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Pilot Project

# Decoding Antisemitism: An AI-driven Study on Hate Speech and Imagery Online

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# Executive Summary

For the second discourse report on the pilot project “Decoding Antisemitism,” the research team studied in detail more than 15,000 comments, mainly coming from Facebook profiles of leading mainstream media outlets in Great Britain, France, and Germany.

Regarding responses online to the recent escalation phase of the Arab-Israeli conflict in May, the results confirm that the conflict is a central facilitator for antisemitic expressions. Even in the context of politically moderate discourses, the presence of antisemitic topoi is 12.6% in the French, 13.6% in the German, and – more than twice as much – 26.9% in the British dataset.

Analysis of web comments on the Israeli vaccination campaign (in connection with the accusation of Palestinians being excluded from the vaccine rollout) again suggests that even media stories about Israeli logistical successes that are entirely unrelated to the conflict quickly become opportunities for the articulation of antisemitic ideas and stereotypes. As with the escalation event, analysis demonstrates that antisemitism appears far more frequently in British social media debates than their French and German counterparts – but also indicates a marked difference in the types of stereotypes regularly deployed in the respective countries.

Three other discourse events on the national level were accusations of antisemitism against three prominent individuals – hailing from a diversity of political milieus and professional backgrounds – David Miller, Dieudonné M’bala M’bala and Hans-Georg Maasßen. The scrutiny of the web users’ reaction to these cases points to the remarkable adaptability of antisemitism. At the same time, antisemitism in this context functions as part of a broader process of construction of enemy images, targeting electoral rivals, political or corporate elites as well as minority groups.

The datasets coded for this report will serve as first training material for classifiers as the machine learning phase of our project gets underway. The ongoing development of such categorised datasets will help increase the accuracy of the tested algorithms.

# 1. Introduction

This is the second in a series of six discourse reports that will be published during the pilot phase of the transnational and interdisciplinary research project “Decoding Antisemitism”. Since summer 2020 this three-year pilot project, funded by the Alfred Landecker Foundation, is being carried out by a research team at the Centre for Research on Antisemitism (ZfA) at the Technical University Berlin in collaboration with King’s College London (KCL).<sup>1</sup>

The project examines the conceptual elements of anti-semitism as well as the ways in which those concepts are communicated linguistically and visually. The results of this analysis will not only provide insights into the diversity of antisemitism online, but form the basis for an algorithm which, after a trial phase, should enable the automated identification of antisemitic content published online. The project will be expanded to include quantitative analyses based on the results of the qualitative and AI-supported analyses. This multi-stage research design is itself recognition of the complexity of the topic.<sup>2</sup>

The capacity for online interactions to catalyse processes of radicalisation has been well-documented in both academic research and the media. This growing potential means that the analysis of online antisemitism is of greater importance than ever before. Our research takes as its object the comments sections of traditional media within the political mainstream. Such focus on the mainstream is justified because we regard the creeping normalisation of antisemitic derogation and exclusion in politically moderate, socially established milieus as a fundamental and insidious danger: as a result of the environment in which they are communicated, and through patterned forms of partial coding, antisemitic ideas are lent the appearance of acceptable expressions of opinion. This is because they are often brought into the discourse by public figures regarded as authorities, or because they have an air of innocence from the outset due to being created within

moderate milieus. Given the potential consequences for Jewish life in Europe of a normalising of antisemitism in the centre ground, these patterns need to be scientifically investigated.

In addition to this intra-societal view, the project analyses the various forms and spread of antisemitic content across national borders, examining the different modes of antisemitism found within the websites and social media channels of leading media outlets in the UK, France, and Germany. A separate team of researchers is responsible for each country. After completing the pilot phase, the aim is to expand the focus to include discourses from other European countries.

As well as the detailed scholarly exploration of the object of investigation and expanded development of internet-related antisemitism research, the project sees itself as a bridge to, and contact point for, politics, media and education. In this sense, our discourse reports serve both as a way of summarising and conveying our research activities and as an impulse for preventive and interventional measures. Our research in the field of AI will also be put into practice: the targeted output of the project is an open access tool that shows in a transparent way the possibilities and limits of AI-based moderation and is intended to provide incentives to improve it. It will be made available to the content management of platforms, news websites and all other interested actors.

<sup>1</sup> – For further information see the websites of [TU Berlin](#) and [Alfred Landecker Foundation](#).

<sup>2</sup> – For a description of the study design, see [first Discourse Report](#), Chapter 3.

This report consists of a qualitative and a quantitative section. In Chapter 3 we present the results of qualitative analyses about the responses of web users to five recent discourse events:

First, media coverage of the Hamas-Israel conflict in 2021 in the three countries are examined and compared. Second, responses to the precocious success of Israel's rollout of the Covid-19 vaccination programme, as well as the issue of alleged Israeli responsibility for Palestinian access to the vaccine, are analysed in each country. Six media events in total are therefore examined across these two discourse stimuli. Third, we turn to three country-specific events: in the UK the antisemitic statements by David Miller, a professor from Bristol; in France the *deplatforming* (i.e., the exclusion from social media) of the antisemitic comedian Dieudonné; and in Germany accusations that Hans-Georg Maaßen, former President of the Federal Office for Protection of the Constitution and CDU politician, had spread coded antisemitism.

These events were selected because of the significant media coverage of Israel generated by the recent escalation of the conflict, and the accumulation of antisemitic incidents worldwide which followed. But we were also interested in the extent to which forms of so-called 'vaccine envy' towards Israel were combined with antisemitic attributions in the three countries. For their part, the three case studies concern different political and social milieus in the three countries, the distinct antisemitic repertoires of which were to be determined through the corpus studies.

We examined at least 1,500 comments in detail for each of the nine media events. In total, the qualitative analysis covers a total of more than 15,000 comments. In order to be able to compare the examined datasets, we mainly focused on Facebook threads. The categorised corpora are then used to train automated classifiers, as part of a supervised machine learning programme currently under development.

Chapter 4 presents a statistical analysis of over a hundred thousand comments on British news stories relating to the discourse events mentioned above. This analysis shows the importance of particular words – and particular combinations of words – in framing issues connected with Israel and Jews.

A summary of the key findings of the first project phase and an outlook are given in Chapter 5.

Before we present the results of our analysis, we will first introduce our conceptual working basis: the definition by which we identify antisemitism and which we add to the linguistic-semiotic categories for describing online posts.

## 2. Definition of Antisemitism and Operationalisation

One result of the research project is the creation of an algorithm that will automatically recognise antisemitic statements in web comments in all three languages. With this feature, it will be able to detect antisemitism across web milieus so that antisemitic posts can be removed more efficiently and accurately.

It is essential that potential users of the algorithm – namely any provider of online spaces in which users are able to comment on its content, including moderators of leading media outlets and social media platforms – are convinced of its advantages and ethical appropriacy.<sup>3</sup> In addition to its performance, this also requires a high level of acceptance of the algorithm's working basis – and thus also of the underlying definition of antisemitism. For this reason, we use the IHRA definition, including the examples provided alongside it, for the identification of antisemitic posts.<sup>4</sup> This definition is already used by about thirty states,<sup>5</sup> is furthermore applied at local and regional levels and is recommended for use by the EU.<sup>6</sup> It has also been adopted by NGOs, businesses, sports organisations, and the media.

Antisemitism in user comments has to be determined by its forms of expression. Here, the IHRA definition acts as a conceptual framework. For the scientific work, it was necessary to refine the definition, (which in itself was designed for compactness and practical applicability) and to expand it with further categories related to antisemitic concepts. The result is a detailed list of stereotypes and topoi according to which antisemitic content can be precisely categorised. The differentiation and precision of these categorical codes allows for the analysis of even linguistically complex manifestations of antisemitism, including those which require further contextual information – i.e., information from articles/posts and comments from other users – for the antisemitic content to become identifiable.

The basic categorical structure of antisemitic concepts established by the project means that use of the algorithm is not restricted to the IHRA definition. Given that all definitions of antisemitism overlap in areas covered by the categorical codes of the project, the algorithm would work equally well with any chosen definition. For example, a social media platform that adopts an alternative definition of antisemitism from the IHRA would be able to draw (via the use of a trained algorithm) on our operationalisation of expressions of antisemitism to filter out comments that fit the particular definition it uses. While the algorithm is intended to distinguish between antisemitic and non-antisemitic texts in the first step, a refinement of the classification is planned in a second step: the algorithm should then also be able to detect specific antisemitic concepts in texts.

### Detection of concepts in web comments

The foundational work of the project is therefore the creation of a list of conceptual elements of antisemitism based on the IHRA definition. These consist of classical stereotypes (such as POWER, GREED, CHILD MURDER)<sup>7</sup> and more contemporary attributions (topoi of secondary and Israel-related antisemitism SUCH AS INSTRUMENTALISATION OF THE HOLOCAUST, NAZI ANALOGY, DENIAL OF ISRAEL'S RIGHT TO EXIST). This conceptual repertoire of hostility towards Jews has been sufficiently defined by antisemitism research.

This list is contrasted with a set of linguistic-semiotic categories derived from pragmalinguistic research (such as allusions, metaphors, speech acts, etc.; see Discourse Report 1, Chapter 4).

3 – We are well aware of the discussions on algorithmic bias that might appear in the development process. Therefore, this tool will be tested accordingly before releasing it and all the possible issues will be discussed at a later stage.

4 – <https://www.holocaustremembrance.com/resources/working-definitions-charters/working-definition-antisemitism>.

5 – <https://www.ojc.org/adoption-of-the-working-definition>.

6 – See footnote 4.

7 – Since stereotypes are phenomena that exist on the conceptual, i. e. mental, level and can be reproduced using language, stereotypes are given in SMALL CAPS in accordance with the conventions of cognitive linguistics.

These deductive categories will be joined over time by further categories developed inductively from the ongoing analysis of country- as well as milieu-specific debates. This will allow us to include novel attributions (as well as to record their distribution in the individual web milieus).

An explanation of how we deal with these levels in contemporary online discourse is presented with authentic examples in Chapter 3 of this report. The meaning of an implicit utterance is usually developed by bringing together linguistic knowledge (grammar, lexicon and language use) as well as contextual, cultural and world knowledge (cf. Becker/Troschke 2021). Such implicit meanings can be seen in this *YouTube* comment posted below a *BBC* report about conspiracy theories directed against the Jewish philanthropist George Soros:

**“This is nothing to do with anti-Semitism. I suggest you (The BBC film makers) look into this more carefully; those who still know what the truth is and haven’t taken your 30 pieces of silver .”**

[YT[20210309]].

Here, the existence of antisemitism in relation to Soros is flatly denied. Those responsible for the documentary are then advised to examine the insinuations against Soros more closely. The opposition-construction used (*BBC film makers* vs. *those* as part of them) tells us – and for this we use our knowledge of language – that the user indirectly accuses the *BBC* of spreading untruths in exchange for payment. Drawing on our cultural knowledge, the phrase *taken your 30 pieces of silver* can be understood as a commonly used formulation for bribery. But the allusion to a further antisemitic meaning can also be deduced through context and world knowledge. The reference here – placed in a thread focussing on a famously Jewish person – is to the Biblical portrayal of Judas betraying Jesus in exchange for 30 pieces of silver. Thus, by enriching the interpretation with various areas of knowledge, readers can infer, on the one hand, a core concept of anti-Judaism – that of BETRAYAL and MURDER OF GOD – and, on the other, the stereotype of INFLUENCE ON THE MEDIA, both of which are hidden behind an opposition-construction and an allusion.

In addition to linguistic categories, semiotic and visual forms play a role in online discourses – especially on social media platforms. The use of emojis, memes and other images, along with other typographic properties, create text-image relations that specify or expand meanings of comments which, in purely linguistic terms, remain semantically open (e.g., emoticons expressing irony or disgust).

The first step of our mixed methods approach thus consists of a combined qualitative analysis of conceptual units, language and visual elements. In the following chapters, we describe the results of this detailed approach, which we applied to current web debates in the UK, France and Germany.

## 3. Qualitative Analyses

### 3.1. Hamas-Israel conflict May 2021

From 10 May 2021, the Arab-Israeli conflict was marked by an escalation period that – despite ending with a ceasefire after merely eleven days – had the highest number of casualties since the confrontations of summer 2014.

These events in the Middle East triggered an enormous increase in media coverage and social media campaigns, as well as antisemitic demonstrations and violence worldwide.

In order to capture the first online reactions to this period of violence, the measurement period of our analysis is between 10 and 13 May, when preceding tensions tipped over into a belligerent escalation. Our focus was on articles dealing with both Hamas rocket fire and the IDF's

retaliations. Since some media websites (such as *The Guardian*, *BBC*, and *Süddeutsche Zeitung*) have deacti-

vated the comment function for some articles on their websites (often including articles regarding the Arab-Israeli conflict), while other outlets like *Le Monde* or *The Times* limiting open debate by placing articles and comment sections behind a paywall, the study focuses on threads on the *Facebook* profiles of the leading mainstream outlets. This allowed us to collect a greater number, and wider range, of reactions. In order to make the datasets comparable and subject them to consistent qualitative corpus analysis, we limited the dataset to selected *Facebook* threads and a specific number of comments.

In the following sub-chapters, we will present the results of our qualitative content analysis, focusing on the conceptual and linguistic particularities in the threads examined. All quantitative findings from the selected three corpora will be presented in 3.1.4.

#### 3.1.1. UK

Matthias J. Becker

The majority of the leading UK media outlets used the events in the Middle East as an opportunity to report extensively on the escalation phase and the two parties in the conflict. There was a conspicuous outpouring of contributions on all nationally relevant mainstream news websites such as the *BBC*, *Daily Mail*, *The Guardian*, *The Independent*, *The Spectator*, *The Telegraph*, *The Times*, (at least 304 articles were noted), whereas *Daily Express*, *Daily Mirror*, *Financial Times*, *Metro* and *The Sun* reported on the topic only in passing. The same applies to the activities on the *Facebook* profiles of these media, to which a high percentage of the content provided on their respective news websites was reposted. For the qualitative corpus study presented here, the dataset was limited to the first 150 comments under posts on the *Facebook* profiles of ten mainstream media outlets (cf. list in Sources).

The selected media reports were broadly split between those focusing on Hamas's rocket fire and those on the IDF's retaliations. Our analysis makes clear that there was a different distribution of antisemitic stereotypes in the comments sections depending on the primary focus of the article.<sup>8</sup>

When the media highlighted the activity of Hamas, there was an increase in the number of comments accusing the media of a pro-Israeli bias. This accusation is made against both left-liberal and conservative media outlets. In this context, users imagine a JEWISH-ZIONIST INFLUENCE on British media ("Hypocrisy at its finest from the Daily Mail. Owners are in the pockets of the Zionists, no surprise," DM-FB[20210511]; "Utterly Disgraceful reporting at best. A dog dosnt bite his Master I guess" FT-FB[20210511];

<sup>8</sup> – It is not possible to definitively confirm whether responses to stories posted by UK media outlets on *Facebook* and other social media are from British or UK-based web users, or English-speaking web users based elsewhere. The widespread use of English around the world means that British media posts may attract a higher amount of international web users than their French or German equivalents. Further research is required to establish the extent of this diversity. However, the users' national background does not play a major role in our corpus linguistic analysis (and can only be partially assigned due to anonymisation). Rather, for our pattern analysis, it was relevant to investigate what forms of verbal (and visual) antisemitism we could identify on the websites and *Facebook* profiles of British mainstream media, which then potentially influence the thinking of other (especially British and UK-based) users and, thus, become normalised. The shift in attention from individuals and groups to the online comments themselves is part of a scholarly approach that looks at the presentation and modification of patterns of prejudice across people and milieus.

“Who owns the british media??,” Mir-FB[20210512]; “‘Independent’ my a\*\* . You are bought by the zionist lobby. Sheep’s!,” Ind-FB[20210511] – sometimes to the extent that media are directly conceptualised as Zionist (“Guardian of Zion,” Gua-FB[20210510]), with antisemitic stereotypes such as HYPOCRISY and DECEIT (or even GREED) then transferred to them – and subsequently to Israel: “Nice try zionistNow make money n more bias news” (FT-FB[20210511]).

On the other hand, when the articles focus directly on Israel’s reaction to the rocket fire, whether linguistically or via imagery (or both), various antisemitic stereotypes are (explicitly and implicitly) directed against Israelis (and Jews) without referring to the media. In all ten threads, the frequent reproduction of the stereotype EVIL stands out. The inhabitants of Israel are characterised as malicious and wicked, with commenters claiming that “the one and only thing which unites Israeli Jews is their destruction of others, especially of Palestinians” (Spe-FB[20210512]). This stereotype is semantically enriched and updated by combining it with the conceptualisation of Israel as a criminal state (“built by brutal gangsters,” Gua-FB[20210510]) or even a terrorist state (“Zion is built on terrorism,” FT-FB[20210511]), which “will throw world into war” (BBC-FB[20210511]). The last part here shows how connections are made between these ideas and that of Israel as a threat to world peace. According to some users, only the destruction of Israel would enable the establishment of global peace: “end israel and all the world..not just Palestine will find peace” (DM-FB[20210512]). The EVIL stereotype is often expressed via wordplay, cf. the often used “israhell” or “ziopigs” (Tel-FB[20210511]); see also “Satanyahu” (Tim-FB[20210511]), referring to the then Israeli prime minister, and expressing the conceptually close DEVIL stereotype.

Another stereotype which intersects with the concept of evil and also communicated with high frequency is that of CHILD MURDER (which is to be distinguished from the factually verifiable death toll among minors). Phrases such as “Isreal likes killing children” (Mir-FB[20210511]) suggest that Israelis aim at (and even welcome) the killing of children. This is again a classic stereotype that has been updated in the context of the Middle East discourse.

