

Pilot Project

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

Centre for Research on Antisemitism,
Technische Universität Berlin





Principal Investigator:
Dr Matthias J. Becker

Research Team:
Dr Laura Ascone
Dr Matthew Bolton
Alexis Chapelan
Dr Jan Krasni
Karolina Placzynta
Marcus Scheiber
Hagen Troschke
Chloé Vincent

Project Manager:
Prof. Uffa Jensen
Centre for Research on Antisemitism, TU Berlin

**In collaboration with the Department of Digital Humanities,
King's College London and with Flip Jansen from Hochschule für
Technik und Wirtschaft (HTW) Berlin**

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Project Coordination

Project Coordinator:

Dr Susanne Beer

Secretary:

Andrea Rellin

Student assistants:

Pia Haupeltshofer

Alexa Krugel

Victor Tschiskale

Technische Universität Berlin

Centre for Research on Antisemitism (ZfA)

Kaiserin-Augusta-Allee 104–106

10553 Berlin

Contact: info@decoding-antisemitism.eu

Web: decoding-antisemitism.eu

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Prof. Matthew L. Williams, Criminology; HateLab, Cardiff University, UK

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Executive Summary

1. This report focuses on antisemitic discourses that arose online in response to two recent major international events: the Russian invasion of Ukraine and a series of terrorist attacks in Israel. It analyses the differences and similarities in the way web users reacted to these discourse triggers in the UK, France and Germany. In addition, the report examines four national case studies which drew our attention due to the number of antisemitic reactions they elicited: novelist Sally Rooney's boycott of Israeli publishers in the UK, the Pegasus spyware case in France, and the controversies around singer Gil Ofarim and documenta 15 art exhibition in Germany.
2. We examined a total of 9,103 comments posted in reaction to the Russian invasion of Ukraine. The UK and French corpora both contained 12 % of antisemitic comments. By contrast, the German corpus presented a significantly lower number of antisemitic comments, at just 1 %. Despite the topic being Ukraine and Russia, users often drew parallels with, and quickly shifted their attention to, the Arab-Israeli conflict, presenting Israel as an **EVIL entity**, which must bear the entire **GUILT** for all suffering in this conflict.
3. 9,010 comments reacting to the terrorist attacks in Israel were collected and analysed. The UK corpus contained the highest percentage of antisemitic reactions (17 %), followed by the French (12 %) and the German (9 %). This discourse trigger stimulated different antisemitic concepts across the three countries, such as the **DENIAL OF ISRAEL'S RIGHT TO EXIST**, the **APARTHEID ANALOGY**, and **CONSPIRACY THEORIES**. This repertoire of concepts was mainly adopted by the users to **justify, downplay or glorify the attacks**.
4. The analysis conducted on 3,750 comments related to the Sally Rooney boycott case showed that web user comments tended to reflect the political stance of the newspapers. Those supporting Rooney's boycott elicited a higher number of antisemitic comments (e.g. 23 % in **Guardian** threads) than those criticising it (e.g. 6 % in the **Daily Mail** comments sections). Many supportive comments called for a general boycott of Israel and/or directly referenced the **BDS movement**.

5. A much lower level of antisemitism (5 %) was identified in the 3,196 comments reacting to the Pegasus spyware case involving the Israeli NSO Group. Here, web users tended to resort to CONSPIRACY THEORIES to interpret Israel's actions in the geopolitical sphere. Likewise, when castigating the actions of Israeli firms and government, comments highlighted Israeli (or Jewish) ALIENNESS and ROOTLESSNESS.
6. The German singer Gil Ofarim published a video in which he accuses the Westin Hotel in Leipzig of turning him away from the reception desk because of his Jewish identity. Our analysis was based on a corpus of 2,609 comments. The number of antisemitic comments was much higher in the threads posted after the incident became public (14 %) than in those reacting to the doubts about Ofarim's accusations (3 %). In the former case, users tended to accuse him of INSTRUMENTALISING antisemitism to his advantage. In the latter, this was combined with the idea that Jews allegedly have an especially PRIVILEGED position, or a FREE PASS to act as they please.
7. The controversy around antisemitic images being displayed as part of the 2022 documenta 15 art festival in Kassel triggered widespread discussion of antisemitism in Germany today. Of the 1,700 comments analysed, 7 % were identified as antisemitic. Despite a broad consensus on the antisemitic character of the objectionable artworks, in most of these antisemitic comments users DENY, RELATIVISE and AFFIRM their antisemitism, namely by supporting artistic freedom, satire and/or social critique.
8. The implementation of our first artificial intelligence model to automatically detect antisemitic content in web comments was successful. The approach chosen, logistic regression, allowed the model to identify the antisemitic comments with a good accuracy in comparison to similar projects. Further promising approaches are currently explored and will be described in the next report.

1. Introduction

Decoding Antisemitism is a transnational and interdisciplinary research project analysing the content, structure and frequency of antisemitism in online spaces. We provide insights into the progress and interim results of our corpus analyses through the bi-annual publication of a Discourse Report. These regular presentations of our findings are central to our intention to break new ground within both academic and non-academic domains. In this fourth Discourse Report, we summarise the current results with regard to the most relevant discourse events of the previous months in France, Germany and the UK.

The **Russian invasion of Ukraine** has been not only one of the biggest political and media story of 2022 so far, but also a trigger for various antisemitic incidents – be it the political relations between Russia and Israel, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov's statements about Hitler's alleged Jewish identity, Nazi and Holocaust comparisons on both sides of the conflict, and equations with the Arab-Israeli conflict. These discourse events have generated a multitude of antisemitic statements in the examined web communities. In addition to overarching conceptual and linguistic characteristics – which testify to the extent to which communication patterns of radicalised milieus have already arrived in the mainstream – there are conspicuous contrasts between the three language communities.

The **terrorist attacks** in Israel in the spring of 2022, which emanated from the Islamic State and were supported by pro-Palestinian movements, generated a high density of media reports and reactions from the web communities in all three countries. Here, too, it became tangible how extreme attitudes such as gloating, threats and calls for violence and murder – sometimes in elaborated language – have penetrated moderate communication spheres. Stereotypes, dehumanisation and demonising analogies, as well as delegitimisation of Israel function as justifications of corresponding statements.

The **four case studies** deal with the reactions to events in only one language community at a time since the related event were reported and discussed only there.

In the UK, author **Sally Rooney**'s decision to refuse permission for an Israeli publishing company to translate her latest book, and her explicit support for BDS, triggered a new debate about boycotting Israel. Commenters frequently confirmed the inherent antisemitism of Rooney's stance and while doing so, fell back on stereotypes, analogies and other antisemitic concepts.

Discussions of the **Pegasus** spyware on the French web demonstrated once again how old conspiracy myths appear in new guises as soon as a suitable cause is found (see also [Discourse Report 3](#)). This event saw the re-emergence of classic antisemitic stereotypes, such as the idea of Jewish global **POWER** and **AMORALITY**.

An accusation of antisemitism made by the singer **Gil Ofarim** in October 2021 triggered a wave of solidarity, but also antisemitism on the German web. Since there was a lengthy investigation procedure, we examined this discourse event in two blocks and were able to find numerous antisemitic attributions (such as **GREED**, **PRIVILEGE**, **INSTRUMENTALISATION** of, or even **GUILT** for antisemitism), relating not to Ofarim as an individual, but to his Jewish identity.

In summer 2022, antisemitism at the **documenta 15 art exhibition** in Kassel represented the antisemitic incident in Germany *par excellence*. In the debates examined, we could identify patterns of argumentation such as **DENIAL** and **RELATIVISATION** of Jew-hatred. Affirmations of the antisemitic imagery, combined with a demand for artistic freedom, were particularly conspicuous.

