily reflect antisemitic intent, but were antisemitic “objectively” in terms of targeting or impacting on Jews as Jews. These instances were also experienced “subjectively” as antisemitic by many British Jews, contributing to a palpable sense of an intensified climate of everyday antisemitism, a sense which draws on a period in which British Jewish perceptions of insecurity have grown and Jewish communal leaders have emphasised Jewish insecurity. Jewish media played a role in circulating accounts of these instances in the Jewish community, contributing to this mood of insecurity.

Subjective experiences of antisemitism must not become the final arbiter in determining the prevalence of antisemitism, but needs to be taken seriously, both by mainstream society and by anti-Israel activists. Shifting a focus from antisemitic intent to “objective” impacts of antisemitism and to how casual, everyday antisemitism is institutionally and socially embedded, may provide a way to generate a more productive discussion of antisemitism, through which subjective experiences can be taken more seriously.

Endnotes

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