In addition to the idea that Israelis are to be characterised by AMORALITY (“unjust and godless of course they have neither conscience nor morality,” FT-FB[20210511]), the stereotypes HYPOCRISY and DECEIT could be identified. Users accuse the Israelis of presenting themselves as victims in order to generate political capital out of their deliberate continuation of the conflict, and suggest they are willing to accept civilian casualties on the Palestinian side in order to do so.

The conceptualisation of Israel as a state for which DECEIT and obfuscation are acceptable means for its own advancement is at times underpinned by CONSPIRACY THEORIES. For example, users suggest that Israel itself supplies Hamas with rockets in order to deliberately stoke the conflict: “how are hamas able to get rockets or any military weapons when Israel controls everything that goes in and out of Gaza?” (Tel-FB[20210511]). Such imputations are complemented by the accusation of a secret arrangement between Israel and the British royal family to manipulate public opinion on the conflict (“I guess the British Royal family owned news outlet doesnt want us to know the real story,” DM-FB[20210511]) – or references to a more general global Jewish conspiracy (“Jews rule the WORLD!,” FT-FB[20210511]).

Other topoi with conceptual overlaps with the EVIL stereotype are the classic images of DEICIDE and the idea that expulsion and centuries of oppression grew out of Jewish GUILT: “that’s why God expelled their choose people two times from holy land with disgrace and they travel all around the world over 3000 thousands years without dignity and honour” (BBC-FB[20210511]).

Commenters also use Nazi comparisons to demonise Israel (“Zionism = Nazism,” Gua-FB[20210510]; “Nazis under a different flag,” Mir-FB[20210512]; “The Israelis have so quickly forgotten how they were treated by the Germans!,” Tel-FB[20210511]). The latter comment implies that Israelis are now carrying out the same atrocities that happened to them in the past, a subtle variant of the victim-perpetrator reversal. Writers can activate the Nazi scenario without specific historical references through the use of allusions: “[the Israeli] government roll[s] out an extermination plan,” (Tel-FB[20210511]); “Fourth Reich Rising,” (Tim-FB[20210511]) (cf. Becker 2021: 249 ff.).

In other cases users affirm Nazi crimes, at times by slightly modifying the spelling (probably in order to avoid automatic detection): “the big dùde of Germany (Hitfèr) once said that “ he còuld’ve kjàlléd em all, but hè left some so people can know why he did that” (Tel-FB[20210511]).

As with EVIL – a stereotype that forms the conceptual basis for the NAZI ANALOGY – an alleged similarity to Hitler’s Germany is used as a basis for further forms of antisemitism, including the APARTHEID ANALOGY and associated CALLS FOR BOYCOTT, the insinuation of a GENOCIDE against the Palestinians, the denial of JEWISH SELF-DETERMINATION as well as the allegation of ISRAEL’S SOLE GUILT IN THE CONFLICT: “It’s not Israel Palestine until 1948 then these scums came begging for safety and bit the hand that fed them,” (FB[20210512]); “The entire blame is on Israel. Once they stop their continued 7 decade aggression there will be no need for a resistance,” (DM-FB[20210511]); “If I didn’t want rockets fired at me, I would simply not set up a murderous apartheid settler colonial state that oppresses Palestinians on a daily basis,” (Ind-FB[20210511]). The last-mentioned stereotype can also be reproduced as a slogan, creating a simplistic moral dichotomy between the parties to the conflict: “Simply put: Zionism is the problem” (BBC-FB[20210511]). The conceptualisation of ISRAEL’S SOLE GUILT at times returns to its classic form when writers BLAME JEWS FOR ANTISEMITISM: “I wonder why the British government sent the jews away to philistine and didn’t keep them in its own land (Bild: 😞)” (BBC-FB[20210511]).

The frequently used, alternating references to colonialism or apartheid are complemented by ascription concerning the opponent of the conflict. By means of the acronym “PLM” (Gua-FB[20210510] and Ind-FB[20210511]), users allude to the *Black Lives Matter* movement, i.e. by means of a changed label, the Hamas-Israel conflict is subtly placed in the context of racism in Western societies. In this way Israel is accused of structural discrimination against Palestinians, ignoring the complex genesis of the conflict, as well as the role of Islamism: “This is the equivalent of [...] blaming George Floyd that he stopped breathing under the knee of (yet another) militant police officer” (FT-FB[20210511]); cf. also multiple statements such as “At least 9 children were killed in Gaza .. but yeah they are brown” (FT-FB[20210511]), or “Israelis hate black people,” (Ind-FB[20210511]).

Other examples present comparisons that foreground a disproportionate, highly unjust relationship – closely linked to scenarios of violence (“as perverse as Mike Tyson punching a toddler,” FT-FB[20210511]), murder (“Monster VS children,” DM-FB[20210511]) and even rape: “you mean those homemade rockets [...]? You know how vicious fingernails can be? Have you SEEN the harm done to rapists by their victims nails raked over their faces, even when the rapists smash in the victims head with a hammer? Ohh.. those vicious and nasty nails” (Spe-FB[20210512]). By means of these comparisons, commenters create an emotionally charged interpretative framework that clearly opposes empathetic emotions for the Israeli side, in which they unambiguously identify the guilty party in the conflict and relativise (or even negate) the major escalating aggression (and its ideological basis) that is reflected in the large number of rockets fired at Israeli civilians.

The last step of verbal escalation in the examined comments sections are threats, curses and death wishes. Commenters do so in an overt way (“Death to israel,” FT-FB[20210511]); “[Rockets are] Totally deserved and appropriate!!!! Israel deserves MUCH more than this. Fascist, Genocidal state!!!!” and “As usual, they deserve every rocket thrown at them,” Ind-FB[20210511]) – or they refer to religious sources that, applied to current day scenarios allude to the idea of Israel’s destruction: ““And never think that Allah is unaware of what the wrongdoers do. He only delays them for a Day when eyes will stare [in horror].” (Quran. Ibrahim 14: Verse 42)” (BBC-FB[20210511]).

## 3.1.2. France

### Laura Ascone

The recent escalation between Hamas and Israel received wide coverage in mainstream French media outlets. The publication of these articles, both on the media websites and on their Facebook pages, saw web users criticising and sometimes demonising the role of Israel in the Arab-Israeli conflict. Unsurprisingly, the coverage of this event opened the way to antisemitic reactions, and the articulation of classic antisemitic stereotypes and concepts.

The French corpus consists of the first 100 comments posted in reaction to 15 articles shared on the Facebook pages of seven French mainstream media (*Le Monde*, *Libération*, *Le Figaro*, *Le Parisien*, *Le Point*, *L'Express*, and *20 Minutes*). Most of the antisemitic comments identified target Israel and Israelis rather than the Jewish people. In these cases, negative features are attributed to the Israeli population whose actions are, to the eyes of the users, condemnable. More precisely, users tend to accuse Israelis of being AMORAL since they would kill innocent civilians (“A terrorist state killing innocent children and women”, [“un état terroriste qui tue des enfants et des femmes innocents”], Poi-FB[20210512]) as well as of being LIARS (“You’re the champions in lying and falsifying history”, [“Vous êtes champions dans les mensonges et la falsification de l’histoire”], Lib-FB[20210512]).

By using the argumentative maxim of the act (Plantin 1993), according to which the quality of an individual depends on their behaviour, the speaker transfers, more or less explicitly, the judgment of the action to the actors themselves. A comment to *Le Parisien* says: “They have killed children and attack people while they are praying, they really are cowards” [“Ils ont discours qu’avaient les Nazis tué des enfants et s’attaquent aux gens pendant qu’ils prièrent, ils sont vraiment des laches”] (Par-FB[20210511]). Thus, because of their recent actions against Palestinians, Israelis as a whole are devalued. In the same comment section, another user accuses Israelis of being criminals, but not in relation to this specific escalation period. Rather, the user generalises Israel’s conduct, stating: “As always, Israel kills civilians nothing surprising coming from the criminals” [“Israël tue des civiles comme à chaque fois rien d’étonnant venant des criminels”] (Par-FB[20210511]). This argumentative maxim of the act was also found in another thread: “The figures speak for themselves, and Israel is a terrorist people killing women and children with impunity” [“Les chiffres parle et Israël et un peuple terroriste tuant des femmes, des enfants sans impunité”] (Par-FB[20210511]). In this comment, the web users use the argument from authority (Ducrot 1984): the reference to figures allows the user to give weight to their statement. Furthermore, this comment shows the stereotype of a FREE PASS that,

in our corpus, is attributed to Israel: the idea that, unlike other states, Israel is supposedly never held accountable by the international community for its violent actions against Palestinians – or is at least treated extremely gently.

These forms of alleged PRIVILEGE may fuel some users’ belief that Jews and Israelis control the world on both the economic and political levels. In reaction to an article published by *Le Monde* and shared on its Facebook page, a user commented “It’s clear that le monde is paid by these demons” [“on voit bien que le monde est payé par ces demons”] (Mon-FB[20210510]). As this comment shows, users not only tend to ascribe malicious characteristics and actions to Israelis by overtly demonising the latter as the example shows, but additionally attest them to INFLUENCE THE MEDIA. In case the comment does not refer to the medium alone, but to the world – this cannot be clearly determined in the present case – the example would stand for the concept of WORLD CONSPIRACY. They are then depicted as the worst people in the world while referring to the classic Anti-christ stereotype.

The recent escalation in Israel and, more generally, the Arab-Israeli conflict has caused several innocent casualties, including children. This has been seen by some users as evidence of the classic stereotype of CHILD MURDER, according to which Jews allegedly kill Christian children in order to use their blood in religious rituals. In the comments section of an article published by *20 Minutes*, a user writes: “you’re used to killing children” [“vous êtes habitué à assassiner des enfants”] (20M-FB[20210512]), while in reaction to an article from *Le Point*, a user states that “some Jews love seeing blood” [“certains juif qui aiment voir le sang”] (Poi-FB[20210512]). These comments are evidence of the way classic antisemitic stereotypes are updated and adapted to current events and social context.

Other frequently deployed concepts include analogies used to compare Israel to Nazi Germany. More precisely, the NAZI ANALOGY conflates the conditions and violent actions faced by the respective victim (i.e., Jews in the Nazi scenario, and Palestinians in the Middle East scenario). In a comment to an article from *Le Parisien*, a user describes Gaza as “a new open-air concentration camp” [“un nouveau camp de concentration à ciel ouvert”] (Par-FB[20210511]).

In one comment on an article from *Le Monde*, the analogy was established with regard to narratives: “The same discourse as the Nazis’ when Jews killed German soldiers” [“Le meme discours

qu’avaient les Nazis quand les juifs tuaient des soldats allemands”] (Mon-FB[20210511]). This comment was a reaction to a previous comment stating that Islamists were attacking Israel and that Israel was just defending itself. The user refutes the previous argument by activating the NAZI ANALOGY: Nazis and Israelis are perspectivised as perpetrators who would use the same strategic excuses for the murder of the respective victim group.

This analogy can also be operated through the process of denotation: the user designates the target, that is Jews or Israelis, as Nazis through compound words (“the Nazi-Zionists”, [“les Nazi-Sionistes” Lib-FB[20210512]]: this process is a way of intensifying the Nazi analogy. In the user’s eyes, the two originally separate and distinct groups (Nazis and Zionists) form a single and merged entity.

Users also identify Israel with South Africa during the apartheid regime (“Israel is an apartheid state” [“Israël est un Etat d’apartheid”] Mon-FB[20210512]), and European colonial states (“A land that is being stolen by new settlers coming from Europe” [“Une terre qui se fait volé par de nouveaux colons venant d’Europe”] Mon-FB[20210511]). In the French corpus, Israelis tend to be perceived as colonisers. They are then presented as a foreign people who occupied the territory of Israel and whose presence is therefore illegitimate. In some cases, Israel’s alleged illegitimacy results in the DENIAL OF ISRAEL’S RIGHT TO EXIST. Users may present Israel as an illegitimate state (“Israel is an illegitimate and illegal state” [“Israël est un état illégitime et illegal”] Par-FB[20210511]), or deny and reject its existence altogether (“your rogue state doesn’t exist” [“ça n’existe pas ton état voyou”] Mon-FB[20210512]). These two concepts - COLONIALISM ANALOGIES and the DENIAL OF ISRAEL’S RIGHT TO EXIST - are often linked to each other and, in some cases, to the stereotype according to which Israelis and/or Jews are perceived as foreigners. The distancing from Israelis as foreigners is operated on the geographical level, either by focusing on the opposition between the in-group and the out-group (“you are and you’ll remain foreigner to this land” [“Vous êtes et vous demeurerez étrangers à cette terre !”] Mon-FB[20210512]), or by emphasising that Israelis would be stateless persons (“Israelis, errant people” [“israélites, peuple errant”] Poi-FB[20210512]). The reference to ISRAELIS AS FOREIGNERS is not always made explicit. However, it remains intrinsic to the analogy with colonialism, which is characterised by the lexical fields of colonisation and occupation (referring to Israeli territory).

Having discussed the conceptual level so far, the linguistic specificities of antisemitic comments will now be investigated. To condemn the role of Israel in the Arab-Israeli conflict, some users resort to puns such as “Isra-Hell” or “Israhate” (*Israhaine*, in French), or to other semiotic elements specific to computer-mediated communication like emojis (“🤮” or “😡😡😡😡😡😡😡”),

20M-FB[20210511]). This allows the user to convey their emotions towards Israel (disgust in the first example) as well as antisemitic stereotypes; in this case, by using the devil icons, the user may condemn Israel’s actions or compare Israelis to the devil.

From a linguistic perspective, in antisemitic comments, the speaker’s point of view is not generally explicitly expressed as such. Rather, users tend to present their point of view as a general and incontestable truth. In other terms, the *ethos* is not built on what is said but on how it is said (Ducrot 1984). In the comment “It’s clear that the world is paid by these demons” [“on voit bien que le monde est payé par ces demons”] (Mon-FB[20210510], (Mon-FB[20210510]), cf. constraints mentioned above), the user does not present the conspiracy as his/her point of view. On the contrary, they present it as something that can be seen and, as a consequence, verified.

Not only do comments sections allow the user to share their point of view, they can also present injunctions, calls to action, advice, etc. (Calabrese 2014). In our corpus, when addressing their targets, that is Jews and/or Israelis, users tend to make demands (“Then leave their territory” [“Quittez donc leur territoire”] 20M-FB[20210512]). However, users seem not to favour direct address through the use of imperatives. Most of the time, the demand is verbalised as an external constraint the speaker is not responsible for. The user then expresses it by using modals such as the impersonal “have to” (*il faut*, in French) rather than imperatives. This way, the obligation is presented not as the user’s wish but rather as a legitimate demand “You have to leave the occupied territory and give it to its owners!” [“Il faut laisser les territoires occupés les redonner à leurs propriétaires !”] (Par-FB[20210511]).

In some comments, users address their targets in a violent way, namely by expressing threats, curses or death wishes. Even in these cases, the user’s point of view is absent. In other terms, when expressing threats, curses or death wishes, the user does not commit themselves. The French corpus presented only one comment where the user commits themselves: “tomorrow you’ll be the victims and we’ll do the same” [“demain ça sera vous les victims et on fera la meme”] (Lib-FB[20210512]). Through religious references, whose nature is universal and truthful (Régent-Susini 2015), the user’s death wish is presented as a curse and, as a consequence, as something that is going to happen: “When ALLAH’s decree will come you’ll be disintegrated into dust your days are numbered for ALLAH AZAWAJEL” [“Quand le decret D ALLAH descendra vs serez reduit a poussiere vos jours sont compte aupres D ALLAH AZAWAJEL”] (Mon-FB[20210511]).

### 3.1.3. Germany

#### Hagen Troschke

The two conflict events – the rocket fire on Israel from Gaza on 10 May and the subsequent bombing of Hamas targets by the IDF – were discussed by ten of the 13 observed leading German media outlets, each in a linked article posted on Facebook (in *Bild*, *FAZ*, *Focus*, *n-tv*, *rp-online*, *Der Spiegel*, *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, *taz*, *Die Welt* und *Die Zeit*). Web users thus had information on both events and the connection between them and they were able to incorporate them equally into their assessment and evaluation of this conflict phase. The dual focus of the reporting meant that online commentators were not influenced by one-sided coverage but responded to stories describing actions taken by both sides of the conflict. With this approach, we were able to investigate reactions which, in addition to possibly already established attitudes, are based on the reception of both events. A total of posts, 1,520 user comments were analysed. Within these comments, the question of the blame for this escalation and attacks against the media for their alleged bias in favour of Israel cropped up with particular frequency.

The antisemitic posts were mainly aimed at Israel and Israelis, though in some cases also Jews. The most commonly attributed antisemitic ideas are presented here with examples. They can be assigned to two concept areas. The first area goes back to the attribution of EVIL and is connected with several concepts that imply that Israel or its politics or actions are characterised by essential wickedness, or the desire to cause comprehensive damage to others in a targeted and proactive manner. This conceptual frame also includes the attributions of CHILD MURDER, NAZI and APARTHEID ANALOGIES and ISRAEL'S SOLE GUILT FOR THE ARAB-ISRAELI CONFLICT.