With this report, we are pleased to introduce first steps in using our annotated data sets for **machine learning approaches** (see Step 2 in our [research design](#)). Our external contributor Flip Jansen examined our English data sets and implemented machine learning components by using methods such as logistic regression, naive Bayes, and decision tree. This work has led to most promising results.

2. The Russian invasion of Ukraine

The Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 has generated a huge amount of reporting and commentary in the British, French and German press. Much of the discourse around the war, both from the protagonists and the media, drew a variety of comparisons with the Nazis, Jews, antisemitism or Israel. In all three countries, this discourse generated a substantial amount of media coverage, stimulating a similarly large response from the online readership.

Given the breadth of coverage, we were able to identify four distinct "discourse triggers" for potentially antisemitic speech. The first was Israeli Prime Minister Naftali Bennett's efforts at mediation between the warring parties and Israel's position in the conflict; the second, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov's assertion that Hitler had "Jewish blood;" the third, Nazi references in the context of the war; and finally, comparisons between the Russian invasion and the Arab-Israeli conflict. We have coded these latter comparisons as antisemitic: the unprovoked war of aggression by Russian forces on Ukraine, an independent sovereign nation-state, and the targeted attacks on civilians as a central war strategy cannot be reasonably conflated with the decades-long dispute over territory in the Middle East. Doing so thereby activates the antisemitic concepts by which Israel is regarded as an inherently **EVIL** entity, who must bear the entire **GUILT** for all the suffering in the Arab-Israeli conflict.

Comment threads were gathered from the websites, Facebook pages and Twitter profiles of major media outlets, spanning the political spectrum. In the UK, these outlets were *BBC News*, *Daily Express*, *Daily Mail*, *Financial Times*, *The Guardian*, *The Independent*, *The Telegraph*, and *The Times*; in

France *Le Figaro*, *Le Monde*, *Le Parisien*, *Libération*, *Le Point*, *L'Express*, and *BFMTV*, and in Germany *Welt*, *Tagesspiegel*, *taz*, *Zeit*, *Spiegel*, *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, *Bild*, *Focus*, *Rheinische Post*, *Frankfurter Rundschau*, and *n-tv*. Threads with more than 100 comments were selected for analysis, giving a total of 49 threads across the five discourse triggers, and 9,103 comments overall. In both the UK and French corpora, the level of antisemitic comments was 12 %, but significantly lower in the German corpus – at just 1 %.

2.1 Israel's position in the conflict and its mediation efforts

2.1.1 Israel's perceived failure to condemn Russia

Contrary to many European countries, Israel did not condemn Russia immediately after its invasion of Ukraine began. This supposed hesitation generated little media coverage in the UK or Germany, but was widely reported in France. Our analyses conducted on the antisemitic comments reacting to Israel's hesitation in France (13 %) revealed two main tendencies. Some users approved Israel's silence: to them, "They [Israel] are the worst nation in the world, they live in Palestine so it would be shameful if they declared themselves" ("Eux même sont la pire nation du monde, ils vivent chez les Palestiniens, donc, il serait honteux de leurs part de se prononcer !") (LIBER-FB[20220305]). Based on both the **EVIL**

stereotype and the DENIAL OF ISRAEL'S RIGHT TO EXIST, the user indirectly compares Russia and Israel. The same comparison can be found in the following comment, expressed in a more explicit way:

"They do the same thing in Palestine. Why would they condemn what they think is right"

[“Ils font la même chose en Palestine. Pourquoi voulez-vous qu'ils condamnent ce qu'ils trouvent juste?”] (LIBER-FB[20220305]).

Some users perceived Israel's hesitation as a strategy to protect its own economic interests and, therefore, as a form of GREED:

"Business, always business!!!"

[“Les affaires, toujours les affaires !!!”] (LIBER-FB[20220305]).

2.1.2 Prime Minister Naftali Bennett's mediation efforts

Naftali Bennett's efforts to broker a peace deal generated substantial press coverage in each of the three countries. In UK threads responding to reports of his visit to Moscow, there was a clear difference between the responses to *The Times* and *BBC* stories on the one hand, which both highlighted Bennett's role specifically and contained 8% and 12% of antisemitic comments respectively, and the *Financial Times* and *Daily Mail* reports on the other, focusing mainly on other political actors, which contained negligible levels of antisemitism. In the French corpus, 9% of comments were antisemitic, in the German corpus just 3%.

Most antisemitic comments in the UK corpus sought to conflate Russia's invasion of Ukraine and the Arab-Israeli conflict (see section 2.4), but in contrast to the French corpus emphasised that, unlike Russia, Israel receives a FREE PASS for its actions from the world community. One sarcastically argued that “Mr Bennett is ideally placed to broker peace. He can argue that Israel is occupying Palestinian territories but nobody makes any fuss so the world needs to accept that Russia can occupy Ukrainian territories in the same manner” (TIMES[20220311]).

The *BBC* Twitter thread saw users drawing upon the APARTHEID ANALOGY to mock Bennett's intervention: “Devils with blood on their own hands cant play peacemakers while running an apartheid state” – here associating Jews with THE DEVIL (BBC-TW[20220310]). Another announced that one should “Never trust an Israeli... never,” articulating the notion of DECEIT (BBC-TW[20220310]). The concept of Jewish EVIL was implicitly expressed through a comparison of Bennett to Genghis Khan: “Was the ghost of Genghis Khan not free to do that particular intervention on the ills of occupation and expansionism?” (BBC-TW[20220310]).

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Most of the French users also drew comparisons between Russian aggression against Ukraine and Israel's actions in the Middle East, highlighting the fact that, in supposedly acting the same way, Israel should not take on the role of moderator. This comparison was expressed either implicitly: "They look like twins" ["On dirait Des jumeaux"] (FRANCE24-YT[20220302]) or explicitly: "[Israelis] do the same" ["Ils font la même chose"] (LIBE-FB[20220305]). Some used metaphors such as "Israel is as dirty as Putin" ["Israël a autant les mains sales que poutine"] (LEPAR-FB[20220321]). Many users cited an idiom that can translate roughly to "it's the pot calling the kettle black" ["l'hôpital qui se fout de la charité"] (MONDE-FB[20220321]). This could be interpreted as making an equivalence between Russia and Israel, or simply pointing out that Israel has its flaws and is currently in a conflict itself. Given those alternative interpretations, we did not consider the use of this idiom as antisemitic. Furthermore, in some examples, the comparison is not made between Russia and Israel, but rather between Ukraine and Palestine:

"Ukrainians and Palestinians are fighting the same fight against the oppression and for their freedom!"

[Ukrainiens et palestiniens connaissent malheureusement le même combat contre l'oppression et pour la liberté!] (MONDE-FB[20220307]).

In contrast to the UK and France, German commenters were generally positive about the attempted mediation, and concentrated mainly on condemning Russia and Putin.

2.2 Lavrov's statement about Hitler's alleged Jewish origins

On May 1, 2022, Russia's foreign minister made the claim that Adolf Hitler had "Jewish blood." Sergei Lavrov's rehashing of the myth reinvigorated a decades-old CONSPIRACY THEORY. Our empirical study points to the fact that this narrative is well anchored, even within the online readership of mainstream media publications, with 11 % of French and 16 % of British comments seeking to confirm the claim directly or referring to other, related antisemitic allegations. Again, the contrast with the German corpus was stark: here, less than 1 % of comments were classed as antisemitic.

At the most basic level, the antisemitic comments approve and reinforce Lavrov's claims, both with terse structures – such as "He's just saying the truth" ["Il n'a dit que la vérité"] (LEFIG-FB[20220502]) or "Is true tho" (DALY-FB[20220503]) – and rhetorical questions seeking to create a false sense of evidence: "This is the truth, why is this a provocation 🤔?" ["C'est la vérité pourquoi c'est une provocation 🤔?"] (BFMTV-FB[20220502]) or "What is there to apologize about?" (GUARD-FB[20220601]). Others articulate the idea that certain "truths" are being suppressed: "The truth hurts" ["La vérité qui blesse"] (LEPAR-FB[20220502]); "Bravo Lavrov, truth hurts them" (GUARD-FB[20220503]); "Israel doesn't like the truth" (GUARD-FB[20220601]).