When the EVIL stereotype is expressed, Israel is often explicitly branded as a *rogue* or *terrorist state*: “Nothing more than a rogue state” [“Nichts weiter als ein Schurkenstaat”] (NTV-FB[20210510]). Alongside the imputation of malicious activity, this attribution also delegitimises Israel's statehood. However, key terms of this kind are not usually present. The comment “I think when all Israelis come back to Europe and America then we'll have peace in all Arab countries, no refugees will come to Europe and America”

[“Ich denk wann alle Israelische kommen wieder nach Europa und Amerika, dann wir haben Frieden im alle Arabisch Länder kommt keine Flüchtlinge nach Europa und Amerika”] (NTV-FB[20210510]) makes the absence of Jews in Israel a condition for peace in the region. In so doing the comment also asserts, conversely, that Israel is allegedly responsible for all regional conflicts and thus all flights of refugees from the wider Middle East. As “the spawn of Europe” [“die Ausgeburts Europas”; a variation of a German idiom in which hell or devil stands in place of Europe] (NTV-FB[20210510]), Israel is portrayed as the embodiment of all that is negative in the world. Israelis are accused several times of having an inherent tendency to violence – one said to have been temporarily hindered by the Covid-19 pandemic: “They have fought off covid and now they are gaily shooting all over the place again. 🤡” [“Corona ist bei denen bekämpft und jetzt wird wieder lustig rumgeschossen. 🤡”] (B-FB[20210510]).

A comment based on the same premise invokes the stereotype CHILD MURDER by presenting the killing of children as an everyday feature of Israeli life: “Covid in Israel over, now back to everyday life, in thoughts with the killed children” [“Corona in Israel vorbei jetzt wieder Alltag in Gedanken bei den getöteten Kindern”] (NTV-FB[20210510]). While this comment requires a certain amount of deduction, others express the stereotype explicitly: “Israelis deliberately kill children and dance while they're doing it” [“Israelis töten gezielt Kinder und tanzen dabei”] (SP-FB[20210511]); “This is exactly what the Israelis have been waiting for, Jewish bombs are back to executing countless civilians and children” [“Genau darauf haben die Israelis gewartet, jetzt werden wieder etliche Zivilisten und Kinder mit jüdischen Bomben hingerichtet”] (SZ-FB[20210510]). In both comments, *dance* and *waiting* suggest a wickedness in Israelis that craves bloodshed. Designating the bombs as *Jewish* extends the attribution to the original targets of the stereotype.

The following comment uses a comparison and allusions to create a NAZI ANALOGY. The reference to *crimes against humanity*, a category of international law created in response to the Nazi atrocities, is an allusion to Nazism which brings Israel into conceptual proximity with it. It serves as a bracket both for a comparison on the level of action, with Israel said to be re-enacting these atrocities, and for the allusions *deportation* and *ghetto* which once again reinforce the analogy.

**“Israel’s policy has been a crime against humanity since the founding of Israel, although they should know what the Germans did to them, that is exactly what they are enacting. The Palestinians are forcibly deported into ghettos with no way out”**

["Israels Politik ist seit der Gründung Israel, ein Verbrechen an die Menschheit, obwohl sie es wissen müssten, das was die deutschen ihnen angetan haben, genau das leben sie da aus. Die Palästinaner werden zwangs depotiert in irgendwelchen Ghettos ohne Ausgang"]

(FAZ-FB[20210511]).

As well as the Nazis, other actors are also used to demonise Israel. “The new IS in the region is called Israel, expel occupy assimilate, this is how former victims become today’s perpetrators!” [“Der neue IS in der Region heißt Israel, vertreiben besetzen assimilieren, So werden aus Opfern von damals Täter von heute!”] (SZ-FB[20210510]). By both equating Israel with the goals and practices of the Islamic State and through a victim-perpetrator reversal implying that Israel is a revenant of Nazi Germany, Israel is assigned to the conceptual area of what is widely perceived as *EVIL*.

In another type of demonisation (and delegitimisation), Israel is imputed to practice *apartheid*, either directly or through references to (former) South Africa: “#endapartheid”; “That should have been said to the [...] in South Africa” [“das hätten man den [...] in Südafrika auch sagen sollen”] (FAZ-FB[20210511]).

The distorted portrayals of the conflict in the comments often went as far as giving *ISRAEL SOLE GUILT* for the entire Arab-Israeli conflict. This blanket attribution combines the stereotype of Jews as *TROUBLEMAKERS* with ideas of an inherent aggressiveness. It is alleged, for example, with reference to the War of Independence that only permanent deterrence on the part of the Palestinians would prevent Israel from driving them out of the region: “Defence is important in the Middle East. Otherwise the nakba and flight and expulsion of 1948 would be repeated” [“Verteidigung ist im nahen Osten Wichtig. Ansonsten würde sich die nakba und Flucht und Vertreibung von 1948 wiederholen”] (TAZ-FB[20210512]). According to this web user, Palestinians acted in a purely defensive manner. Another comment similarly dismisses the existence of antisemitism

and claims to Israeli territory within the Palestinian side – phenomena which self-evidently cannot be part of a reconciliation of interests between the two parties, and therefore will continue to stoke the conflict for as long as they persist.

“If Israel broke the blockade, withdrew all troops from the West Bank and left the Palestinians alone, then there would be no reason for radicalisation.” [“Wenn Israel die Blockade auflösen würde, alle Truppen aus der Westbank abziehen würde und die Palästinenser in Ruhe lassen würden, dann gäbe es keinen Grund für Radikalisierung.”] (TAZ-FB[20210512])

The ideas in these comments are often accompanied by statements rejecting the Jewish right to self-determination in their own state by *DENYING ISRAEL’S LEGITIMACY* or *NEGATING* it altogether. This is very clear in the statement “Palestine under occupation for 73 years” [“Palästina seit 73 Jahren unter Besetzung”] (W-FB[20210511]) where the Israeli state territory is declared as *occupation* even at the point it was founded, thereby depriving Israel of its sovereignty over any territory. A more complex variant is the analogy to an absurd fantasy scenario, intended to undermine any claim to a historical connection between Jews and the territory of contemporary Israel to justify a claim. In addition, the image of a tyranny is depicted here corresponds to a stereotypical attribution of *EVIL*:

“Maybe I should tell the French sometime hey come to Germany Napoleon was here. You can take over the country and anyone resisting gets the death penalty first.” [“Vielleicht sollte ich mal den Franzosen sagen ey kommt mal nach Deutschland Napoleon war hier. Ihr könnt das Land einnehmen und jeder der sich wehrt bekommt erstmal die Todesstrafe.”] (Z-FB[20210512])

Alongside *EVIL*, the second main conceptual area in the corpus relates to the idea of supposed Israeli influence on media reporting and public opinion. It includes the stereotype of *JEWISH/ISRAELI INFLUENCE ON THE MEDIA* and the topos of a *TABOO OF CRITICISM* against (in this case) Israel. Conceptually similar to both is the frequent accusation of media bias (motivated either by the media themselves or some unknown cause) which we have not, however, categorised here as antisemitic. In the next example, based on a rhetorical question which assumes the presence of Israeli propaganda from the outset, the suggestion of a name change implies that the publication is in the service of Israel. A metaphor is then used to depict its supposed relationship to Israel as one of subservience and dependency:

**“Why are you doing Israeli terror propaganda? [...] Maybe you should be renamed Israel Post Rheinische Post [...] YOU are like their dogs that have to obey.”**

[“Warum macht ihr Israelische Terrorpropaganda ? [...] Vielleicht sollte man euch doch umbenennen in Israel Post Rheinische Post [...] IHR seid wie ihre Hunde, die gehorchen müssen.”]

([RP-FB\[20210512\]](#))

To A’s critical question, “Who controls the German media habibi” [“Wer kontrolliert den die deutschen Medien habibi”], B responds: “You already know, who? Not just the German media but all media. This is a known fact.” [“du weißt schon, wer? Nicht nur die deutschen Medien sonder auch alle Medien. Dies ist eine bekannte Tatsache”] ([SP-FB\[20210511\]](#)). By employing world knowledge, anyone who is familiar with this stereotype can infer that it means Jews. B was able to be very clear without committing themselves to the corresponding statement.

The idea of a TABOO OF CRITICISM against Israel is noticeable throughout (“Scary and you can’t say anything about Israel 🤖” [“Gruselig und man darf nix über Israel sagen 🤖”] ([B-FB\[20210510\]](#)) – sometimes expressed with the support of a metaphor (“The compliant German NATO press handles Israel with kid gloves. Don’t criticise [...] 😊” [“Die gleichgeschaltete deutsche Nato Presse, fässt Israel mit Sandhanschuhen an. Ja nicht kritisieren [...]”] ([FAZ-FB\[20210511\]](#)).

In addition to these conceptual forms of antisemitism, we also found a variety of malicious speech acts against Israel. This was shown in curses, death wishes and calling for violence against Israelis. These hate expressions were found in direct and – as in the following curse in the form of a rhetorical question – indirect speech acts: “When will the devil come for them” [“Wann kommt der Teufel sie holen”] ([SP-FB\[20210511\]](#)).

Death wishes, the last stage of escalation of verbal antisemitism, were communicated both explicitly and implicitly as in: “Saladin and Ottomans will soon rise up again. This undemocratic attitude will end. Dear Israel” [“Saladin und Osmanen werden bald auferstehen. Diese undemokratische Haltung wird eine ende haben. Lieber Israel”] ([SZ-FB\[20210510\]](#)). This prediction of an imminent end is associated with an unreal and implicit wish-fantasy. This wish imagines the return of historical actors who once established their rule over areas of contemporary Israel by force and who (or their equivalents today) should now end not merely the alleged attitude but ultimately the sovereignty of Israel in the same way. Such violence would inevitably result in the deaths of many Israelis. “🇸🇦 yesss it’s time ❤️” [“🇸🇦 jaaa wird Zeit ❤️”] ([B-FB\[20210510\]](#)) is a call for violence that can only be extrapolated from the context: the comment refers to the news that Hamas had started to bombard Israel with rocket fire. Knowing the potential consequences of indiscriminate rocket fire, this is also an implicit death wish.

### 3.1.4. Summary

The recent escalation in the Arab-Israeli conflict triggered extensive coverage across all three countries and generated a consistent number of antisemitic responses in social media. However, the results of our qualitative analyses demonstrate that these vary greatly between countries. The analysis of Facebook profiles of leading media outlets in the UK reveals a disproportionately higher frequency of antisemitic statements (26.9% of the 1,504 analysed comments), twice as many as in the other two countries. The amount of antisemitic comments on Facebook profiles of the French mainstream media was 12.6% of the 1,500 comments. On the Facebook profiles of leading German media outlets it was almost the same share: 13.6% of the 1,520 comments analysed contained antisemitic statements.

In the UK, related ideas are communicated either directly or indirectly – in 38.7% of the antisemitic comments, the thread's context was decisive for inferring the hidden meaning. The most frequently communicated concepts were, in this order, EVIL (39.8%), ISRAEL'S SOLE GUILT IN THE CONFLICT (27.9%), CHILD MURDER (8.1%), the DENIAL OF JEWISH SELF-DETERMINATION (7.7%), APARTHEID (5.2%) and NAZI ANALOGIES, as well as AMORALITY (4%).

The analysis conducted on the French corpus reveals that around 62% of the antisemitic comments required the wider context of the thread to be taken into account in order to determine its antisemitic character. Almost half of the antisemitic comments present the EVIL stereotype (46.8%). Other antisemitic concepts French users evoke most often are DENIAL OF JEWISH SELF-DETERMINATION (17.8%), COLONIALISM (13.1%) and NAZI ANALOGIES (7.8%), CHILD MURDER (11%) and AMORALITY (6.3%).

For the German comments sections, 48.3% of the antisemitic meanings could only be inferred via the context. The most frequent antisemitic attributions were those of EVIL (41.0%), ISRAEL'S SOLE GUILT IN THE CONFLICT (10.1%), JEWISH/ISRAELI INFLUENCE ON THE MEDIA (8.2%), a TABOO OF CRITICISM towards Israel (8.2%), the APARTHEID ANALOGY (6.2%), CHILD MURDER (5.8%), and DENIAL OF JEWISH SELF-DETERMINATION (5.3%).

It is striking that attributions towards Israel of being essentially EVIL or committing major EVIL have been by far the most frequent in all three countries – that is to say that Israel is principally connected to a range of demonising evaluations that are regularly repeated and shared across the countries. The EVIL stereotype serves as the basis for further topoi, be it by means of the depiction of Israel as a NAZI or APARTHEID STATE, or the SOLE CULPRIT IN THE CONFLICT. In relation to its British equivalent, the conceptualisation of Israel as the last existing COLONIAL STATE plays a greater role in the French corpus. Inversely,

the accusation of an apartheid regime as well as the concept of ISRAEL'S SOLE GUILT IN THE CONFLICT is less present in the debates.

Moreover, there are two shared dominant topoi in all three country discourses: CHILD MURDER and the DENIAL OF JEWISH SELF-DETERMINATION. The former evidently continues to serve as a perennial mode of antisemitism. The latter ties in with the antisemitic conceptualisation of Israel as such: the end of Israel's existence one way or the other, with the foreseeable catastrophic consequences for its Jewish population.

The topoi of TABOO OF CRITICISM is far more prominent in Germany than France or the UK. This difference may be due to the centrality within German antisemitic discourses of the idea that German consciousness of guilt for the Holocaust has made Jews virtually untouchable in Germany, whether through social desirability or the influence of an (un)determined power, and that both this guilt and untouchability should be rejected. There is also relatively little appearance of the stereotype of JEWISH/ISRAELI INFLUENCE ON THE MEDIA in the UK and France. With regard to the UK, the majority of commenters who dismiss the image of Israel presented in the British media do so solely by accusing the latter of a pro-Israeli bias (40.7% of all comments). This accusation is, of course, compatible with the notion of a JEWISH INFLUENCE ON THE MEDIA, but it was not openly communicated – an interesting contrast to the more overt allegations generally found in the British corpus.

In the comments of all three corpora, it was noticeable that – in spite of a high percentage of antisemitic contributions making use of linguistic means of implicitness – web users generally do not try to hide the antisemitic meanings behind implicit structures. Rather, antisemitic ideas were expressed openly or with a minimum of subtlety. It seems the users were not under the impression that their attitudes are problematic. Given the high number of antisemitic comments found, it can be assumed that (with one possible exception) none of the media carried out moderation on their Facebook posts.

The discovered topoi presented in this chapter deny Israel any moral integrity, picture it as an aggressor – whose behaviour would be covered up by pro-Israeli biased reporting – and exclude it from the community of states.

## 3.2. Covid-19 Vaccine Rollout in Israel

In December 2020, Israel launched its Covid-19 vaccination programme. With great fanfare and much global press attention, the then Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu was publicly pictured receiving his first dose of the Pfizer jab. The speed of Israel's rollout of the vaccination programme across its population drew plaudits from across the world, with other countries looking to see what could be learnt from the Israeli experience. But this generally positive coverage was swiftly followed by media stories focusing on the question of Israel's responsibility for distribution of the vaccine to Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza, as well as within the Israeli borders.

The success of the rollout and the question of responsibility to the Palestinians make up the two 'poles' of this discourse event. The measurement period of this analysis is between 23 December 2020 and 23 February 2021, beginning with the first week of the Israeli rollout and covering the period during which discussion over Palestinian access to vaccines reached its height.

As in the previous chapter, due to the deactivation of the comment function on stories related to the Arab-Israeli conflict on certain UK media websites, this study again focuses on threads on the Facebook profiles of the leading mainstream outlets. Again, so that the datasets could be analysed consistently across the different countries, a specific number of comments from a delimited number of Facebook threads were selected for analysis. In total, more than 4,500 Facebook comments posted underneath newspaper articles about the Israel vaccine programme in the UK, France and Germany were analysed.

The following sub-chapters present the results of our qualitative content analysis, including both conceptual and linguistic elements. Quantitative data drawn from each corpus and comparative findings can be found in the concluding section of the chapter.

### 3.2.1. UK

Matthew Bolton

The UK corpus was comprised of 15 threads of comments responding to stories posted on the official Facebook profiles of leading UK media outlets, including *BBC*, *The Guardian*, *The Times*, *The Sunday Times*, *Daily Mail*, *The Spectator*, *The Independent* and *The Telegraph*. Eleven of these stories related to the precocity, speed and success of the Israeli vaccine programme, beginning in mid-December 2020. Four related specifically the question of the distribution of vaccines to the Palestinians, with the first published in early January 2021.<sup>9</sup>

One of the most frequently articulated antisemitic ideas across both 'poles' of the discourse event was the attribution of AMORALITY to Israel.<sup>10</sup> Web users explained the lack of vaccines in Palestine by reference to Israel's supposed inability to recognise its moral or 'humane' duty to supply them. AMORALITY is expressed primarily through the attribution of acts of omission, the failure to attain the moral standards required by humanity. It is therefore an updated version of older antisemitic ideas of an absence of 'Chris-

tian' morality within Jewish communities. These comments often took the form of rhetorical questions – "How many Palestine vaccinated 0" (DM-FB[20210101]) – or statements – "guarantee not one Palestinian has been vaccinated.." (Tel-FB[20211229]) – premised on the presupposition that Israel's prioritisation of its own citizens when distributing vaccines constitutes an inherent moral failing.

The idea of Israel as inherently EVIL appeared even more frequently. In contrast to AMORALITY, EVIL is a more active category, and attributes to Israel a deliberate, positive strategy of Palestinian exclusion, aimed at fulfilling a pre-existing agenda. Web users argued the success of the Israeli rollout was predicated on "purposely excluding Palestinians, for whom they are legally responsible, from the vaccination scheme. Not something to celebrate" (Tel-FB[20210110]). Stories concerning data about the 'real-world' effectiveness of the vaccines received the rejoinder that, whatever the efficiency, "It's still more effective than the zero vaccine they are allowing to reach Palestinian people" (Gua-FB[20210119]) – 'allowing'

<sup>9</sup> – See footnote 8 in Chapter 3.1.1 where the difficulties in confirming the origin of web users on UK media websites and Facebook threads is discussed.