The theme of HYPOCRISY as well as that of TABOO OF CRITICISM, is activated by the reference to transatlantic slavery: "If it's allowed to say Blacks took part in slavery why not accept what Lavrov says?" ["si des noirs ont participé à l'esclavage et que c'est permis de le dire Pkoi pas accepter ce que lavrov dit ?"] (BFMTV-FB[20220502]). Certain users go further and hint at Israel's alleged machinations regarding Hitler's origins: "Why is Israel condemning it? It's true, unless Israel is hiding important stuff! We want the truth on Mr. Jacob Hitler..." ["Pk Israël condamne ? C'était la réalité sauf si Israël nous cache des choses trop importante !! On veut la vérité sur Mr Jacob Hitler ..."] (LEPAR-FB[20220502]). In this context, the Jewish state is accused of "loving to rewrite

history as they please" ["mais Israël adore refaire l'histoire à sa façon ..."] (LEXPR-FB[20220506]). Other commenters insinuate a TABOO OF CRITICISM for Jews: "Why is it impossible to say anything that's not affirmative for any that is a Jewish person or anything that is tied to Jews on the whole? We all know their history and their tragedy but they are human" (GUARD-FB[20220503]).

The leitmotif of secrecy is linguistically conveyed by calls to "look deeper" (DAILY-FB[20220503]). The CONSPIRACY narrative does not stop at Hitler's origins, but includes familiar figures in the antisemitic imaginary, such as the Rothschild dynasty, accused of having bankrolled his rise to power: "You ungrateful bunch, of course he was Jewish, his massacres have been financed by the Rothschild banker, how strange" ["Bande de ingrats bien sûr que ils et tes juif le massacre qu'il a commis c'est le banquier rochilde qu'il a financé les des juif comme c'est bizarre"] (LEFIG-FB[20220502]); "Behind Hitler, there was the Rotchild family" ["Derrière Hitler, il y avait déjà la famille Rothschild..."] (LEPAR-FB[20220502]). Others denounce the Second World War in its entirety as a Jewish ploy: "That's why I always say WW11 was a planned war. The Jewish elite with their allies stage the war..." (DAILY-FB[20220503]).

The sense that such statements will be widely rejected lead many users to engage in an attempt to de-stigmatise their beliefs by appeals to authority (*argumentum ab auctoritate*) (Breton 2009), ranging from vague references to "professional historians," to the users' schoolteachers or to web search engines.

Ultimately, the resilience – despite the lack of any evidence – of the myth of Hitler's origins can be explained by a desire to ascribe to the Jewish people the BLAME FOR ANTISEMITISM: the cause of murder of six million Jews as the result of an alleged perverse Jewish neurosis, rather than exterminatory antisemitism. In this light, Hitler appears as a "self-hating" Jew, who sought to overzealously compensate his frustrations: "Yes, it's 100 % true that Hitler was Jews from Germany and he get killed 6 million Jews just for pretending himself as innocent Christian..." (DAILY-FB[20220503]) or "Hitler

did all these atrocities to Jews to prove that he is German..." (DAILY-FB[20220503]). Vague statements such as "No Wonder" (FB-DAILY[20220503]) casually reinforce the idea that a catastrophe of the scope of the Second World War and the Holocaust could only have been fomented by Jews, explicated in statements like "The WS are involved in every war in the last 300 years" (BBC-FB[20220503]).

2.3 Comparisons between modern-day Russia and Nazi Germany

The ubiquity of Nazi references in the rhetoric of both Russian and Ukrainian leaders in the first weeks of the invasion was of particular interest to the UK media. On the one hand, they reported on Russia framing its invasion on Ukraine as an attempt to "de-Nazify" Ukraine; on the other, Ukrainian president Volodymyr Zelensky has accused Russian government of "deporting Ukrainians to concentration camps" and of "bloody reconstruction of Nazism." Some media outlets made such comparisons too, with *The Telegraph* posting an editorial on Putin "mirroring Nazis."

The commonplace nature of Nazi comparisons in everyday speech today – particularly prevalent in the UK, and by no means limited to the Russia invasion – means that caution should be exercised when determining whether such analogies are antisemitic or not. It is possible to minimise or trivialise Hitler, Nazi crimes and the Third Reich as a whole without making either explicit or implicit reference to Jews or the Holocaust. Thus, Zelensky's above-quoted accusation of Putin's "bloody construction of Nazism" does not necessarily trigger antisemitic concepts, and would not be coded as antisemitic in our analysis. However, given the primary place of the Holocaust and the extermination camps within the Nazi crimes, such an analogy can open a pathway to antisemitic concepts, such as HOLOCAUST DISTORTION or the RELATIVISATION OF THE HOLOCAUST. This effect can be seen in Zelensky's second comment, the accusation that Russia was "deporting Ukrainians to concentration camps" – here the link with

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Auschwitz is more explicit, and this comment would therefore be categorised as RELATIVISING THE HOLOCAUST. In our analysis of the online responses to such stories, keeping in mind the need to make such careful distinctions, 10% of comments contained antisemitic ideation.

Some of the comments agreed with the comparisons, leading to RELATIVISATION OF ANTISEMITISM, from short affirmations, such as "Absolutely true" (BBC-FB[20220508]), to extended parallels in terms of military imagery: "Couldn't agree more. Nazism has returned. A 'Z' instead of a swastiki. Otherwise, no difference. A nightmare" (BBC-FB[20220508]) or practices: "What they've done already – illegal invasion, seizing territory, killing of civilians, rape – is more than enough to qualify as nazi, comrade" (TELEG[20220508]). Others pointed out alleged links between Ukraine and Nazism: "Last time I'd checked Ukraine was celebrating Nazis and Azov Nazi batallion was part of Ukraine armed forces?" (BBC-FB[20220508]) or trivialised the entire Nazi era by suggesting that both Ukraine and Russia were equally guilty of Nazi practices ("Ehe pot calling the kettle black! 😂" (BBC-FB[20220508])).

An article on plans for a "Ukraine transport" for all families fleeing the Russian invasion, an initiative by a British rabbi, prompted mentions of Israel and Palestine. Web users HELD JEWS COLLECTIVELY RESPONSIBLE for the Arab-Israeli conflict, suggesting HYPOCRISY and discrimination against Palestinians: "Interesting.. why isn't the same proposal offered for the Palestinians whose homes and land are being destroyed by the people who share your faith and ethnic? .. Selective humanism" (GUARD-FB[20220306]), and RELATIVISED THE HOLOCAUST: "...and families fleeing the #PalestinianHolocaust...? How about them?" (GUARD-FB[20220306]). Some accused Jews of attempts to wield INFLUENCE and "desperately lobby and bribe around the western world to hush your Genocide and abhorrent barbaric behaviour?? Sure" (GUARD-FB[20220306]).

Although similar reports appeared in the German media, once again there were barely any antisemitic comments. The majority of users criticised or rejected the war as such, and the rhetoric used by Russia. In France, on the other hand, such comparisons rarely appeared in media reports, but were still observed in comments sections, specifically in relation to Ukraine: either calling Zelensky himself a "Nazi", or more vaguely stating that "there are Nazis in Ukraine" (LEPAR-FB[20220321]).

2.4 Comparisons between the Russian invasion and the Arab-Israeli conflict

The invasion of Ukraine prompted some users to draw general comparisons with the Arab-Israeli conflict; however, this juxtaposition was far less common in France and Germany than in the UK discourse, not allowing sufficient material for a cross-country analysis. As noted earlier in this chapter, we suggest that comparisons between the two contexts are both ahistorical and create a frame for antisemitic sentiment. This becomes apparent when analysing user comments posted under reports of celebrities such as the fashion model Gigi Hadid and musician Nick Cave making statements that compared or contrasted the two situations, or of the USA being criticised for supporting sanctions against Russia but not Israel. In these threads, 14% of comments were identified as antisemitic (more often than not explicit), mostly directed at Israel.

Numerous comments presented both Russia and Israel as villainous: "you must be either from Russia or from #ApartheidIsrael . So you don't know anything about humanity. Your forces kills women,children and innocent people. I don't know how you people can sleep at night" (INDEP-FB[20220310]). However, most of these suggested that Israel is the worse of the two, claiming that Russia is "not expelling Ukrainian from their land like illegal state Israel" (INDEP-FB[20220306]). By calling Israel "illegal", this and other comments DENIED ISRAEL THE RIGHT TO SELF-DETERMINE, by referring to it as "the zionist entity (israel)" (INDEP-FB[20220310]). This DENIAL was the second most common antisemitic concept in the corpus.

The most prominent concept in the corpus was the APARTHEID ANALOGY, employed to present both countries in a negative light ("see how many lies you just said in the comment. Just like Russians. Israel is apartheid state, responsible of killing of thousands of people" (INDEP-FB[20220310])), but also, again, to imply that "Israel Palestine conflict is worse than the Ukraine Russia conflict, The Israel Palestine conflict is literally organize crime and apartheid against Palestinians implemented by the world" (INDEP-FB[20220306]). As in the comments on Naftali Bennett's mediation efforts, some comments claimed that Israel is given a FREE PASS by other political actors: "Apartheid State have been committing various crimes against humanity for seventy years but have gone unpunished but Russia has committed similar crimes against humanity for some few days & have been sanctioned is it fair ?" (GUARD-FB[20220307]). The same accusation was occasionally levelled at other web users within the thread: "oh but you do excuse [bombing and killing] when it comes to israel" (INDEP-FB[20220306]).

Finally, some comments disagreed with the comparison between the two contexts, explicitly claiming that "Israel-Palestine isn't a war, it's a conquest by settler-colonial ethno-fascists" (INDEP-FB[20220306]) and that "What Israel is doing is ethnic cleansing" (INDEP-FB[20220306]). Some called Israel a RACIST STATE with "the desire to create an apartheid ethno-state which practices demographic engineering in order to maintain a Jewish majority" (INDEP-FB[20220310]).

3. Terror attacks in Israel

A recent spate of terrorist attacks against civilians in Israel, and their coverage in the media of the UK, France and Germany triggered many reactions from web users in the comments sections of mainstream news outlets, on their websites and official Facebook and Twitter accounts. The events, which took place in the spring of 2022 and included street shootings as well as stabbings in a shopping centre, were later claimed by the Islamic State and supported by other pro-Palestinian movements.

In order to determine whether reactions to these attacks were antisemitic, it was first necessary to establish if the attacks themselves represented an antisemitic hate crime or represented an non-antisemitic, if deeply contestable, expression of protest against perceived oppression in an ongoing territorial dispute. Three main elements led us to the conclusion that they were: antisemitism is intrinsic to the fundamentalist ideologies that motivated the attacks, with the DENIAL OF ISRAEL'S RIGHT TO EXIST, and support for its destruction, being a cornerstone of this worldview; the attacks were based on a set of pre-established ethnic, religious and racial criteria: in this case, being citizens of the State of Israel and most likely of Jewish religion or descent; the attacks targeted civilians rather than military or state representatives.

As a consequence, in our analysis of 9,010 comments – taken from five British and five French media outlets, as well as eight German media outlets and further social media threads with high engagement – any comment supporting or justifying these attacks, and praising the perpetrators was considered antisemitic. Indeed, according to the IHRA definition, “Calling for, aiding, or justifying the killing or harming of Jews in the name of a radical ideology or an extremist view of religion” is antisemitic.¹ This was achieved through a range of concepts (stereotypes, analogies, etc.) with some overlap between the three language communities. However, we were

careful to distinguish responses which expressed flat support for the Palestinian cause (such as posting Palestine flag emojis or writing “Free Palestine”) from comments which articulated more direct support for the attacks as such. The first category of comments may be distasteful in the context of the attacks, and perhaps motivated by antisemitic hatred of Israel, but it is not possible to discern with any certainty from the comment itself. In the latter case however, explicit support for acts of violence against Israelis or Jews – especially with regard to attacks for which Islamic fundamentalist terrorist groups claimed responsibility – should be classed as antisemitism.

3.1 UK

The corpus of 3,000 comments sourced from the websites and Facebook pages of UK media from across the political spectrum (a total of eight comment threads from five mainstream outlets: *BBC News*, *Daily Mail*, *The Independent*, *The Telegraph*, and *The Times*) contained nearly 17% of antisemitic comments. The overwhelming majority sought to vilify either Israel or its citizens, and to redirect attention away from the attacks to Israel's real or perceived actions and behaviour. The most frequent antisemitic concepts in the UK corpus were the DENIAL OF ISRAEL'S RIGHT TO EXIST, attributing to Israel total BLAME FOR THE CONFLICT, and the APARTHEID ANALOGY. Beyond this, it was striking to see the diversity of the conceptual and linguistic strategies adopted to justify, downplay or glorify the attacks (see Figure 1).

¹ – <https://www.holocaustremembrance.com/resources/working-definitions-charters/working-definition-antisemitism>.

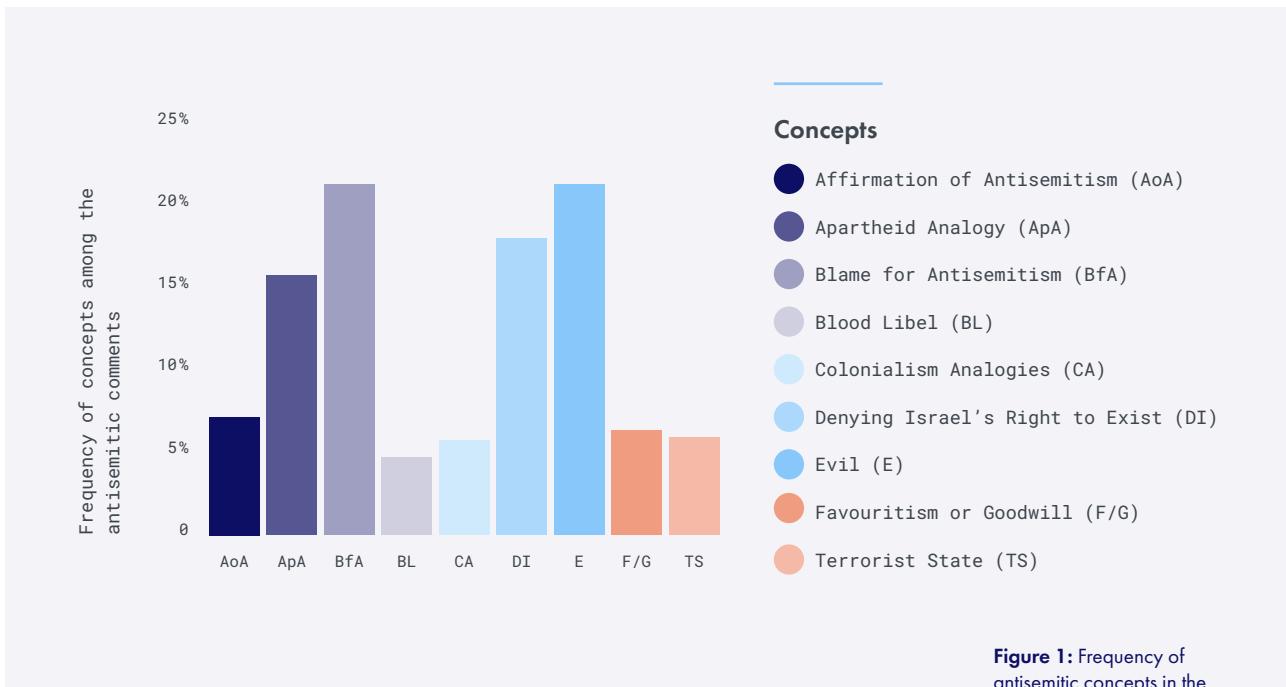


Figure 1: Frequency of antisemitic concepts in the British corpus (n=495).