<sup>10</sup> – While other sections of this report combine the concept of AMORALITY with that of IMMORALITY, in this analysis AMORALITY is treated as a distinct concept, representing a form of passivity or an act of omission which results in harm, and contrasted to EVIL, which indicates an active, positive decision or policy to purposefully inflict harm. The quantitative analysis at the end of the section will reunite AMORALITY with IMMORALITY for comparative purposes.

here indicating a positive decision to block Palestinian access. Other responded with sarcasm to the rising totals of Israeli citizens vaccinated: “But no Palestineans. Weird hey” (DM-FB[20210101]).

Web users activated the EVIL stereotype more directly by describing the limitation of Israeli vaccines to Israeli citizens as “Wickedness of the highest order” (Ind-FB[20210108]) or “pure evil” (Ind-FB[20210108]). But such *wickedness* was nothing less than should be expected from Israel, given that “ordinarily they will prefer to see all Palestinians dead” (Ind-FB[20210108]). In such comments, the idea that “Israel wants Palestinians dead, sick, and desperate” is presupposed – for “How else will they keep their campaign of hatred, abuse and invasion?” (BBC-FB[20210125])? The Israeli state is depicted as viewing the vaccine rollout as just another “opportunity to kill the existence of the Palestinian’s and as usual the world turns a blind eye” (DM-FB[20210118]). The latter clause here combines the stereotype of Jewish EVIL with that of JEWISH PRIVILEGE – the idea that leaders of global powers give Israel a ‘free pass,’ willingly turning a blind eye to Jewish machinations. The EVIL stereotype was regularly given more concrete form through direct comparisons between the Israeli state and that of Apartheid South Africa. For these users, the Apartheid of the vaccine rollout “is clear to anyone who cares to see it” (Tel-FB[20210110]).

At times, other commenters attempted to refute these arguments, pointing out that Israel was not legally responsible for healthcare in the West Bank and Gaza, and that Israeli Arabs and Palestinian prisoners inside Israel were being given the vaccine at the same speed as Israeli Jews. But this counter speech was rejected outright, and the accusation of apartheid reiterated: “Whatever the reasons for this, it’s not a lie to say that Apartheid Israel isn’t offering the vaccine to Palestinians, it’s simply a fact” (Tel-FB[20210124]). One user suggests the vaccine rollout exemplified Israel’s status as a “an apartheid mafia state within a state” (Tim-FB[20210103]), invoking the DENIAL OF ISRAEL’S RIGHT TO EXIST through the implication that Palestine was the true state and Israel an illegitimate criminal presence, if not an outright “stain on humanity” (Ind-FB[20210108]). Those who sought to defend Israel were then confronted with rhetorical questions targeting their own AMORALITY or EVIL. One web user was asked whether it was merely a “a state of permanent apartheid over the Palestinians or something even more sinister you desire?” (Tel-FB[20210124]), while another was told their “excuses for the cruel, criminal actions of the Apartheid state of Israel are despicable” (Spe-FB[20210102]). One defender of Israel was repeatedly asked “how many children” they had “killed” (Tel-FB[202101229]), invoking the idea of Jewish CHILD MURDER.

Some commenters suggested that given the presupposition of Israeli EVIL, Palestinians should refuse to accept vaccines from Israeli health workers even if they were offered, instead insisting on “medical

staff from trusted medical personnel from trusted organizations” (Tel-FB[20210124]). Implicit here is the idea that Israeli health workers might use fake, lethal vaccines in order to kill Palestinian recipients. As one sceptical user put it, “Israel is try to eliminate Palestinians so how does Palestinians think that the guy who wants to kill you can save you from a sinking boat???” (BBC-FB[20210125]). Similar ideas of the Israeli desire for the death of Palestinians were expressed with greater intensity in comments that described the vaccine programme as a means for Israel to further the alleged GENOCIDE of the Palestinians. The idea of GENOCIDE was articulated indirectly – “They just want the Palestine people dead and gone shame on them” (Ind-FB[20210108]) – or directly, sometimes with added irony: “The only time Zionists wanna be hands-off is when it leads to the genocide of the native Palestinian population.” (Tel-FB[20210124]).

The idea of GENOCIDE was frequently combined with other antisemitic topoi. One comment described Israel as a “racist apartheid state that commits genocide on the indigenous people, commits daily war crimes, and human rights abuses” (Tel-FB[20210112]), bringing together ideas of RACIST STATE, APARTHEID ANALOGIES, EVIL, GENOCIDE and DENIAL OF ISRAEL’S RIGHT TO EXIST. Others added the idea of JEWISH PRIVILEGE, asking how “the world” could remain “silent about this continued genocide. Its insanely inhumane!” (Ind-FB[20210108]). In some comments GENOCIDE was combined with HOLOCAUST RELATIVISATION and the accusation that JEWS HAVE NOT LEARNT FROM THE PAST: “it was evil, terrible what happened to millions of Jewish people. THIS DOES NOT GIVE MODERN ISRAELIS THE RIGHT TO DO SIMILAR TO OTHER PEOPLE” (Tel-FB[20210110]).

The choice of antisemitic ideas was fairly consistent across stories concerning the rollout and those specifically focusing on the question of Palestinian access to vaccines. The one key difference between the two ‘poles’ was a marked increase in comparisons between Israel and Nazi Germany in comments on stories about the Palestinian issue. Explicit references to “Jewish nazis” (Ind-FB[20210108]), descriptions of Israel as a “modern day nazi Germany” (Ind-FB[20210108]) and Zionism as “Nazism in blue and white drag” (Ind-FB[20210108]) were accompanied by more implicit references via wordplay – “the goons of the WaffenIDF” (Ind-FB[20210108]) – and the use of irony and emoticons: “Israel as bad as nazis who woulda thought it 😏” (DM-FB[20210118]).

A small but significant number of comments drew connections between the Israeli vaccine rollout and broader conspiratorial ideas around JEWISH GREED, vaccines, and the notion that COVID IS A HOAX. Israel’s speed with the vaccines was because “Knowing them” – the Jews – “they have watered it down a little” (DM-FB[202101230]). Others suggested that it was “No surprise, the country that secretly controls the world is getting the quickest

vaccines" (BBC-FB[20210125]). Some users made a connection between conspiracy theories about Covid – that the virus and the vaccine are plots to reduce the world population – and antisemitism by ironically congratulating Israel on the speed of the rollout and demanding they "Make sure every zionist gets it" (Gua-FB[20210119]) implicitly expressing a death wish.

Turning now to the key linguistic characteristics identified within the corpus, the most common linguistic feature within antisemitic comments here was the use of rhetorical questions to distance the web user from the antisemitic content of their comment. One user poses the question "How are zionists different from nazis?" (Ind-FB [20210108]), while another faux-naively responds to an article about Israel banning incoming passenger flights with a simple "What's Israel?" (DM-FB [20210125]) implicitly expressing the DENIAL OF ISRAEL'S RIGHT TO EXIST. The use of sarcasm was widespread, with many of those attempting to defend Israel facing contempt from their interlocuters. There was the occasional use of wordplay, with the term "Israhell" being used by multiple web users.

Comments which activated the idea of GENOCIDE were often expressed with heightened emotion, indicated by the addition of typographic properties such as multiple exclamation marks: "Yet another Israeli crime .... if this isn't intended genocide I don't know

what is !!!!!" (Ind-FB[20210108]). Other web users used the presupposition of Israeli GENOCIDE in order to BLAME JEWS FOR ANTISEMITISM:

**"unfortunately the facts are black and white in regards to the rise in anti semetism sentiments. Personally, I fully oppose any shape or form of racism .... but it still gets me thinking .... why? Do you not think this is due the lack of condemnations of the atrocities and genocide being carried out in Gaza"**

(Ind-FB[20210801]).

The use of rhetorical questions, suspension points suggesting hesitancy or tentativeness, and the prior affirmation of anti-racist credentials here indicates the desire to distance the web user from accusations of antisemitism. But they simultaneously express unconscious recognition of the antisemitic idea of blaming Jews for antisemitism articulated within the comment.

## 3.2.2. France

### Chloé Vincent

In the French corpus, 1,300 Facebook comments are analysed from a variety of mainstream media outlets (*Le Figaro*, *L'Express*, *Le Monde*, *Le Nouvel Observateur*, *Libération*, *Médiapart*, *Le Point*, *20 Minutes*, and *Le Parisien*). The comments are extracted from the media's official Facebook profiles. One hundred comments are analysed for each article about the Israeli vaccine rollout. They were posted on Facebook between 27 December 2020, a week after the official vaccination campaign launch, and 3 February 2021, when the French media reported on the success of the Israeli campaign. The Palestine-related articles, although fewer, are distributed during the same period.

The antisemitic ideas found in the comments are expressed using a variety of historical antisemitic stereotypes, such as EVIL, as well as modern concepts, such as the DENIAL OF ISRAEL'S RIGHT TO EXIST. Given the discourse event in focus, the antisemitic comments mirror in part the ones discussed in the analysis of the French corpus concerning

the recent Hamas-Israel conflict and add some more specific ones to the vaccine rollout.

The most frequent of the antisemitic concepts found in the French corpus is the DENIAL OF ISRAEL'S RIGHT TO EXIST. In half the comments where this concept is expressed, the users do not stop at arguing whether Israel has a right to exist or not, but they refuse to even acknowledge its existence. This denial is expressed using rhetorical questions, such as "since when is there a country called Israel?" ["Depuis quand y'a un état qui s'appelle Israël ???!!!"] (Par-FB[20201228]), or by labelling Israel "occupied Palestine" ["Palestine occupée"] (Par-FB[20210102]).

The historical stereotype of EVIL is used to qualify Israel or the Israelis. It is found either regarding the conflict with Palestine in general ("The white phosphorus bombing of innocent and unarmed civilian populations" ["Le bombardement au phosphore blanc de populations civiles innocentes et désarmées"]

(Mon-FB[20210201])) or regarding the vaccination campaign specifically (“They are going to poison them [with the vaccine]” [“Ils vont les empoisonnés”] Fig-FB[20210131])). The idea of Israelis being EVIL is also found in the NAZI ANALOGY, most often expressed by an analogy between Palestinians and “Jews of the past”, using allusions to the Warsaw Ghetto as an equivalent to the Gaza strip for instance (e.g., “Palestinians are in the same situation as the Jews prisoners of the ghetto controlled by the nazis” [“les palestiniens sont dans la situation des juifs prisonniers du ghetto tenu par les nazis.”] (Mon-FB[20210201])). The ascription of Israeli EVIL also appears in APARTHEID and COLONIALISM ANALOGIES, used as general truth to support the user’s argumentation; in the AMORALITY stereotype which is illustrated by the supposed lack of Israeli empathy towards the Palestinians, especially in the context of the vaccination; and in the DEHUMANISATION of Israel and Israelis (e.g., “Israel a virus state” [“Israel un état virus”] (Fig-FB[20201227])).

The focus of comments often shifts from the situation in Israel to the Jewish community as a whole. Indeed, some commenters verbalise the stereotypes related to the idea of a Jewish CONSPIRACY, including the idea that Jews are especially POWERFUL AND INFLUENTIAL, that they benefit from a PRIVILEGE which enables them to do as they please. Through those stereotypes, the users explain the vaccination success with the idea that “they [Israel] own the world” [“Ils détiennent le monde”] (Fig-FB[20210131]), referring to QAnon “deep state” (Mon-FB[20210201]), the supposed “relations” of Jews with those in power (Par-FB[20210102]) and media manipulations (Nou-FB[20210127]). In most of those comments, the user does not clarify who is supposedly behind the conspiracy allowing the shift from Israel to Jews worldwide.

The old stereotype of JEWISH GREED frequently appears in the corpus. Some comments are based on the antisemitic joke that Jews will do anything if it appears to be free - “of course [the vaccination campaign is a success], when you tell them it is free” [“Bah oui, depuis qu’ils ont appris que c’est gratuit 😊”] (Fig-FB[20201227]) – a stereotype swiftly confirmed by another users: “they come running” [“ils accourent”] (Par-FB[20201228]). The other comments are either in reference to the Palestinians’ lack of vaccination, or on one occasion to the CONSPIRACY theory that Israelis (or Jews) are responsible for the pandemic for financial gain.

Other stereotypes appear less frequently, such as the denunciation of the INSTRUMENTALISATION OF ANTISEMITISM, calling Jews “kleenex” (Par-FB[20201228]), implying they always cry about antisemitism, but claiming “it [this behaviour] does not work” anymore [“Ça ne marche pas”] (Mon-FB[20210121]). The conceptualisation of Jews as being FOREIGN/ALIEN is illustrated by the use of stereotypically Jewish names, e.g., “Shoshana”, to address and label a supporter

of Israel as a way to diminish the opposing argumentation, implying they must be Jewish to hold such views.

The few indirect death threats that are found in the corpus are based on the idea that vaccines are lethal (“For once I am all for it. Let them all get vaccinated” [“Pour une fois que je suis pour. Qu’ils se fassent tous vacciner”] (Fig-FB[20201227])) and therefore the vaccination campaign success is positive as it will eliminate Israelis (“Palestinians will soon be able to occupy the vacant land” [“Les palestiniens pourront bientôt occuper les Terres vacantes”] (Poi-FB[20210103])).

Finally, an intriguing comment asked whether six million individuals had been vaccinated (“Has it been 6000 000 or not?” [“Ça fait 6000 000 ou pas ?”] (Par-FB[20210102])). The sentence does not literally imply any death threat. However, it is an allusion to the Shoah and the 6 million Jews who perished, as well as a scripted reference to the self-explanatory neo-Nazi phrase *6 million wasn’t enough* (cf. 6MWE). As such it consists of a dog whistle – a coded comment whose implicit meaning is readily understandable to those who are attuned to such linguistic hints.

We note the use of another dog whistle that draws from the French antisemitic comedian Dieudonné’s political grammar of victimisation (see next section, the Dieudonné case study): “How much does it cost?” [“Combien ça coute ?”] (Mon-FB[20210121])). This question is a line from one of Dieudonné’s shows where he jokes about the idea that when one is accused of antisemitism, one can pay to get out of the accusation. It is based both on the idea that Jews are INSTRUMENTALISING ANTISEMITISM for their own gain and also on the stereotype depicting Jews as GREEDY.

### 3.2.3. Germany

#### Marcus Scheiber

The following qualitative and quantitative analysis is based on a thematic corpus that was compiled from the comments sections of the Facebook profiles of German mainstream media (*Faz, taz, Zeit, Spiegel, Süddeutsche Zeitung, Bild* and *ntv*). Using various search terms connected to Israel's vaccination success, the corpus was generated on the relevant Facebook pages and includes 1,500 coded comments. The corpus is restricted to the period from 1 January to 23 February 2021, as this was when the media coverage of the first phase of the Israeli vaccination campaign reached its peak. The selected comments sections can therefore be interpreted as a direct reaction to the success of the Israeli vaccination campaign, although two of the articles focus directly on the question of whether Israel should include the Palestinian population in its vaccination programme. The first 100 comments from a total of 15 threads were analysed. This analysis was expanded to include a keyword search with discourse-relevant terms (*Palestine/Palestinian, criticism/critical, apartheid*) which can serve as indicators for antisemitic statements, as it was found that the initially analysed threads contained very few antisemitic comments.

Although the proportion of antisemitic statements is lower than assumed at the beginning, the threads nonetheless show clear expressions of antisemitic concepts. Particularly dominant within comments sections about the success of the Israeli vaccination campaign are comparisons and references which seek to relate Israel to the Nazi regime. In these comments, users attest to Israel's morally reprehensible actions by projecting the practices of the Nazi regime onto today's Israel: "The Israelis do the same with Palestinians as Germans did with them back then" ["Die Israelis tun dass gleiche mit Palestinenser wie Deutsche mit denen damals"] (FAZ-FB[20210124]).

Nazi comparisons of this kind often appear alongside HOLOCAUST RELATIVISATION as in the following example: "No, but access to various provisions is tied up with the 'star'.... And have you ever thought that not everyone can get vaccinated? And go figure germany would have done it like that, then the Jews would immediately make a comparison and condemn us...." ["Nein, aber der Zugang zu verschiedenen Einrichtungen wird am 'Stern' festgemacht.... Und hast du schon mal dran gedacht, dass sich nicht jeder impfen lassen kann? Und stell dir vor deutschland hätte es so gemacht, dann würden die Juden es sofort damit vergleichen und uns anprangern...."] (Z-FB[20210223]). Such comments are often found in the context of a general rejection of a Covid-19 vaccination, as the pandemic is either declared non-existent or the effects of the virus are presented as negligible.

Many comments in the corpus perceive the Covid-19 pandemic as a government-sponsored lie, but do so without necessarily expressing or referring to antisemitic worldviews. Thus the linguistic manifestation of a conspiratorial view of the pandemic in general does not seem to engender antisemitism in and of itself. By contrast, there was a clearer connection between comments which expressed a conspiratorial vaccination scepticism towards the Covid vaccine and the articulation of antisemitic stereotypes or Judeophobic statements: "I think it's good that the ultra-Orthodox were vaccinated first because many died from it and this world has become a bit clean" (SZ-FB [20210124]). The plausibility of the death wish in this comment, i.e. the possibility of its realisation, is entirely based on the argument that the Covid-19 vaccination not only does not offer any protection against the virus, but itself has lethal consequences.