The most extreme comments celebrated the attacks directly, AFFIRMING THE VIOLENCE ("Hero selflessly kills 5 terrorist occupiers in HIS HOMELAND!" (DAILY-FB[20220329])) and welcoming the news of the attack and Israeli deaths through verbal and visual expressions of joy, including glee-ful memes or emojis: "Such a great news: Made my Day 💥😊🎃👍" (BBC-FB[20220322]), as well as through DEHUMANISING language: "he killed zionists not humans." (BBC-FB[20220322]), or through depictions of the victims as EVIL: "evil people are dead" (DAILY-FB[20220505]). The theme of innate Israeli EVILNESS was expanded upon by commenters who sought to justify the attacks, labelling all Israelis as "potential murderers" and thus legitimate targets (DAILY-FB[20220505]). One stated that "There is no innocent person in Israel" and as such, indiscriminate terrorist attacks on civilians are "the smallest thing the Palestinians have to do against you 'colonialists'" (INDEP-FB[20220506]) – not only ascribing generalised EVILNESS to all Israelis and making an analogy between Israel and European colonialism, but also affirming the violence

by minimising its severity ("the smallest thing") and thus implicitly calling for further and greater attacks and killing. Others pinned the blame for the indiscriminate killing on the victims' "grand parents 🙄 for occupying the land that don't belong to them" (DAILY-FB[20220505]), thus simultaneously blaming Israel for the conflict and DENYING THE RIGHT OF JEWISH SELF-DETERMINATION (the attacks taking place in Tel Aviv). Some commenters sought to implicitly justify them by demonising Israelis as CHILD MURDERERS who celebrate EVIL, asking "what about the kids murdered every day by the thugs in Israel army" (BBC-FB[20220322]) or claiming that "Night bombing in Gaza is celebrated by ISraeli with cheers and merriment ... Knives are dropped beside Palestinian corpses ... Children as young as 8 years are arrested 😔" (BBC-FB[20220322]). The DEVILISH character of the Jewish state was occasionally illustrated with the pun "israhell" (BBC-FB[20220322]).

3. Terror attacks in Israel

One common theme was the attempt to invert media descriptions of the attacks as terrorist attacks by claiming that Israel itself constitutes a TERRORIST STATE. Some did this directly – “The Zionist apartheid criminal military regime is the biggest terrorist entity in the world” (INDEP-FB[20220506]) – while others couched the accusation in irony: “Plot twist - Israel is a terrorist attack against Palestine” (INDEP-FB[20220506]). Some web users took the opportunity to make more expansive denunciations and demonisations of Israel, arguing that “The zionist state is a vicious immoral entity, founded on violent land expropriation, ethnic cleansing a d physical and cultural genocide. A colonial enterprise” (INDEP-FB[20220506]) – here combining the antisemitic concepts of IMMORALITY, GENOCIDE and COLONIALISM ANALOGY. In the following part, the comment gets increasingly more aggressive, culminating in an indirect threat of destruction: when the web user claims that Israel’s “time is approaching. Date stamped, and no amount of lying propaganda from Hasbara trolls like yourself will prevent it” (INDEP-FB[20220506]). Elsewhere, a commenter employs a NAZI ANALOGY: “Perhaps you don’t realise that Gaza was intended by Israel as a dumping ground for the people it ethnically cleansed in 1948. Would you expect the people of the Warsaw ghetto to elect Nazis?” (TIMES[20220401]).

Another commonly referred to historical scenario was the APARTHEID ANALOGY: “Hamas only exists because of 75 years of brutal occupation, dispossession and apartheid, the product of the brutalisation of a nation betrayed by Britain” (TIMES[20220508]), sometimes alongside the COLONIALISM ANALOGY “Very sad. To be expected in an apartheid state perpetrating 74 years of colonialism. Free Palestine” (BBC-FB[20220322]). Such comments frequently appealed to the authority of institutions: “I’m opposed to the Israeli regime which has been called out on all these issues by UN resolutions, Amnesty and many others” (TELEG-FB[20220410]), as well as famous figures: “Bishop Tutu. Nelson Mandela. Both called out israel as an Apartheid state” (INDEP-FB[20220506]); others called on personal experiences of people on both sides of the conflict “you have a lot of Jews who are against israel apartheid policies” (BBC-FB[20220322]); “I am a Palestinian Israeli so don’t you even dare lecture me about the apartheid I live under” (BBC-FB[20220322]).

As a result, numerous comments framed the attacks as legitimate resistance “[i]o occupation 😊 To making Palestinians life as hell.. To stealing their lands since 1948 till now .. To Apartheid so called stat” (DAILY-FB[20220329]). They argued that “[w]e can’t expect the Palestinian people to just roll over and soak up Israeli oppression and torture. Resistance isn’t futile it’s vital.” (INDEP-FB[20220506]). To validate their view of attacks as just retaliation or self-defence on the part of “freedom fighters”, they often drew comparisons between the Middle East conflict and the current Russian invasion of Ukraine (see also chapter 2.4), rhetorically asking “should we start calling the Ukrainians fighting back the Russians terrorists too?!” (BBC-FB[20220322]). Some insisted that there is a “double standard!!” and called on the international community to “[q]uit the Hypocrisy” (INDEP-FB[20220506]), with some suggesting the latter was caused by racist attitudes towards the Middle East: “this is not any different from the Ukrainian fight against Russia in any way (except that Palestinians are not blond with blue eyes)” (INDEP-FB[20220506]).

At times, the accusations of GOODWILL or SERVILITY were levelled at “English and American news sources” who “can’t publish something that is against the Israel brutal regime 🤦”, or “work for the evil system.” (BBC-FB[20220322]). One commenter alleged that “Israel is still carrying out ethnic cleansing in the West Bank but the western media (Guardian / Telegraph whatever you choose) ignore it as do western governments” (TELEG[20220410]).

3.2 France

The French corpus comprises 3,005 user comments collected from the Facebook pages of *Le Monde*, *Le Figaro*, *Libération*, *Le Parisien*, and *L'Express*. Particular attention was paid to comments sections of the articles published between March 22 and May 6, 2022. Our analysis showed that 12 % of the comments under investigation conveyed antisemitic ideas through a different range of antisemitic concepts (see Figure 2).

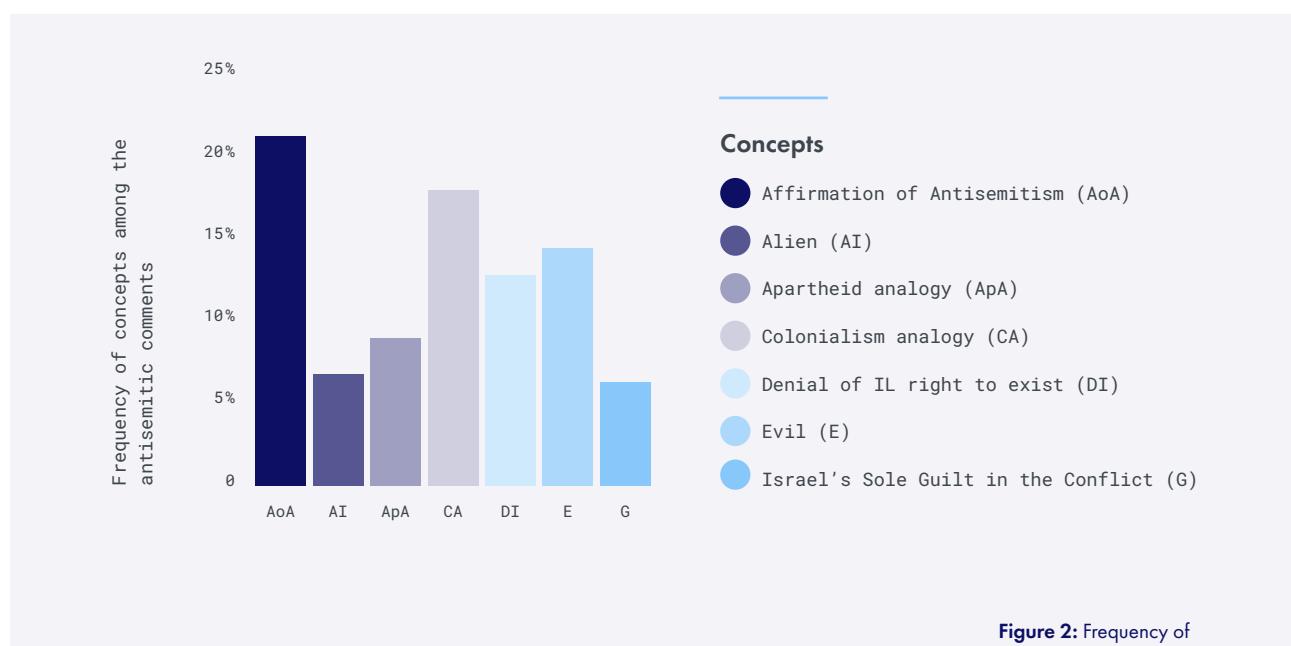


Figure 2: Frequency of antisemitic concepts in the French corpus (n=373).

In this corpus, support for the attacks was expressed either explicitly ("Good news" ["Bonne nouvelle"] (MONDE-FB[20220330])) or implicitly ("👉👉👉👉" (LIB-ER-FB[20220330])). The implicitness of the second example relies on the fact that the index finger pointing upwards is one of the Muslim gestures frequently used by members of the Islamic State, which claimed responsibility for the attacks (Serghini/Desmoulins/Nardone 2017). Likewise, the perpetrators were praised in more or less explicit ways: "Rather two mujahideen heroes of Palestinian freedom" ["Plutôt 2 héros moudjahidine de la Libération palestinien"] (LEP-

AR-FB[20220328]). Contrary to this comment, in the following one the praise is conveyed by the intrinsic value of the term "resistance fighters", which implies a position of a victim oppressed by the other party: "They're resistance fighters like the Ukrainians" ["des résistants comme les ukrainien"] (LEFIG-FB[20220407]). Again, here we see the implied antisemitic analogy between Israel and Russia (see chapter 2). When supporting violent actions and praising the perpetrators, users tend to resort to a positive valence lexicon (e.g. "good", "heroes", "resistance fighters"), which hides its intrinsic violence.

3. Terror attacks in Israel

The radical DELEGITIMISATION of the Jewish state functions as another implicit strategy of legitimising violence. The traditional charge of the ROOTLESS, WANDERING JEW fuses with the modern accusations that Israel is a colonialist entity that builds on and prolongs centuries of Western imperialism (Gold 2011). Online users are keen to describe Israelis as Europeans or Americans with no link to the Middle East: "But Israel is not a country, it's a colony of people coming mainly from Eastern Europe and the US." ["Mais Israël n'est pas un pays, c'est une colonie de gens venu principalement d'Europe de l'Est et des USA"] (LEXPR-FB[20220423]). The idea of ROOTLESSNESS is also conveyed through the affirmation that the country is "occupied by people [...] who come from all corners of the world" ["occupée par des gens [...] qui viennent des quatres coins du monde"] (LEXPR-FB[20220423]). The figure of the GLOBAL JEW (*Weltjude*) as the archetypal FOREIGNER is activated when one user alleges that Israelis are "from everywhere and nowhere" ["venus de partout et de nulle part"] (MONDE-FB[20220330]). A few comments explicitly draw on the WANDERING JEW topos, which has partial overlaps with the idea of Jews being ALIENS: "Don't forget you are doomed to roam the earth hehe" ["tu dois errer sur terre oublie pas hihi"] (MONDE-FB[20220408]).

COLONIALISM ANALOGIES abstract from the historical reality of Israel's formation to build both on the idea of supposed Jewish FOREIGNNESS and on other topoi, such as POWER (as a form of imperialism, colonialism necessitates vast political, military and economic resources) or EVIL. Israelis are described as a "colonial people" ["peuple colonial"] (LEP-AR-FB[20220506]), implying that colonial predation is ontologically embedded into Jewish nature. This narrative alleges that Palestinian suffering is the vengeance of an embittered "landless people who colonises and massacres this people to take their lands" ["C'est un peuple sans terre qui à coloniser et chasser massacrés ce peuple pour leurs prendre leurs terres"] (LIBER-FB[20220322]). COLONIAL ANALOGIES paint Israel as a brutal, morally corrupt and anachronistic regime which cannot stand the test of time: "Zionistan is a colony doomed to disappear in the dustbin of history" ["le zionistan est une colonie voué à disparaître dans les poubelles de l'histoire"] (MONDE-FB[20220330]).

Israel is thus demonised as the "last bloody colonial regime in the world"

[“dernier régime colonial sanguinaire au monde”] (LIBER-FB[20220401]).

As some authors have pointed out (Gelber 2007, Gold 2011, Friling 2016, Sternberg 2016, Becker 2019), colonial narratives build on pre-existing repertoires (such as decolonisation discourses) to demonise Israel and delegitimise its very existence, casting it out of the community of civilised nations. In this context, terrorist violence becomes justified, even against civilians who are all identified as "settlers" and accomplices: "those who illegally occupy someone else's land are not civilians. They are aggressors..." ["celui qui occupe illégalement la terre des autres n'est pas un civile. C'est un agresseur..."] (LEFIG-FB[20220331]). The same idea is conveyed through the stereotype of EVIL, for instance describing Israelis as "the biggest executioners in the world" ["s'est les plus grand bourreaux dans le monde"] (LIBER-FB[20220322]). The expression of the EVIL stereotype is particularly striking given that the context of the discourse event does not report on Israel's actions in the conflict but, on the contrary, on Israeli victims of terrorist attacks.

By presenting Israelis as settlers, users more or less explicitly DENY JEWS THE RIGHT TO SELF-DETERMINATION: "Israel doesn't exist: what exists are simply Jewish and Zionist settlers, criminals stealing land, History, reality and truth attest that" ["Israël n'existe pas: ce qui existe ce sont simplement des colons juifs et sionistes, des criminels voleurs de terre, l'Histoire, la réalité et la vérité l'attestent"] (LEXPR-FB[20220401]); "Here are people from Eastern Europe and the USA, who settle themselves in Palestine expelling Palestinians and endlessly expanding their colony and who complain about being attacked" ["voilà des gens venus de l'Europe de l'Est et des usa, qui s'installent sur le territoire de Palestine en y chassant les Palestiniens et en agrandissant sans cesse leur colonie et qui se plaignent d'être agressé"] (LEXPR-FB[20220423]). The antisemitic portrayal of Jews as FOREIGNERS and COLONISERS is used to legitimise the violence of the terrorist attacks

against Israel. In other terms, according to the user, Israelis deserve to be attacked.