There are also statements that articulate antisemitic ideas independently of this thematic framework (the success of the Israeli vaccination campaign) but rather through a reference to the discourse figure Israel: "Israel is the only aggressor in the Middle East. #FreePalestine" ["Israel ist der einzige Aggressor im nahen Osten. #FreePalestine"] (SP-FB[20210213]).

Through the attribution of ISRAEL'S SOLE GUILT IN THE CONFLICT, here the historical stereotype of a general blame against Jews – JEWS ARE TO BLAME FOR ANTISEMITISM – is reproduced through the Jewish state and thus testifies to the unbroken continuity of such stereotypes. In the articles dealing with Israel's role in vaccinating the Palestinian population, web users characterise Jews as EVIL with a desire to DISINTEGRATE, identifying an active interest in purposefully harming the Palestinian population:

**“The behaviour of the Jews is perverse. They destroy a state (Palestine) and ‘benevolently’ give the remaining Palestinians that have not yet been driven away only a limited amount of vaccine. One might think that the small amount might incite unrest among the Palestinians. They are indirectly diminished because they are not given enough money and serum. Reminds me a bit of Warsaw and the food rations, between the Polish/Jewish informers and the rest of the population groups who did not get enough food”**

[“Das Verhalten der Juden ist pervers. Sie vernichten einen Staat (Palästina) und geben ‘wohlwollend’ den noch nicht verjagten Rest an Palästinenser nur eine begrenzte Menge an Impfmittel. Man könnte denken, die Palästinenser werden durch die geringe Menge zum gegenseitigen Unfrieden aufgehetzt. Sie werden indirekt reduziert, weil Ihnen nicht genügend Geld und Serum zur Verfügung gestellt wird. erinnert so ein bisschen an Warschau und die Essenrationen, zwischen den polnisch/jüdischen Denunziaten und der restlichen Bevölkerungsgruppen, die keine ausreichende Nahrung bekamen”]

([SP-FB\[20210211\]](#)).

In the course of these remarks, this web user – representative of a whole series of comments found in the corpus – presupposes that Israel is responsible for vaccinating the Palestinian population, but Jews have no interest in sharing the vaccine, and as a result deliberately withhold it from the Palestinians. This self-interest, in turn, is based here on the stereotype of **DISINTEGRATION**, that is, the idea that Jews seek to destroy communities. Once again, the concept of

**NAZI ANALOGY** is used by equating this action of the Jews with the conditions in the Warsaw Ghetto. Such a comparison intensifies the reprehensible intentions attributed to Israel.

Web users often reproduce the stereotype of the **INSTRUMENTALISATION OF ANTISEMITISM** in these discussions, arguing that their (supposedly) legitimate criticism should not be rejected with reference to antisemitism: “What is antisemitic about it? It is a bad situation, one of many! If you always sharpen the knife straight away, it will get blunt!” [“Was ist daran antisemitisch? Es ist ein Missstand, einer von Vielen! Wenn sie immer gleich die Keule schwingen wird sie stumpf!”] ([TAZ-FB\[20210107\]](#)).<sup>11</sup> Within this kind of accusation, a **TABOO OF CRITICISM** and the rejection of this stereotype are also implicitly active. Nevertheless, the keyword search revealed that the reference to this kind of **TABOO OF CRITICISM** and the **INSTRUMENTALISATION OF ANTISEMITISM** is not accepted by all participants in these discussions. Responses to such rejections are met with communicative negotiation processes that reproduce a diversity of antisemitic concepts are reproduced: **NAZI ANALOGY** “One could not have described Israel’s train of thought better. Your statement now matches exactly that of the Nazis from back then...” [“besser hätte man Israels Gedankengang nicht beschreiben können. Deine Aussage jetzt deckt sich 1 zu 1 mit den der Nazis von früher...”] ([FAZ-FB\[20210124\]](#)), **INFLUENCE ON PUBLIC OPINION** “inform yourself better and not just about western media.. they are funded by israel anyway...” [“informier dich mal besser und nicht nur über westliche medien.. die werden eh von israel finanziert...”] ([SZ-FB\[20210124\]](#)) as well as general conspiracy theories “western media that your leaders [Jews] have in their pockets” [“westlichen medien die deine anführer [Jüd\*innen] in den händen haben”] ([SZ-FB\[20210124\]](#)).

Regardless of the content of the individual reports or their respective thematic focus, the entire corpus is pervaded by the concept of the **DENIAL OF ISRAEL’S RIGHT TO EXIST**: “Then go where you [Israelis] belong and leave the country to its people” [“Dann geht doch da wo ihr [Israelis] hin gehört und überlast das Land sein Volk”] ([SP-FB\[20210211\]](#)). This shows the extent to which this relatively new antisemitic concept has become commonplace in everyday communication.

These stereotypes on the content-conceptual dimension can now be analysed on a linguistic-communicative level: the linguistic formations are regularly used that are able to support the antisemitic communicative goals of the respective commenters within the limits and possibilities of

<sup>11</sup> – The comment this question refers to has been analysed as antisemitic.

the medium. The stereotypes **TABOO OF CRITICISM** and **INSTRUMENTALISATION OF ANTISEMITISM** are characteristically expressed by means of rhetorical questions (“what is antisemitic about it?” [“was ist daran antisemitisch?”] TAZ-FB[20210107]). On the one hand, such questions offer the security of being interpreted as a legitimate enquiry in the event that the antisemitic claims to validity are rejected. On the other hand, they enable the particular antisemitic world view to be communicated implicitly.

Allusions are used to open up gaps which are then filled with context-relevant and discourse-immanent knowledge through implicit argumentation structures: “Germany lost the war too early” [“Deutschland hat zu früh den Krieg verloren”] (NTV-FB[20210105]). The combination of allusions and comparisons – here through the concept of the **NAZI ANALOGY** – “The Israelis do the same with Palestinians as Germans did with them back then” [“Die Israelis tun dass gleiche mit Palestinenser wie

Deutsche mit denen damals”] (FAZ-FB[20210124]) can also be found in the corpus. Allusions can therefore be interpreted as a communicative strategy through which the respective users try to convey their message in an indirect form and thus try to encode it in a certain way since those gaps must first be filled with appropriate interpretations before the intended meaning of the statement can be revealed.

Outside of these linguistic tools, suspension points are often utilised as graphic structures on the linguistic surface. These either have the purpose of intensifying the intended message “wouldn’t be surprised if these [coronavirus vaccinations] go on to have negative effects.....” [“Würde mich nicht wundern Wenn diese [Corona-Impfungen] nachträglich negative auswirkungen haben.....”] (SP-FB[20210211]) or, just like the allusion, of opening a communicative gap “And it used to be the star...” [“Und früher war’s der Stern....”] (Z-FB[20210223]) which has to be filled by the user.

### 3.2.4. Summary

While the vaccination campaign in Israel attracted a large amount of online discussion in each country, there was a marked disparity in the frequency of antisemitic comments across the UK, French and German corpora. More than 17% of comments analysed in the UK were classed as antisemitic, while France (7.5%) and Germany in particular (3.4%) attracted lower, though still notable, levels of antisemitic discourse. Certain stereotypes, particularly those expressing the supposed **EVIL** of Israel and Israelis, were used regularly in all three countries, with **NAZI ANALOGIES**, **COLONIALISM** and **APARTHEID** also appearing frequently in each corpus. Others, such as the **DENIAL OF ISRAEL’S RIGHT TO EXIST** were more prominent in the French and German corpora, with assertions of Israeli **AMORALITY** more common in the UK corpus.

In the UK corpora, 1,522 comments were analysed – 1,097 comments relating to the vaccine rollout in Israel, and 426 to the issue of Palestinian access to vaccines. There was a clear shift from ideas of Israeli **AMORALITY** in comments responding to stories about the success of the vaccine rollout to references to **GENOCIDE** and explicit **NAZI ANALOGIES** in comments responding to stories directly concerning the question of Palestinian access to vaccines. Among the 259 comments which were deemed to be either directly antisemitic or antisemitic in the context of the thread, **NAZI ANALOGIES** appeared in 13% of antisemitic comments about distribution to the Palestinians, as opposed to 2% of the rollout comments. The most frequently expressed antisemitic ideas across the UK corpus as a whole were **EVIL** (36%), **IMMORALITY/AMORALITY** (24%), **APARTHEID** (20%), **GENOCIDE** (16%).

In the French corpus, somewhat surprisingly, stories about the rollout of the vaccine attracted on average more antisemitic comments (8%) than the stories about Palestinian vaccination (6.5%). One possible explanation might be that the articles about the Palestinian vaccination triggered many more comments on average than those on the rollout (753 vs. 302 on average), and the antisemitic comments are dispersed in the volume. A further analysis of the corpus, once more data are coded, will help understand the patterns that are emerging. The majority of the antisemitic concepts and stereotypes found in the French corpus were directed at Israel or the Israelis (72%). However, in many instances the target of the stereotype is not clear, and the distinction between Jews, Zionists, and Israelis is purposefully blurred. To summarise, 7.5% of the 1,300 comments in the French corpus were antisemitic. Among those, the most frequent concepts are, in this order, **DENIAL OF ISRAEL’S RIGHT TO EXIST**, **EVIL**, **CONSPIRACY**, **NAZI ANALOGY**, **COLONIAL** or **APARTHEID** state, **AMORALITY** and **GREED**.

In the German corpus, 3.4% of comments were coded as antisemitic, whether indirectly or directly. A clear discrepancy can be seen in the quantity of antisemitic comments occurring in relation to the reporting around Israel’s vaccination success compared with the question of Israel’s role in vaccinating the Palestinian population. Thus, 17% of all comments in articles addressing the issue of Palestinian vaccination were coded as antisemitic. In contrast, only 1.3% of the comments in the articles focusing on Israel’s success in the vaccine rollout were coded as such. In these latter threads, the success

of the Israeli vaccination campaign was mostly used by web users as a point of reference to criticise the German vaccination campaign, which was still in its infancy at the time of the stories' publication. The most frequent antisemitic concepts in the German corpus as a whole are, in this order, INSTRUMENTALISATION OF ANTISEMITISM, DENIAL OF ISRAEL'S RIGHT TO EXIST, EVIL, TABOO OF CRITICISM, HOLOCAUST RELATIVISATION, NAZI ANALOGY and ISRAEL'S SOLE GUILT IN THE CONFLICT.

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### 3.3. Three Independent Case Studies

#### 3.3.1. The Miller Case in the UK

##### Karolina Placzynta

Earlier this year, the UK media widely reported the claims made by Professor David Miller – a political sociologist at the University of Bristol – about students from the University's Jewish Society. In an online debate, he alleged they were “political pawns by a violent, racist foreign regime engaged in ethnic cleansing” (Lipshchiz 2021), which in turn was a reaction to some of his students' earlier complaints regarding the content of his lectures: Miller had presented conspiracy theories about Zionist networks and claimed Israel was “trying to exert its will all over the world” (Gogarty 2021). Both the University authorities and the police subsequently opened investigations into Miller's actions. There have been other reports of Miller's long-standing interest in conspiracy theories, often involving Israel; in May 2020, Miller's membership of the Labour Party was suspended and he subsequently resigned, after accusing the party's leader, Keir Starmer, of being “in receipt of money from the Zionist movement” (Kennedy 2020).

The case was covered between mid-February and the end of April 2021 in most major news outlets, including *The Daily Mail*, *The Telegraph*, *The Times*, *BBC*, as well as the *Evening Standard* and *The Guardian* later on in the period, with a few posts shared to their *Facebook* pages. Some (*BBC* and *The Guardian*) chose to disable the comment function on their websites, and this is perhaps why – despite nationwide coverage – the dataset for analysis has been somewhat limited. Five online articles and one social media post with more than a hundred comments were identified, and from each a number of comments proportional to its size was used (between 70 and 1,100), totalling over 1,720. Unlike the international discourse events presented in earlier chapters of this

report, this case has been specific to the United Kingdom. As a result, most commenters were in all likelihood either from, or based in the UK, and familiar with its culture – as is evident from both the language and various references.<sup>12</sup> Frequent allusions were made to Jeremy Corbyn, a former leader of the Labour Party suspended in 2020, after he was deemed responsible for not providing a proper response to antisemitism complaints within the party, with one of the complaints aimed specifically at him; the publication of the EHRC report on antisemitism in the Labour party was one of the discourse events presented in the first discourse report.

Within the analysed dataset, a host of comments supportive of Miller and his actions centred around the issue of freedom of expression. Despite the fact that he is being investigated in relation to his statements about the University's students and not to his research, many claimed that as a member of the research community, Miller had the right to hold and present his own academic opinions, and that he was the victim of a TABOO OF CRITICISM. Some called for “Independent Universities, free of outside interference, please.” (Tim[20210223]), and argued that “We may or may not agree with his views on the actions of the state of Israel but you can't sack people for holding a view different to your own.” (Tim[20210223]). Others mocked what they saw as a violation: “Oh dear free speech working well when it suits ! ;)” (DM[20210427]), and yet others explicitly pointed to the source of the perceived TABOO: “even to make the slightest negative comment about Jews or the Jewish State is regarded as being wrong” (Tim[20210227]). Some commenters did refer to Miller's students rather than his research, but denied the antisemitic impact of his claims with the argument that university

<sup>12</sup> – These included certain lexical characteristics, e.g. using regional British terms of endearment such as “pet”, as well as references to British public figures unlikely to be well-known abroad (politician Chris Williamson, comedian David Baddiel, television presenter Andy Crane), and to events or narratives particular to the domestic media (cf. footnote 8 in 3.1.1).

students should, for their own benefit, be exposed to a 'range of views' and learn to debate against them, and that they had not been harmed – "I don't treat criticism as 'attack'. Sticks and stones, etc." (Tim[20210223]). They also frequently relativised this impact: "What about those who are at the university who now will not feel safe vocalising being against Netanyahu and the actions of the Israeli army?" (Gua-FB[20210428]), or went even further, hinting that the Jewish students in question were to BLAME FOR ANTISEMITISM, and that "any conflict Prof. Miller had with the Jewish Society did not take place in a vacuum (takes two to tango)" (Tim[20210223]).

Other web users attributed the investigation against Miller to the alleged PRIVILEGE enjoyed by the Jewish community: "we must all realise that none of us have any right to expect others to support our particular views or claims when it comes to faith" (Tim[20210227]). Many said that Miller was not antisemitic, but simply an incompetent or careless lecturer, again relativising his claims by interpreting targeted antisemitism as academic ineptitude: "Having said that, I would protect his right to spout such demonstrable rubbish up and until he actually breaks the law and then prosecute him for that, not being a fool" (Tim[20210223]). Finally, some commenters declared this a calculated strategy on the part of the media – either aiming to distract the public from political issues currently affecting the country, with some alluding to the Prime Minister: "Yawn. Dm and the boring anti corbyn stuff. Concentrate on the useless lump in no 10" (DM[20210228]), or to provoke a public outcry: "This week on 'things to conjure up outrage'" (Gua-FB[20210428]).

The second major theme running through comments in defence of David Miller focused on the accusations against Israel which he had previously voiced. Once again, it was claimed that he had been the victim of the same TABOO OF CRITICISM, with some rhetorically inquiring about its origin: "Forced by whom? The collective opinion of a bigoted minority who feel threatened by the free press?" (Tim[20210223]). Numerous comments insinuated that Israel was INSTRUMENTALISING ANTISEMITISM in order to deflect valid criticism, here combining this with the topos of CHILD MURDER in an ironic mock-admission: "I don't approve of shooting kids for throwing stones.....I am an anti-semitel!" (Gua-FB[20210428]), and elsewhere with SELF-VICTIMISATION, complaining that it was "The. usual thing. If you stick up for Palestine then you are anti Semitic and the Jews are always a special case because of the Holocaust." (Gua-FB[20210428]). Commenters complained about the

alleged INFLUENCE ON PUBLIC OPINION, as well as INFLUENCE ON POLITICS in the UK by Israel, which "owns all major parties in Britain. they all do it's bidding." (Gua-FB[20210428]). Some offered their own opinion on the actions of Israel, evoking APARTHEID ANALOGIES: "Report comes out yesterday concluding that Israel is an apartheid state and, predictably, today the news is about 'ANTI-SEMITISM!!'" (Gua-FB[20210428]), and DENYING ISRAEL'S RIGHT TO EXIST: "And what of the Palestinians who want to live in their ancestral homes?" (Tim[20210227]).