Similarly, the accusation of apartheid is often used to explain the terrorist attacks: "when you subject another people to apartheid you see the result" ["quand on fait subir un apartheid à un autre peuple on en voie le résultat"] (LEFIG-FB[20220331]). It is also a common response to any article mentioning Israel, when users correct the use of "Israel" to emphasise the accusation of APARTHEID. In response to a comment sending support to Israel, one user writes: "you meant unconditional support for an apartheid state, there's a difference" ["vous vouliez dire soutien inconditionnel à un état d'apartheid, nuance"] (LIBER-FB[20220322]). Many of these reframe the stories told in the article in order to shift the focus to Israel's (real and) alleged wrongdoings, e.g. "Very sad to see what Israelis are doing to Palestinians..." ["Très triste de voir ce que font subir les israéliens aux palestiniens..."] (LEFIG-FB[20220408]). Doing so reverses the responsibility for this violence from pro-Palestinian terrorists killing Israelis, most probably Jewish, to the State of Israel.

Following this logic, many antisemitic comments BLAME ISRAEL FOR THE ANTISEMITIC TERRORIST ATTACKS. Several users justify them by saying: "We only get what we deserve in life. The wheel [of fortune] is turning, don't cry afterwards, it's a bit easy!" ["on a que ce que l'on mérite dans la vie Mme la roue tourne faut pas pleurer après c est un peu facile ça ! "] (LEFIG-FB[20220408]). Many assign the GUILT FOR THE CONFLICT SOLELY TO ISRAEL, claiming Israelis are seeking the war: "Since when do Israelis want peace?" ["depuis quand les israéliens veulent la paix ?"] (LEFIG-FB[20220407]). Sometimes the commenters expand on this idea of SOLE GUILT, linking the origin of the conflict to the so-called colonial project of Israel:

"If Israel wanted, there would be no more suicide bombings and armed soldiers in the streets 😊 If Israel wanted, they would all live harmoniously and continue their cohabitation since before the recognition of the Jewish state in 1948 by the British empire and this is thanks to the dissolution of the Ottomans empire"

["si Israël le voulais ,il n'y aurait plus d'attentat suicides et de militaires armé dans les rues 😊. Si Israël le voulais ,ils vivront tous armonieusement et continueraient leurs cohabitation communes depuis toujours avant la reconnaissance de l'état Juif en 1948 par l'empire Britannique et ce grâce à la dissolution de l'empire Ottomans"] (LEFIG-FB[20220407])

3. Terror attacks in Israel

3.3 Germany

The corpus of 3,005 comments from the German media landscape yielded just under 9 % of antisemitic statements. The reactions to the media reports on the wave of terror attacks in Israel come in part from comments sections of the web pages of *Spiegel*, *Welt*, and *Zeit*. However, news coverage of these events was not extensively commented on by web users. There was an equally moderate number of comments on the Facebook profiles of *Spiegel*, *FAZ*, *Tagespiegel*, *Bild*, *Zeit*, and *taz*. In order to capture the opinions of web users more comprehensively, we also included posts from *Bild*'s YouTube channel, as well as a number of relevant Twitter profiles: those of the *Tagesschau*, the Israeli embassy, the foreign minister Annalena Baerbock, and Friedrich Merz – the chairman of the largest opposition party in Germany,

CDU. In addition, we included tweets of public figures who can be perceived as micro-influencers with a certain relevance in their circles: the Israeli-German psychologist and author Ahmad Mansour, the policy advisor and columnist Aras-Nathan Keul, and the columnist and spokesman of the civil society association *Wertelinitiative* Leonard Kaminski. Inclusion of these *Twitter* profiles expands the understanding of the public media sphere of the social mainstream, as it takes into account and examines direct user responses to statements made by public officials, politicians, and prominent representatives of the civil society. As shown in Figure 3, most of the antisemitic stereotypes are ISRAEL'S SOLE GUILT IN THE CONFLICT, EVIL, Israel as a TERRORIST STATE, and APARTHEID ANALOGY.

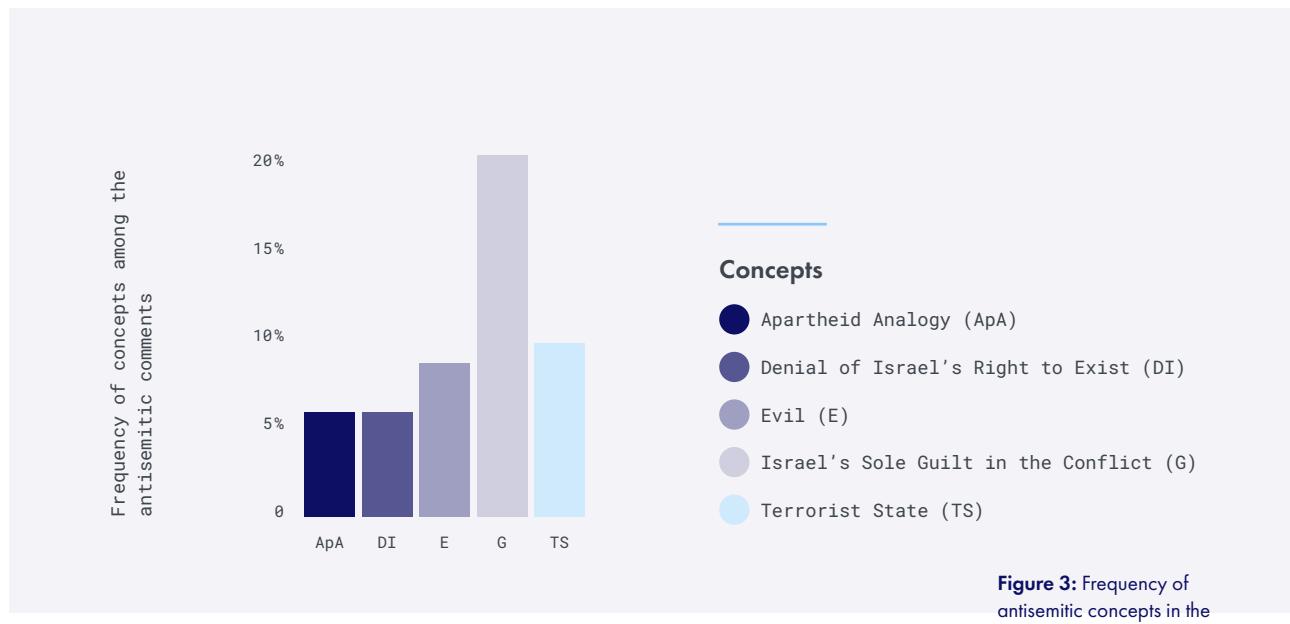


Figure 3: Frequency of antisemitic concepts in the German corpus (n=256).

The most common antisemitic stereotype in the corpus was the one-sided attribution of ISRAEL'S SOLE GUILT IN THE CONFLICT, in which many web users identified Israel's actions alone as the reason for the suffering in the region. Accordingly, any misdeeds and crimes against Israel and its inhabitants are justified by Israel's primordial guilt, and all wrongdoings of the Israeli side are presented as evidence for the attribution. Such statements may take the form of generalisations: "israel started the whole thing by establishing a country in an already existing country" ["israel hat das ganze gestartet in dem es ein land in einem schon existierenden land gegründet hat"] (FAZ-FB[20220707]). On the other hand, they can also appear in combination with other concepts, such as CONSPIRACY THEORIES. Here, Israel is seen as the power behind all acts of violence, regardless of whether Palestinians or Israelis are involved: "Most people don't even realise that Hamas is founded and supported by the Israelis themselves... Where there is constant terror you can always invade, kill and destroy... otherwise you would have to justify yourself" ["Den meisten ist noch nicht mal klar, dass die Hamas von

den Israelis selbst gegründet und unterstützt wird...Wo ständig Terror ist kann man auch immer einmarschieren töten und zerstören... ansonsten müsste man sich ja rechtfertigen"] (BILD-FB[20220505]).