Multiple comments alluded to Miller's association with the Labour Party or left-wing politics in general, frequently drawing comparisons with Jeremy Corbyn – sometimes in combination with the free speech argument, or the criticism of Israel argument. It is worth noting that these allusions seemed to come from different sides of the political spectrum. However political sympathies did not predict whether the comment would be supportive or critical of Miller. Some commenters on the websites with traditionally left-wing readership, and seemingly left-leaning themselves, did speak out in his defence, framing both Miller and Corbyn as victims of INSTRUMENTALISED ANTISEMITISM: "Once again, after destroying Mr Corbyn in the same way, criticism of Israel being conflated with anti-semitism....." (Gua-FB[20210428]), even claiming that this political or media narrative had already been proven wrong "just look at the bullshit they smeared on Corbyn that turned out to be a bag of garbage!" (Gua-FB[20210428]). At the same time, on the traditionally right-wing side, many comments raged at the attempts of his 'woke' critics to 'cancel' Miller using a TABOO OF CRITICISM: "WOKE-FULL-NES will soon result in the total banning of all freedom of speech and all criticism" (DM[20210427]).<sup>13</sup>

While the counter speech in left-wing sources steered clear of any mentions of Corbyn and the Labour, commenters in right-wing sources frequently used the opportunity to directly critique Miller as well as Labour and Corbyn's actions. When asking "What is the purpose of the Labour Party anymore apart from to provoke racial tensions and support middle east terrorist group causes?" (DM[20210228]), or "anti-Semitism still going strong in labour circles?" (Tim[20210227]), they effectively spoke out against antisemitism thus defying the traditional, binary connotation of antisemitism in politics as exclusively right-wing. These blurred lines confirm the importance of researching antisemitism as a complex, shapeshifting phenomenon embedded in the society as a whole regardless of political alignments, adapting itself to a wide range of

<sup>13</sup> – This shows some continuity with the findings from the first Discourse Report, where INSTRUMENTALISATION OF ANTISEMITISM also played a significant role in the analysed dataset, together with insinuations of INFLUENCE ON MEDIA AND POLITICS.

profiles and ideologies, or even attaching itself to counter speech, here in the form of the EVIL cliché:

**“Yep - Israel certainly should be criticised, and I don’t think there’s anything wrong with accusing the state of Israel of ethnic cleansing. (...) But some people just can’t help letting that spill over into the realms of ludicrous conspiracy theories. The idea that ‘Jews control the world’ makes as much sense as flat earthism - but is infinitely more pernicious.”**

(Tim[20210223])

Just as the findings emerging from the conceptual analysis created the impression of a debate largely interested in upholding moral standards, so did the language of the comments. Overall, it seemed relatively sanitised, with some phenomena conspicuous by their absence – none of the antisemitic com-

ments were identified as examples of violent speech acts such as death wishes, threats, or calls for violence. Instead, commenters employed fewer inflammatory rhetorical questions, such as “Are you saying you think there isn’t Israeli influence over some of our politicians?”, as well as sarcasm and irony: “I don’t approve of shooting kids for throwing stones....I am an anti-semite!” (Gua-FB[20210428]). The meaning was often emphasised with suspension points, as in the examples above, and, less frequently, with capital letters or emojis; the latter being perhaps more characteristic of the social media, not as well represented in the dataset as newspaper comments sections. Insults were relatively frequent, but arguably milder and rarer in antisemitic comments – including the recently politicised “snowflakes” (Tim[20210227]) – when compared to the non-antisemitic comments: “tin foil hatted loon” (DM[20210216]), “corrupt shitshow” (Gua-FB[20210428]), “Jew haters and baiters” (Tim[20210227]). These findings, together with the fact that a vast majority of the antisemitic comments expressed their views covertly and would lose their impact if taken out of context, suggest two possible interpretations: one, that the more explicit antisemitic tropes and language had already been removed by automatic or human moderators, the other – that web users consciously choose implicitly antisemitic speech in order to avoid detection and deletion. Both of these are likely: as online content moderation becomes more advanced, antisemitic commenters continue to adapt their vernacular and their repertoire of references.

### 3.3.2. The Dieudonné-Soral Case in France

#### Alexis Chapelan

The French-Cameroonian comedian Dieudonné M’bala M’bala and the political essayist Alain Soral exhibit a remarkable capacity for bridging the ‘old’ and new antisemitism, drawing on ideological materials from far-right, far-left and radical Islamist milieus alike. Dieudonné was propelled to fame in the 1990s but his recent career has been marred by regular accusations of antisemitism, which culminated with the 2014 ban of his show. Soral, a former Communist Party sympathiser, joined the Front National before establishing himself as a leading “anti-Zionist” activist. The pair’s political proximity with Islamist pro-Palestinian circles, as well as their sympathetic approach to the French Muslim minority, sets them apart from other far-right actors. Relying heavily on social networking technology, Alain Soral and Dieudonné largely circumvented their marginalisation in mainstream media. With their respective *Facebook*, *YouTube*, *Twitter* and *Instagram* channels garnering millions of monthly views, they established a fast-growing online

community. However, in June–July 2020, *YouTube* and *Facebook* shut down in rapid succession all of Dieudonné and Soral’s accounts. The ban was widely reported in mainstream media, with the vast majority of outlets applauding the move as part of a broader effort to regulate hate speech online. However, our focus on web users’ comments paints a less unanimous picture which needs closer scrutiny.

The dataset comprises 1,529 comments under posts on the *Facebook* profiles of 10 mainstream – but ideologically diverse – French media outlets: *Valeurs Actuelles* (hard right, anti-establishment), *Le Figaro* (right-leaning), *Marianne* (populist, anti-establishment), *L’Express* (centre-right), *Le Parisien* (centre), *Le Monde* (centre-left), *Libération* (left-leaning), *La Croix* (centre-left, catholic), *Les Inrockuptibles* (cultural and entertainment magazine, left-leaning) and *Numerama* (tech magazine, apolitical).

On the most basic conceptual level, web users convey antisemitic ideation by expressing support for Dieudonné and Alain Soral, thus validating their world view. Support was articulated through conventional phrases of support and appreciation: “I stand with Soral” [“Soutien à Soral”] (LEXPR-FB[20200707]), “Sending support and strength, Dieudo” [“Soutien et courage Dieudo”] (LEFIG-FB[20200630]), “GO DIEUDO” (LEFIG-FB[20200630]). Salvos of superlatives are employed to describe them: “Dieudo you are the best” [“Dieudo t’es le meilleur”] (LEFIG-FB[20200630]), “an immense talent” [“un immense talent”] (MARIA-FB[20200806]), “a genius essayist” [“essayiste surdoué”] (MARIA-FB[20200806]), “They are the two most courageous men in France” [“C’est les 2 hommes les plus courageux de France”] (MARIA-FB[20200806]). More elaborate legitimations of their world view tend to ascribe BLAME FOR ANTISEMITISM to a supposedly overzealous Jewish lobby. Support for Dieudonné is also conveyed through admiration for his activity as a comedian. Other popular mainstream French comedians are the object of deprecating comments, their blandness, inanity and readiness to bow to political correctness being contrasted with Dieudonné’s “balls” and courage – a theme that unsurprisingly echoes Dieudonné’s self-portrayal in his shows. Dieudonné thus appears as the last keeper of a long tradition of French irreverent jocularity: references to iconoclast humourists such as Pierre Desproges or Coluche abound in the comments. Alain Soral, on the other hand, is presented as an intellectual titan, on par with Rousseau, Marx or Lukacs.

Support is also expressed through diminutives (Dieudo) that impart a sense of intimacy and endearment or through non-verbal means such as heart icons or capitalisation to highlight emotional engagement. Inside jokes are another prominent strategy to channel support for Dieudonné; these findings fit scholarly conceptualisation of support for Dieudonné as adherence to a ‘deviant community’ based on a shared coded language (Serge Proust et al., 2020). The infamous quennelle (an inverted Nazi salute), the pineapple (the French word *ananas* gave the portmanteau term *Shoananas*) or the sun icon (Dieudonné’s refers to the ‘powers that be’ with the phrase *Above there is only the sun* [*Au-dessus c’est l’soleil*]) are integral parts of the political grammar of Dieudonné’s post-modern antisemitism. Easily implied through the use of icons, the inside jokes function as subtle dog whistles within the comedian’s fanbase, which often elude those who are not familiar with the intricacies of ‘dieudospeak’. It is also interesting to note that web users play on popular catchphrases, such as the “Je suis Charlie” (“I am Charlie”) mantra. In this case, stating “Je suis Dieudonné” serves a double purpose. First, it communicates solidarity and support; secondly, it upholds a narrative of VICTIMISATION of the comedian. Equating Dieudonné with the victims of the Charlie Hebdo shooting establishes him as an embattled champion of freedom of conscience and expression. A sense of injustice permeates certain

users’ comments: they use the semantic field of exclusion and victimhood to manufacture an underdog story which pits a talented, brave ‘funny guy’ (Dieudonné) against a corrupted system. One user alleges that Dieudonné was “defamed and persecuted for 17 years without ever being allowed to respond to the accusations”, because “media will never have the courage to talk to him” [“Difamé et persécuté depuis 17 ans sans qu’il puisse répondre [...] alors que les médias n’auront jamais le courage de le rencontrer”] (MARIA-FB[20200806]).

Such one-man-against-the-system populist narrative rests on ANTI-ELITIST frames. It mobilises support through simple yet effective enemy images: an omnipotent, tentacular and ill-defined ‘System’ embodies the corruption and oppression weighing down on the ‘little people’. In most cases, the system or the elites are not explicitly denounced as Jewish, and antisemitism is couched in the language of anti-establishment defiance. However, on several instances, clear antisemitic allegations can be identified. Sarcasm or irony is used to convey the idea of Jewish POWER AND INFLUENCE, especially on POLITICS or PUBLIC OPINION. One web user observes that “the lobby that doesn’t exist must have a lot of power to silence the best French comedian” [“Le lobby qui n’existe pas à bien du pouvoir pour faire taire le meilleur humoriste français”] (LEFIG-FB[20200630]). Another one jokes: “Given how much power they have, I’d ask them to save the environment...what a strange country” [“Ils veulent pas aussi sauver l’environnement vu leur pouvoir ...drôle de pays”] (LEFIG-FB[20200630]). Facebook in particular is foregrounded as being under total Jewish control, an accusation reinforced by allusions to Mark Zuckerberg’s Jewish identity: “This way we see whom Facebook obeys to” [“Comme ça on voit à qui obéit Facebook”] concludes one user, ending his comment with a knowing wink emoji (LESIN-FB[20200802]). “When one knows who the CEO of Facebook and Instagram is...and when one knows the reason of the ban, one understands at once” [“Surtout on sais qui est le pdg de Facebook et Instagram...quand on sais pourquoi il a été banni on comprend tout de suite”] (MONDE-FB[20200802]). The company is likewise accused of hypocrisy, tolerating “racists”, “terrorists” or “paedophiles” but cracking down speedily on any content which concerns Jews. Another user chips in to the debate and points out that “ultra-liberal Globalised Finance” [“Finance ultra liberale Mondialiste”] will not silence “useful idiots” [“idiots utiles”] but “only those who reveal the “REAL problems” [“que ceux qui pointent les VRAIS problèmes...”] (MARIA-FB[20200806]).

This rhetoric can take on sinister CONSPIRATORIAL overtones: “Some people have an infinite power to do and undo according to their often-diabolical whims” [“Certains ont un pouvoir infini pour faire et défaire à leur envie bien souvent diabolique”] (LEFIG-FB[20200630]). Another user suggests that the decision comes “from high up, from very high up, from

Tel Aviv” [“Ça vient d’en haut de très haut, du côté de Tel-Aviv”] (LEFIG-FB[20200630]). Analogies with the situation in the Middle East are drawn, such as when a web user complains that “they are everywhere...Palestine is not enough...they want to colonise the world” [“Vraiment, j’avoue qu’ils sont partout... La Palestine ne leur suffit pas... Ils veulent coloniser le monde. #BDS#PalestineLibre”] (LEFIG-FB[20200630]). The Jewish community is hinted at through deliberately vague terms, such as the conspiratorial plural third person: “And people say they are not above the sun. What an injustice, they do what they please in this country” [“Après on nous dira qu’ils sont pas au-dessus du soleil belle injustices ils font ce qu’ils veulent dans ce pays”] (LEFIG-FB[20200630]).

The sense that Jewish people are “above the sun” also activates the scenario of Jewish PRIVILEGE, particularly the TABOO OF CRITICISM surrounding them. This trope is particularly effective as it is couched in the language of democracy and human rights – thus the defence of Dieudonné can shield behind democratic principles such as freedom of speech or of conscience. However, it is important to distinguish between users who express discomfort at the ban while also distancing themselves from antisemitism and those who explicitly embrace Soral and Dieudonné’s worldview. By marshalling the mythology of the whistleblower hero, web users attempt to delegitimise any restriction on hate speech: maxims and generic statements such as “We always try to silence those who possess the truth” [“On cherche toujours à faire taire ceux qui détiennent la vérité”] (LEFIG-FB[20200709]) or “The truth upsets 😡” [“La vérité dérange 😡”] (LEPAR-FB[20200707]) cynically imply that the true reason for the ban is that the powerful fear being exposed. Unsurprisingly, references to dictatorship and totalitarianism are central to the construction of anti-establishment enemy images: France is compared to countries like China, North Korea or the USSR: “Where are we, in China?” [“On est où, en Chine”] (LEPAR-FB[20200707]); “Meanwhile in Korea...errr, sorry, in France” [Pendant ce temps en corée du... euh...en France”] (LESIN-FB[20200802]); “This country became the Korea of the Union” [“Ce pays est devenu la Corée de l’Union”] (LEFIG-FB[20200709]); “Korea 2.0” [“Corée 2.0”] (LEFIG-FB[20200630]); “The Bolshevik version of democracy” [“Démocratie version bolchévique”] (VALEU-FB[20200701]). Literary dystopias such as Orwell’s 1984 are also evoked through multiple allusions to the “Ministry of Truth”.

These allegations are based on the suggestion that the Jewish community enjoys immunity from criticism: “As soon as you criticise Israel, you are antisemitic. We can mock other people but not the Jews” [“Dès que tu critiques Israël tu es antisémite on a le droit de se moquer des autres mais pas des juifs”] (LEFIG-FB[20200630]); “I am Charlie doesn’t apply here, because we are attacking the poor Jews...two different yardsticks...all this is disgusting” [“Je suis Charlie, ça ne marche pas pour ces gens car ici sa rabaisse

les pvres juifs ....deux poids deux mesurs ...deguelasse Tout sa”] (LEPAR-FB[20200707]). Other users avoid in mock-secrecy designating the Jewish community explicitly, citing fears of retribution: “a certain community I cannot name for fear of reprisals” [“une certaine communauté que je ne veut pas citer par peurs de représailles”] (LEPAR-FB[20200707]). Another modality of the Jewish privilege topos is enacted through the FREE PASS allegation. Dieudonné and Soral, who have been excluded from mainstream media spaces, are contrasted with pro-Israeli far-right polemicists, such as the controversial Eric Zemmour (who is himself Jewish), who benefit from much greater media visibility. This perceived asymmetry of treatment is leveraged to expose the ‘double standards’ and the ‘hypocrisy’ of society, but also, in a more subtle way, the agenda of the elites. One user states that “Zemmour criticises Muslims and he’s on TV, Dieudonné does the same with Jews, his shows are cancelled, his channels are banned, etc” [“Zemmour critique les musulmans donc passe à l’antenne et Dieudonné les juifs se fait annuler ses spectacles ses réseaux etc.”] (MONDE-FB[20200802]). Another one contends that “one can unleash torrents of hate on Muslims, Blacks... but as soon as we rub Jews up the wrong way, we are on the side of Evil and Hate” [“on peut déverser des seaux de merde en toute détente sur les Muslims, les blacks...mais dès qu’on égratigne un peu les feujis, oulala on fait partie du clan du Mal et de haine...”] (VALEU-FB[20200701]). The figure of Eric Zemmour serves as symbolic shorthand for the putative Jewish intolerance and hatred, a hatred that is allegedly encouraged and promoted by the ‘System’. Users contend that Western societies place more value on the suffering of Jews than of any other nation or group. The topos of ‘competitive martyrologies’ is indeed central to secondary antisemitism (cf. Rensmann 2017). It antagonises Jews and other discriminated minorities, especially Muslims, while also insidiously enacting a RELATIVISATION OF ANTISEMITISM and ultimately of the HOLOCAUST.

### 3.3.3. The Maaßen Case in Germany

Jan Krasni

On 9 May 2021, moderator Anne Will hosted a debate between Armin Laschet, the CDU/CSU candidate for the German Chancellorship, and Luisa Neubauer, representative of the association *Fridays for Future* and Member of the *Grünen Jugend (Green Youth)* (Will 2021). During the debate, Neubauer argued that the Thuringian CDU candidate for the Bundestag and the former President of the Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution, Hans-Georg Maaßen, had disseminated antisemitic content. In the following days, a number of public figures, the media, and social media web users discussed the allegations of antisemitism against Maaßen.<sup>14</sup>

The underlying meaning of the analysed comments emerges only against the backdrop of the federal elections – the true context of this discourse event. In other words, a large part of antisemitic utterances is not primarily focused on hostility towards Jews or hatred of Israel *but rather on the accusation of such hostility*. Here, the accusation of antisemitism as a discursive vehicle corresponds to the notion of a floating signifier whose meaning depends on the interests of those actors in the discourse that represent a certain hegemonic political and/or ideological project (cf. Laclau 2005: 131–135; Farkas/Schon 2018: 302). Since the discourse event discussed here is framed by the political conflict between competing political parties (CDU/CSU, the Greens and AfD) – whose discourse positions are adopted by users – all the prerequisites for the emergence of such a discursive tool for discreditation are given.

This corpus was generated from websites of traditional German media outlets operating within the political mainstream, as well as their *Facebook* and *Twitter* profiles. *Focus*, *Die Welt*, and *FAZ* represent here the conservative/right-wing side of media discourse, with *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, *Spiegel Online*, and *Die Zeit* on the left-wing/liberal side. Only those articles that gathered more than 100 comments in the comments section of the news website or social media profile have been included. In addition, a contrastive corpus was created with comments on topic-related posts on the *Facebook* profile of the right-wing party *Alternative für Deutschland (Alternative for Germany, AfD)*. We wanted to explore the conceptual and linguistic differences between antisemitic utterances in right-wing and conservative milieus.

Most of the comments that contain the term *antisemitism* formulate the accusation without being antisemitic themselves. In the first phase of the discourse, Maaßen is regularly accused of antisemitism. Following the publication of the list of his tweets on the fact-checking website *Volksverpetzer*, this website is shared and cited in one early thread alone more than 200 times. One comment from *Spiegel Online* exemplifies the constant references to *Volksverpetzer*:

**“Those who would like to know how ‘unfounded’ Neubauer’s accusations are, can read the collection of Maaßen’s posts, retweets and interviews on *Volksverpetzer*. [...] And if it is not clear to them what is behind terms like ‘great reset’ and ‘new world order’, then they have a massive problem with their education”**

[“Wer wissen möchte, wie ‘haltlos’ Neubauers Vorwürfe sind, kann die Belegsammlung von Maaßens posts, Retweeds und Interviews gerne beim *Volksverpetzer* nachlesen. [...] Und sollte ihm nicht klar sein, was hinter begriffen, wie ‘great reset’ und ‘neue Weltordnung’ steckt, dann hat er ein massives Bildungsproblem”]

(SP[20210510]).

The insult “uneducated” regularly appears in connection with the accusation of antisemitism (in the context of the *Volksverpetzer* post), the idea being that those who do not grasp the antisemitism latent in Maaßen’s terminology may, in their ignorance, be antisemitic themselves. The most frequent arguments of commenters being active in threads of conservative media outlets are not reflected in a denial of antisemitism and/or Maaßen’s defence but on the attack against Neubauer (by calling her a hyp-

<sup>14</sup> – A shift in this discourse occurred when the official *Twitter* page of the international *FFF* published a post on 19 May 2021 that questioned or denied Israel’s right to exist (*Fridays for Future* 2021). Even though the German *FFF* branch distanced itself from the tweet, it nevertheless triggered another furor in the comments sections of the media and on social media – this time directed against Neubauer (Spiegel 2021).

ocrite and immoral). Some web users sought to defend Maaßen through the articulation of antisemitic stereotypes, such as the idea of a CONSPIRACY:

**“You can safely assume that there is lobbying by very influential people from banks, MIK, politicians, about which you and I know nothing. [...] However, it seems to be the latest trick to call antisemites the people who speculate about such connections ”**

[“Sie können mal getrost davon ausgehen, dass es eine Lobbyarbeit von sehr einflussreichen Menschen aus Banken, MIK, Politikern gibt, von denen Sie und ich nichts wissen. [...] Es scheint allerdings die neueste Masche zu sein, Menschen, die über solche Verbindungen spekulieren, mal pauschal als Antisemiten zu bezeichnen”]

(Z[20210511])

Note the VICTIMISATION of Maaßen, the vagueness of the accusation and the connection to other conspiracy-theoretical speculations and accusations. In addition, the INSTRUMENTALISATION OF ANTISEMITISM stereotype is present in the notion of such accusations being the ‘latest trick’ to silence criticism.

The most antisemitic comments occur when the discussion diverts from the actual discourse topic (Laschet, Maaßen or Neubauer). In such cases, commenters refer almost without an exception to the Arab-Israeli conflict, as shown the following example:

**“[...] What happened then in Germany when the Jews were also expelled from their homes? Their successors do exactly the same today as happened then with their supposed ‘opponents’. Of course, Hamas is no better but under no circumstances should Isrealis’ actions always be portrayed positively because of our German history. You seem to have fool’s privilege here”**

[“[...] Was passierte denn damals in Deutschland als ebenfalls die Juden aus ihren Häusern vertrieben wurden? Deren Nachfolger machen heute genau das gleiche wie damals mit ihren vermeintlichen ‘Gegnern’. Natürlich ist die Hamas nicht besser, aber wegen unserer deutschen Geschichte darf auf keinen Fall das Handeln der Isrealis immer positiv hingestellt werden. Sie scheinen hier Narrenfreiheit zu habe”]

(F[20210514]).

This example reveals a hostile position towards Israel based on the NAZI ANALOGY as well as accusations of a FREE PASS. Furthermore, through adding quotation marks, the commenter RELATIVISES ANTISEMITISM. Simultaneously, they equate the state of Israel with the terror organisation Hamas. One web user evokes ideas of Jewish VENGEFULNESS and a desire for collective punishment:

“It would be self-defence if Israel bombed those who launched a rocket, but not if they bombed a third party whom they consider to be jointly responsible”

[“Notwehr waere es wenn Israel diejenigen bombardieren wuerde, die eine Rakete abgeschossen haben, aber nicht indem man irgendwelche Dritte, die man mal fuer mitverantwortlich haelt bombardiert”] (Z[20210511])

A tweet demonstrates the conceptualisation of Israel as a RACIST STATE: “one doesn’t say ‘Jews’ to #zioNaZis. boycott #goyimhaters & #IsraelRacism!” [“zu #zioNaZis sagt man nicht ‘Juden’. boycott #goyimhaters & #IsraelRacism!”] (S-TW[20210518]). The examples are not embedded in the immediate context of the German federal elections. Both threads, however, deal with the elections

and political processes in Germany. It is symptomatic that even in a discourse event focussed on coded antisemitic conspiracy theories unrelated to Israel, online discussion nevertheless quickly turns to the topics of Israel and the Arab-Israeli conflict and culminates in antisemitic utterances.

When it comes to the contrastive corpus, in comparison with the mainstream media, more antisemitic comments have been found on the AfD's Facebook page, but there are also some that – at least on surface – demonstrate awareness (or even support) for Jews. The following example illustrates both attitudes:

“For me Mr Schuster and Mrs Knobloch are also only agents of Merkel! When I heard Schuster's statement yesterday, one could have thought that stupid German citizens had demonstrated against the Jews! The fact is the AfD was the first party to call out this Jew-bashing! [...] This horrific act is in the statistics again being pinned on to the RIGHT-WINGERS as usual and our welcoming uncle eccentric president actor STEINGEIER will demand more money 💰 against the RIGHT-WINGERS! 🤔🤔🤔[...] This is only my opinion, which you can regard as caustic satire, and you don't have to share it!” [“der Herr Schuster und die Frau Knobloch sind für mich halt auch nur Erfüllungsgehilfen der Merkel! Wenn ich gestern das Statement des Schuster gehört habe könnte man meinen hier hätten deutsche Dummkopf Bürger gegen die Juden demonstriert! Fakt ist nun einmal die AfD war die erste Partei die diese Judenhetze missbilligt hatte! [...] [...] Diese abscheuliche Tat wird wieder wie üblich den RECHTEN in der Statistik untergejubelt und unser Begrüß Onkel Bunterpräsidenten Darsteller STEINGEIER wird wieder mehr Geld 💰 gegen die RECHTEN fordern ! 🤔🤔🤔 [...] Dies ist nur meine als Gallenbittere Satire anzusehende Meinung die nicht die Ihre sein muss!” (A-FB[20210710-1])

On the one hand, this comment reveals the idea of a (non-antisemitic) CONSPIRACY that in this case also involves the German Chancellor. Anti-elitist rhetoric that is, at least potentially, compatible with forms of coded antisemitism (or at least the insinuation that Jews collaborate with the elites) is a routine occurrence in online discussions connected to the AfD. At the same time, the user pursues a strategy of resolutely condemning antisemitism and presenting themselves (from the AfD's position) as a victim. This attitude cannot be viewed in separation from the ideological delimitation from other parties. Antisemitism is also being strategically disavowed in the last sentence as “satire”.

In the following example Jews are accused of politically INSTRUMENTALISING ANTISEMITISM against the right-wing parties. In addition to this, the rhetorical question stands both for (self-) victimisation and schadenfreude:

## “The Jewish community in Germany has so far attributed all antisemitism to the right. Why should I feel sorry for them now?”

[“Die jüdische Gemeinschaft in Deutschland hat bis dato jeglichen Antisemitismus den rechten zugeschrieben. Warum sollte ich jetzt Mitleid haben?”]

(A-FB [20210710-2]).

On the other hand, the condemnation of antisemitism is linked to a radical anti-Islamic stance. It applies to the “imported anti-semitism” that allegedly arrived in Germany along with Middle Eastern migrants allowed into the country by Merkel and the CDU government (names which are mentioned several times in the comments). This category includes statements by users such as “the lie of German antisemitism” [“die Lüge des deutschen Antisemitismus”] “imported hate towards Jews” [“Judenhassimport”] “imported anti-semitism” [“importierter Antisemitismus”] “[...] Who are the agitators against Jews refugees migrants and Islamists, all of them brought here to this country with open arms from 2015 onwards, and every year thousands join them. Blaming the AfD now is just shameful” [“[...] Wer sind dann die Hetzer gegen Juden Flüchtlinge Migranten und Islamisten die alle ab 2015 mit offenen Armen hier ins Land geholt wurden und jedes Jahr kommen Tausende hinzu. Jetzt der AfD die Schuld geben ist einfach nur beschämend”] (A-FB[20210710-3]).

Some similarities between right-wing and conservative comments are reflected on the linguistic level. In political disputes, similar insults for Neubauer such as “brat” [“Gör”], “child” [“Kind”] or “girl” [“Mädchen”] are used. In the conservative or right-wing antisemitic comments, a compound word involving *cudgel* [-keule] is often used: “Nazi cudgel” [“Nazi Keule”], “N-cudgel” [“N-Keule”], “system cudgel” [“Systemkeule”]. Antisemitism in the left-wing/liberal spectrum of the corpus is not characterised by particular linguistic properties, except when it appears in connection with BDS (Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions) or when affirming international calls against Israel – as in the course of the *Twitter* hashtags #IsraelRacism and #antiNakba.

### 3.3.4. Summary

This chapter looks at three ostensibly unrelated media events in which public figures from the fields of academia, popular culture and politics were brought into connection with antisemitism. Despite the limited comparability of their backgrounds and different national contexts, each of the three case studies shows that antisemitism is not a monolithic ideology, that it cannot be decisively linked to one political milieu, and that it attaches itself to a wide range of figures with varying personal, professional, and cultural profiles, as well as a range of topics.

David Miller's defenders seem to represent the moral high ground: on the surface, they argue for the freedom of speech (similar to the Dieudonné case), or against political oppression abroad and prejudice in domestic politics. Their language is seldom offensive, and on the conceptual level most antisemitic statements would be devoid of meaning if taken out of context, as they do not contain explicit slurs or stereotyping: out of over 1,720 analysed comments, less than 10% were identified as antisemitic, and 85% of these as contextually antisemitic. Such qualitative and quantitative findings create a false impression of a tolerant, open-minded conversation. However, the antisemitic comments build on existing topoi, among which the most prevalent are TABOO OF CRITICISM, as well as INSTRUMENTALISATION, RELATIVISATION, or even DENIAL OF ANTISEMITISM. Also common are APARTHEID ANALOGY, INFLUENCE ON PUBLIC OPINION, and JEWISH PRIVILEGE. The use of well-established concepts coupled with the scarcity of overt antisemitism – a trend noticeable across all three datasets analysed in this chapter – potentially hints at the commenters' awareness of the social unacceptability of antisemitic views and at their efforts to disguise them or blame them on another group.

Dieudonné and Soral's social media ban likewise elicited reactions which echoed historical patterns of anti-Jewish prejudice. A quantitative classification of our sample of 1,529 comments showcases that antisemitism is a robust, albeit minority, presence. 19.8% of analysed comments in our dataset were antisemitic in nature. The vast majority of those (86%) were examples of contextual antisemitism: both the Miller and the Dieudonné cases therefore point to the fact that antisemitic ideation appears to be less driven by specific keywords but is embedded in complex and coded structures. The most prevalent theme was that of TABOO OF CRITICISM (present in 37% of comments) and FREE PASS (17%). Overt AFFIRMATION of Soral and Dieudonné's antisemitic worldview appeared in 20.8% of comments. The topoi of Jewish POLITICAL OR MEDIA POWER/INFLUENCE featured in 9% of antisemitic comments.

When unpacking the hero-making narrative constructed by Dieudonné's supporters, we notice that bottom-up debates among media users do not diverge strongly from the stereotypes that he himself circulates in the public sphere. At the heart of this particular

brand of antisemitism lies an alarmist vision of the distribution of POWER: populist storytelling schemes, such as the underdog or whistleblower-speaking-truth-to-power narratives, are effective drivers of antisemitic ideation. This alleged power can manifest itself in various forms, from silencing dissident voices (TABOO OF CRITICISM) to enjoying undue FREE PASSES. It is therefore useful to approach antisemitism as a fetishised critique of power and authority (Postone 2006) and replace it systematically into the broader semiotics of defiance it is embedded into.

In the highly politicised context of German parliamentary elections, a large proportion of web users reject accusations of antisemitism against Maaßen. Such accusations are portrayed merely as a weapon cynically wielded against an electoral opponent for political gain. In so doing, the problem of antisemitism is relativised, if not outright denied, with the potential effect that antisemitism is normalised and thus becomes acceptable in mainstream public and political discourse. At the same time, where antisemitism is acknowledged it is externalised, represented as an *ideology imported to Germany* by Muslim migrants, and from this perspective condemned by right-wing web users. The same pattern is visible in the Miller case. That being said, in contrast to the other discourse events analysed in this report, there were significantly fewer antisemitic comments in relation to Maaßen. In the corpus of mainstream media and their pages on social networks, 1.7% of 3,532 comments were found to be antisemitic. In the separate AfD Facebook threads, it was 13.5% out of 264 comments.

Often, antisemitic concepts are triggered through the mere accusation, especially AMORALITY and HYPOCRISY. Just as in the Dieudonné-Soral case, the antisemitic utterance may be seen as a display of bravery. Furthermore, the few examples of antisemitism are usually not tied to the discourse topic and refer rather to ISRAEL'S SOLE GUILT IN THE CONFLICT or compare Israel with Nazi Germany. In the discursive strategies of right-wing users, the antisemitic concepts such as JEWISH CONSPIRACY are combined with forms of self-victimisation.

Across the three different datasets, antisemitic attributions are frequently used to critique and denigrate the 'Other': those in positions of power, students, migrants; individuals as well as whole political groups and their supporters; different sides of the political and social spectrum can be seen accusing one another of antisemitic sympathies and history. The findings confirm the fundamental ideological plasticity of antisemitism. This pattern makes it hard to map antisemitism onto a standard analysis of discrimination: serving as a crude substitute for a critique of power, it often dons the mantle of a defender of democracy and freedom. This adaptability of anti-Jewish prejudice – historically proven to be one of its main characteristics – is also one of the reasons for its complexity and longevity.

## 4. Quantitative Analysis

Daniel Allington

### Introduction

Although coding of the data has only just reached the point where the machine learning part of the project can begin, extensive statistical analysis of word frequencies and co-occurrences – so-called corpus analysis – has been carried out in order to deepen understanding of the ways in which people discuss Jewish- and Israel-related topics on the platforms in question. This chapter of the Discourse Report therefore presents an analysis of English-language comments made in relation to three specific discourse events: the Hamas-Israel conflict and Covid-19 vaccine rollout, as discussed in the earlier part of the report, and the controversy over Bristol University professor David Miller, treated in the earlier part of the report as an independent case study. It should be emphasised that it is not possible to detect antisemitism at this level of analysis. However, as this chapter will show, statistical analyses such as these can be highly suggestive with regard to the ways in which issues are being discussed and understood, as well as providing a means of analysing much larger and more complete volumes of text than could be investigated through qualitative means.

### Methodology

The corpus consisted of 90,854 comments totalling 2,175,752 words on 141 articles concerning the Hamas-Israel conflict, 14,504 comments totalling 375,071 words on 39 articles concerning the Covid-19 vaccine rollout, and 930 comments totalling 26,511 words on five articles concerning Prof. Miller (further articles collected had not attracted reader comments). Comments were excluded from analysis if they were deemed not to be in English. This judgement was made on the basis of Benoit et al's (2021) 'smart' list of English stopwords – that is, common structural or grammatical words – with the 6% of comments for which the proportion of stopwords was below 20% being assumed not to be in English. Among the remaining comments, there was a mean of 59% stopwords (which equates to a Ure density of 41). Stopwords from the same list were filtered out, leaving only 'lexical' or communicatively meaningful words. This reduced the total size of the three subcorpora to 882,035 lexical items for comments on articles concerning the Hamas-Israel conflict, 144,432 lexical items for comments on articles concerning the vaccine rollout, and 10330 lexical items for comments on articles concerning Prof. Miller. These lexical items were lemmatised (that is, they were stripped of grammatical inflections so that e.g. 'loses' and 'lost' are both reduced to the infinitive form 'lose'), and the common mis-spelling of 'Isreal' (which occurred 777 times) was corrected to 'Israel'. The hyphenate forms 'anti-semitism', 'anti-semitic', 'anti-Zionist', etc were all

combined into single words (e.g., 'antisemitism', 'antisemitic', 'antizionist'). It was recognised that some comments were much longer than others, and that in some cases these almost essay-length comments appeared to have been copied and pasted. For example, one comment consisting entirely of the words 'ISRAEL IS A TERRORIST STATE' repeated over and over again was posted four times on one particular article under three different names. In order to prevent such comments from biasing the overall counts, the number of times that a lexical item could be counted within in a single comment was capped at five.

The three subcorpora were analysed separately in order to avoid swamping of smaller subcorpora by larger ones. Analysis proceeded in three stages. First, *keywords* – that is, words which are used more frequently than would be expected in typical English text – were identified from among the 300 most common lemmas in each subcorpus. Here, 'typical' English usage was represented by a 5,283,332-word *reference corpus* extracted from a random sample of 421,358 English-language tweets collected at regular intervals between 28 October and 4 November 2020 using the *Twitter* API. These were prepared in the same way as the comments that made up the primary corpus, with the exception that they were identified as being in English by *Twitter* itself. (*Twitter* data was used for the reference corpus because it can be assumed to be a better

exemplar of online text than existing corpora of spoken English and published writing.) Once keywords had been identified through the above procedure, their statistical tendency to appear together – that is, their level of *collocation* – was calculated. Finally, the calculations from both of the aforementioned stages of analysis were visualised as networks, and the *betweenness centrality* of each lexical item to each network was calculated. Betweenness centrality is a measure of how likely a particular node is to fall on the shortest between two other nodes, and is here assumed to reflect the role of each keyword in holding together the discourse as a whole.

This approach to text analysis – which is here referred to as *lexical network analysis*, although it is closely related to what Lee and Martin (2015) metaphorically term ‘cultural cartography’ – enables the three discourse events to be compared not only to English language use generally, but also to one another. It also facilitates comparison between the ways in which different words were used in the same subcorpus. Because this approach is innovative, it is worth explaining it in more detail for readers of this report who may be interested in carrying out similar analyses. Lexeme frequencies in the comment subcorpora were compared to those in the reference corpus of tweets using Fisher’s exact test, which enables calculation of odds ratios with 95% confidence intervals. For each subcorpus, the 30 lexical items with the highest estimated odds ratios were considered to be keywords. Fisher’s exact test was then used to compare the frequencies with which each pair of keywords appeared together, separately, and not at all in comments across the same subcorpus. Only where the relationship was both positive ( $OR > 1.00$ ) and statistically significant ( $p < .05$ ) was a link between two keywords considered to exist. Edges or ties in the network were weighted according to estimated odds ratio. Betweenness centrality was calculated after inverting edge weights (as edge weight reflects distance rather than closeness with regard to betweenness).

Please note that tables of the above calculations are provided in the annex to this report. However, the key information from those tables is presented in the form of visualisations.

## Findings

Figures 1–3 visualise lexical networks constructed for each subcorpus on the basis explained above. Nodes were sized according to their estimated odds ratio (which was capped at 1,000) and coloured to indicate betweenness centrality, with darker shades indicating greater centrality to the respective network. Edge thickness was not used to indicate weight, as this would have led to the obscuring of some edges by others, but graphs were laid out for visualisation using the Fruchterman-Reingold algorithm, which

places nodes closer together the more heavily-weighted the edges between them are: thus, tightly-packed nodes represent keywords that are more strongly correlated. (However, note that minimal tweaks were made to the layout in order to avoid overlap between labels.) For the exact figures (rounded to two decimal places), see the supplemental materials. Tables 1–3 show the keywords for each of the subcorpora, with raw frequencies, point estimates and 95% confidence intervals and statistical significance for odds ratios, as well as betweenness centrality ranked by estimated odds ratio and betweenness centrality and arranged by estimated odds ratio. Tables 4–6, which are available as supplemental materials to this report, show the correlations between keywords, also with point estimates and 95% confidence intervals for odds ratios and with statistical significance, again ranked by estimated odds ratio.

The most statistically overused lexical items for the Hamas-Israel conflict discourse event were ‘Hamas’, ‘Gaza’, ‘Netanyahu’ (i.e. Benjamin Netanyahu, the then Prime Minister of Israel), ‘IDF’ (i.e. Israel Defence Force), ‘settler’ (which is likely to refer to Jewish Israeli settlers), and ‘Aqsa’ (which refers to the al-Aqsa mosque, whose storming by Israeli police was a key moment in the conflict). None of these words appeared in the reference corpus, but all appeared hundreds or even thousands of times in the comments on these news articles. These were followed by ‘Palestinian’, ‘Palestine’, ‘Israel’, and ‘Israeli’: thus, all the top ten keywords related directly to parties and locations involved in the conflict (although ‘settler’ is arguably a special case), as do many of the other keywords (e.g. ‘Arab’, ‘Jew’, etc). The appearance of ‘missile’ and ‘rocket’ are self-explanatory in this context. On the other hand, some keywords clearly suggest a contentious reading of the conflict: the APARTHEID ANALOGY is dubious at best: tenuously justifiable with regard to the existence of a dual legal system in the West Bank but applied to Israel as a whole since before that was the case (see Rich 2017 [2018], pp. 32–40). Moreover, the frequent usage of the keywords ‘ethnic’ and ‘cleanse’ reflects the allegation that the state of Israel was founded on ethnic cleansing: an idea espoused by some of the Israeli ‘New Historians’ but rejected as groundless by others (see e.g., Pappé 2006 and Morris 2016 for opposing views), and which has – despite its controversiality – become widespread on the political left in recent decades. When we look at the network as a whole, we find that one end of it is dominated by words referring to objective aspects of the conflict, i.e. ‘Israel’, ‘Gaza’, ‘IDF’, ‘missile’, ‘rocket’, ‘civilian’, and ‘Hamas’, while the more contentious terms ‘apartheid’, ‘ethnic’, and ‘cleanse’ are all closely related to one another at the other end of the network – where they are also linked, perhaps tellingly, to ‘Netanyahu’ and ‘Zionist’. This can be interpreted as reflecting a tendency on the part of some commenters to contextualise the conflict in terms of racism attributed to the Israeli state and blamed both on its leadership and on its official ideology. Interestingly, the greatest betweenness centrality by





## 5. Summary & Outlook

The second discourse report on the research project “Decoding Antisemitism” provides, for the first time, comprehensive, comparative, and concise insights into our corpus analyses relating to Great Britain, France and Germany. The significantly larger scope of this report, in comparison to the first, reflects the diversity and complexity of the research object and illustrates the challenges that the research design we follow must meet in order to examine authentic web debates – especially concerning this delicate topic.

Chapter 3 presented the nine media events we selected as well as the results of the qualitative analyses of more than 15,000 comments. We studied debates on the social media profiles mainly of major leading media outlets on a) the recent escalation phase of the Arab-Israeli conflict, b) the Israeli vaccination campaign and its success (in connection with the accusation of Palestinians being excluded from the vaccine rollout) and c) three prominent individuals – coming from the realms of academia, culture and politics – David Miller, Dieudonné M’bala M’bala and Hans-Georg Maafßen and their relationship to antisemitism.

With regard to the analyses of the escalation phase in May, the findings are as varied as they are worrying. We were able to confirm the observation coming from antisemitism studies that the conflict is a central facilitator for antisemitic expressions. Moreover, in mainstream discourses relevant to this project, antisemitic stereotypes and other topoi are reproduced in attributions towards Israel. The analyses of the French and German threads identified antisemitism in 12.6 and 13.6% of the comments analysed, respectively. With 26.9% antisemitic comments, the British corpus contained more than twice as many. Due to the widespread use of English around the world, posts in the British media attract an international audience, which contributes to the spread of antisemitism. In particular, the reproduction of the stereotype *EVIL* stood out, partly acting as a basis for further forms of devaluation, demonisation and in some cases combined with calling for or affirming violence.

The second event – the vaccination campaign and the assertion of a corresponding Israeli responsibility towards the Palestinians – showed that, with 17%, the debates produced by British media again provoked more antisemitism than their German (3.4%) and French (7.5%) counterparts. Here, too, the stereotype *EVIL* appeared frequently in combination with other topoi of demonisation, whereby it was striking that on the profiles of French media (in contrast to the other two corpora) it was not the accusation of excluding the Palestinian side, but the success of Israel’s vaccine rollout itself that triggered more antisemitic statements.

The three independent case studies make clear once again the ideological plasticity of antisemitism. In the studies on Miller and Dieudonné in particular, what stood out was the manner in which antisemitic tropes attached themselves to ostensibly ‘democratic’ arguments about freedom of expression or academic freedom.

By deploring the ‘silencing’ of public figures or regular citizens by an alleged Jewish lobby, web users thus reinforce one of the central tenets of secondary antisemitism: the claim of a *TABOO OF CRITICISM* and of the *INSTRUMENTALISATION OF ANTISEMITISM* for suppressing dissent. The three selected case studies span a wide variety of political milieus and social spaces, pointing to the remarkable adaptability of such antisemitic frames.

The qualitative analyses of all nine corpora make it clear that – as soon as Israel is the topic of an article, post, or tweet – the verbal directness in the web comments increases. With the other discourse triggers, on the other hand, antisemitism was expressed much more strongly in coded or linguistically more complex ways.

The quantitative analysis in Chapter 4 suggests that notions of *apartheid*, *ethnic cleansing*, *occupation*, and *settlement* may play a special role in framing the Jewish state and everything connected with it within online discussion of news stories. In this context, it is important to recall the finding that some of the key terms used in debate on Israeli and Jewish topics were almost unknown in wider internet discussion (at least at a time when Israel was not involved in military action). This suggests that the forms of antisemitic discourse discussed here may have little persistence outside certain specific settings – perhaps including the websites and social media pages of major news organisations. It seems plausible that the latter may be deliberately targeted by people with an antisemitic agenda as a vector through which to place their views before a wider audience than they would otherwise have access to.

The datasets coded for this report will henceforth serve as training material for classifiers as the machine learning phase of our project (the second step in our multi-stage research design) gets underway. Developments in web-crawling capacity now mean that the three country teams will be able to select data from *Twitter* for future corpora, in addition to content coming from news websites and their *Facebook* profiles, further enhancing the scope of the project. The ongoing construction of such categorised datasets serves to increase the accuracy of the tested algorithms. The next Discourse Report, to be published in February 2022, will provide further insights into this transfer.

# Annex

**Table 1:**  
Key lexical items: Hamas-Israel conflict discourse event

Keyword	Raw count		Est.	Odds ratio		Rank	p	Betweenness		
	Corpus	Reference		2.5%	97.5%			Score	Rank	
hamas	9437	0	1000+	1000+	1000+	1	<.001	***	0	15
gaza	3859	0	1000+	1000+	1000+	1	<.001	***	5	9
netanyahu	864	0	1000+	424.68	1000+	1	<.001	***	0	15
idf	771	0	1000+	380.31	1000+	1	<.001	***	0	15
settler	728	0	1000+	354.92	1000+	1	<.001	***	61	2
aqsa	624	0	1000+	305.47	1000+	1	<.001	***	28	6
palestinian	10879	23	861.74	580.99	1000+	7	<.001	***	0	15
palestine	5725	16	647.30	397.10	1000+	8	<.001	***	0	15
israel	20709	82	463.65	371.20	595.15	9	<.001	***	0	15
israeli	6674	27	446.63	306.09	670.54	10	<.001	***	0	15
apartheid	1049	10	189.70	102.83	393.27	11	<.001	***	0	15
zionist	1352	13	188.13	109.81	355.90	12	<.001	***	0	15
jerusalem	1652	17	175.85	109.90	302.54	13	<.001	***	42	5
rocket	5580	71	142.83	112.85	182.90	14	<.001	***	0	15
arab	3422	46	134.87	100.63	185.21	15	<.001	***	1	14
occupation	1281	19	121.93	77.74	202.09	16	<.001	***	3	11
jew	5026	82	111.30	89.76	140.30	17	<.001	***	0	15
mosque	1099	18	110.38	69.67	186.04	18	<.001	***	0	15
civilian	2976	53	101.72	77.43	136.08	19	<.001	***	48	4
missile	1421	26	98.83	67.15	151.71	20	<.001	***	0	15
evict	576	11	94.60	52.51	190.12	21	<.001	***	0	15
settlement	768	17	81.62	50.73	140.41	22	<.001	***	216	1
occupy	1495	37	73.04	52.88	104.54	23	<.001	***	2	12
ethnic	851	22	69.87	45.90	112.14	24	<.001	***	14	8
jewish	2569	77	60.36	48.12	76.95	25	<.001	***	4	10
conflict	1583	60	47.78	36.86	62.82	26	<.001	***	0	15
land	7962	315	46.08	41.12	51.75	27	<.001	***	0	15
territory	804	33	44.05	31.11	64.42	28	<.001	***	50	3
cleanse	939	41	41.42	30.32	58.16	29	<.001	***	16	7
egypt	571	28	36.86	25.23	56.04	30	<.001	***	2	12

**Table 2:**  
Key lexical items: Covid-19 Vaccine Rollout discourse event

Keyword	Raw count		Odds ratio			Rank	p		Betweenness	
	Corpus	Reference	Est.	2.5%	97.5%				Score	Rank
<b>gaza</b>	410	0	1000+	1000+	1000+	1	<.001	***	32	7
<b>pfizer</b>	377	0	1000+	1000+	1000+	1	<.001	***	3	17
<b>hamas</b>	333	0	1000+	980.06	1000+	1	<.001	***	0	23
<b>oslo</b>	168	0	1000+	491.69	1000+	1	<.001	***	41	5
<b>vaccinate</b>	950	9	1000+	608.63	1000+	5	<.001	***	0	23
<b>palestinian</b>	1860	23	902.26	589.53	1000+	6	<.001	***	52	4
<b>vaccination</b>	523	12	479.93	275.82	927.25	7	<.001	***	1	20
<b>israel</b>	3171	82	433.02	346.38	554.60	8	<.001	***	0	23
<b>israeli</b>	1009	27	412.10	283.29	644.33	9	<.001	***	1	20
<b>palestine</b>	557	16	382.31	233.78	669.47	10	<.001	***	0	23
<b>apartheid</b>	222	10	245.29	131.28	520.33	11	<.001	***	4	16
<b>jab</b>	488	24	225.08	148.96	357.39	12	<.001	***	0	23
<b>vaccine</b>	2652	146	204.13	173.52	244.10	13	<.001	***	22	9
<b>dose</b>	689	53	144.13	108.90	193.06	14	<.001	***	0	23
<b>guardian</b>	527	42	138.96	101.21	194.46	15	<.001	***	0	23
<b>arab</b>	544	46	130.99	96.73	181.00	16	<.001	***	35	6
<b>administer</b>	88	8	121.48	58.97	292.18	17	<.001	***	167	1
<b>occupy</b>	335	37	100.21	71.23	145.33	18	<.001	***	16	11
<b>zionist</b>	109	13	92.69	51.94	179.80	19	<.001	***	8	13
<b>jew</b>	648	82	87.72	69.54	111.51	20	<.001	***	25	8
<b>jerusalem</b>	114	17	73.95	44.21	131.41	21	<.001	***	5	15
<b>occupation</b>	121	19	70.30	43.19	120.70	22	<.001	***	3	17
<b>manufacturer</b>	136	23	65.28	41.77	106.31	23	<.001	***	1	20
<b>territory</b>	169	33	56.54	38.76	84.71	24	<.001	***	61	3
<b>jewish</b>	380	77	54.60	42.60	70.82	25	<.001	***	6	14
<b>oxford</b>	102	22	51.21	32.05	85.05	26	<.001	***	3	17
<b>egypt</b>	120	28	47.35	31.13	74.17	27	<.001	***	17	10
<b>population</b>	540	137	43.69	36.11	53.11	28	<.001	***	11	12
<b>authority</b>	275	88	34.54	27.08	44.48	29	<.001	***	164	2
<b>nhs</b>	219	76	31.83	24.41	41.94	30	<.001	***	0	23

**Table 3:**  
Key lexical items: David Miller discourse event

Keyword	Raw count		Odds ratio			Rank	p	Betweenness		
	Corpus	Reference	Est.	2.5%	97.5%			Score	Rank	
hotbed	9	0	1000+	306.89	1000+	1	<.001	***		
ihra	8	0	1000+	262.56	1000+	1	<.001	***	0	18
zionism	30	7	670.23	284.52	1000+	3	<.001	***	33	6
sociology	20	5	626.80	225.06	1000+	4	<.001	***	0	18
bristol	50	19	413.98	236.89	723.07	5	<.001	***	23	10
israeli	59	27	341.13	212.37	554.69	6	<.001	***	11	14
palestinian	46	23	310.50	185.71	544.20	7	<.001	***	28	8
israel	162	82	310.23	235.65	405.77	8	<.001	***	78	3
antisemitism	98	53	288.64	205.72	408.35	9	<.001	***	0	18
conflate	11	6	283.77	96.48	961.34	10	<.001	***	137	1
jewish	133	77	270.82	202.53	362.11	11	<.001	***	94	2
antisemitic	61	39	243.97	159.85	375.46	12	<.001	***	0	18
palestine	25	16	242.86	124.75	481.61	13	<.001	***	0	18
judaism	7	5	217.29	59.39	884.07	14	<.001	***	19	12
zionist	17	13	204.15	92.91	451.23	15	<.001	***	36	5
apartheid	13	10	200.73	81.64	514.06	16	<.001	***	0	18
unsafe	14	11	197.67	83.42	476.43	17	<.001	***	6	15
criticise	24	21	178.30	94.81	336.02	18	<.001	***	0	18
jew	76	82	145.24	104.78	201.46	19	<.001	***	31	7
antisemite	11	12	142.86	56.89	352.90	20	<.001	***	0	18
academic	47	56	130.46	86.73	196.14	21	<.001	***	6	15
academia	11	14	121.91	50.13	290.38	22	<.001	***		
lecturer	11	14	121.91	50.13	290.38	22	<.001	***	26	9
miller	49	63	121.13	81.66	179.26	24	<.001	***	51	4
criticism	34	47	112.60	70.06	177.39	25	<.001	***	13	13
university	102	156	102.44	78.79	132.23	26	<.001	***	3	17
accusation	17	28	94.18	48.48	178.91	27	<.001	***	21	11
sack	58	98	92.12	65.64	128.91	28	<.001	***	0	18
ethnicity	8	15	82.82	30.41	207.49	29	<.001	***	0	18
tolerant	7	15	72.47	25.00	188.68	30	<.001	***	0	18

Note: Betweenness scores omitted for isolated nodes

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