Such statements also have a conceptual commonality with the second most common stereotype in the corpus, according to which Israel is a TERRORIST STATE: Israel is conceptualised as an aggressive actor. As such, Israel is seen as regularly perpetrating acts of terror, whether to expand power, underscore a claim to power, intimidate, or provoke. Through the use of the multimodal connection with a map, the following tweet implicitly posits – next to the explicit comment – the claim that Israel has gained its territory and control over the West Bank through a history of terror. This subsumes the causes of the historical development, such as the UN partition plan, and omits attacks by neighbouring states and the unresolved situation in the West Bank. Moreover, the title of the map ("İsgalin Tarihi", Turkish for "History of Occupation") itself DENIES THE RIGHT OF JEWISH SELF-DETERMINATION.

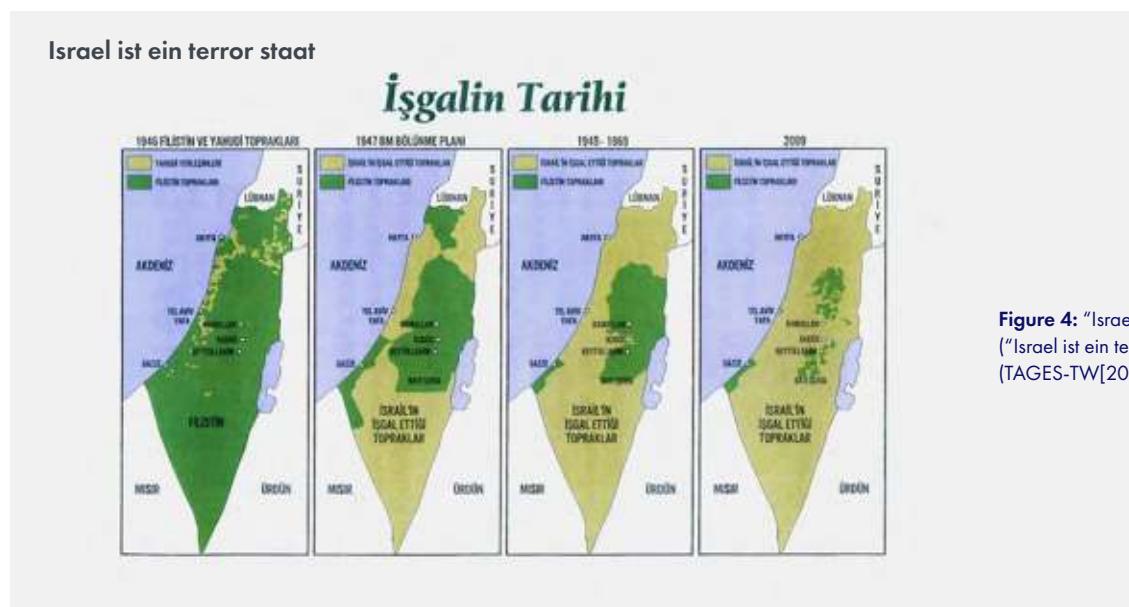


Figure 4: "Israel is a terror state" ("Israel ist ein terror staat" (TAGES-TW[20220415])).

3. Terror attacks in Israel

The TERRORIST STATE stereotype can be expressed by generalising the conflict as violence regularly used by Israel which justifies a call for retaliation: "Okay, so it means that everyone should go hunting for Jews when Israel commits terror again" ["Ok heisst also das jeder auf Judenjagd gehen soll wenn Israel wieder Terror verübt."] (TAGES-TW[20220415]). In addition to this stereotype, an implicit parallel is drawn with the invasion of Ukraine, by putting Israel in the role of the aggressor that should be condemned and stopped: "Who do we have to supply heavy weapons to now? The aggressor who has been robbing one piece of land after another for decades? Or the people who are heroically resisting the aggressor?" ["Wem müssen wir jetzt schwere Waffen liefern? Dem Aggressor, der seit Jahrzehnten ein Stück Land nach dem anderen raubt? Oder dem Volk, das dem Aggressor heldenhaften Widerstand leistet?"] (FAZ-FB[20220707]).

Even in the context of terror attacks against Israeli citizens, EVIL is attributed exclusively to Israel by ascribing it various misdeeds, and without contextualising or concretising what happened: "Who is the occupier? That's right, Israel! And they bring disaster to the Palestinians day after day" ["Wer ist denn da der besatzer? Richtig Israel! Und die bringen tag für Tag Unheil über die Palästinenser"] (N-TV-FB[20220403]). This stereotyping is complemented by the APARTHEID ANALOGY, which has been given special attention and legitimacy by Amnesty International's recent report,² and which in turn serves to delegitimise Israel: "It's not Hamas, but Israel's occupation policies and land theft and ethnic cleansing and apartheid that leads to resistance" ["Nicht die Hamas, sondern die Israel's Besatzungspolitik und Landraub und Ethnische Säuberung und Apartheid führt zum Widerstand"] (ISRAE-TW[20210510]).

² – The report of Amnesty International has received controversial reactions in the international community and many of the international institutions, including the United Nations, disagree with the conclusions which this report offers to the public. Amnesty International: Israel's Apartheid Against Palestinians. Cruel System of Domination and Crime Against Humanity.

4. Four independent case studies

4.1 The Sally Rooney case in the UK

In October 2021, the Irish novelist Sally Rooney announced that she had refused permission for an Israeli publishing company to translate her latest, best-selling novel *Beautiful World, Where Are You* into Hebrew. She stated that this was done in support of the Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions (BDS) movement, and as part of a cultural boycott of Israel. While she claimed that she would be happy for the book to be translated by one of the small number of non-Israeli Hebrew publishers, her decision effectively targets the Hebrew language rather than the specific product or service. Israeli bookshops responded by withdrawing Rooney's previous novels from sale. The event was covered in most major UK newspapers and brought the subject of Israeli boycotts and BDS back into British public discourse, three months after the US company Ben & Jerry's announced they would no longer be selling their ice cream in Jewish settlements in the West Bank. While Ben & Jerry's action was aimed only at settlements, Rooney's blanket boycott of all Israeli publishers – and her explicit support for BDS – meant that her decision has been broadly regarded as antisemitic.

To garner a deeper understanding of online reactions to the event, we collected data from websites and official Facebook accounts of seven British mainstream media outlets. We used comment threads posted under twenty-five articles covering the Sally Rooney story over the second week of October 2021, 11 from websites and 14 posted on Facebook. We coded the first 150 comments from each thread, giving a total of 3,750 comments.

Web user comments tended to reflect the political stance of the newspapers. Those responding to articles from the more left-leaning *Guardian* and *Independent*, both of which published articles in support of Rooney's decision, were most

likely to support Rooney as well, resulting in the highest share of antisemitic comments: 17 and 23 % respectively. Fewest antisemitic comments were posted by readers of the *Daily Mail* (6 %) and *The Times* (9 %), with both papers criticising Rooney's decision. Criticism of Rooney was sometimes expressed via a dismissive view of her literary abilities, or through misogynistic remarks.

As Figure 5 shows, most antisemitic comments fell into a set of well-known concepts. Some directly agreed with Sally Rooney's decision, **AFFIRMING** the prejudice of her announcement: "Not a fan of her work, but this is admirable" (GUARD-FB[20211105]), and often expressing support for the BDS movement or the general idea of **BOYCOTT** at the same time: "I'll be buying her latest work! Thank you Sally for standing up for justice and being an awesome human with a conscience! #BDS ❤️✊🇮🇪" (INDEP-FB[20211012]). Others elaborated on the topic of Israel-Palestine relations:

"Sally, good on you for taking a BRAVE stand and not being intimidated by the politically correct. You speak the truth, something that many people are afraid to say out loud: namely that Israel is, at present, an apartheid state, and but for US support (thanks to the Jewish Lobby's deep pockets / and or use of threats / intimidation) would be an international pariah - as it should be." (TELEG-FB[20211104])

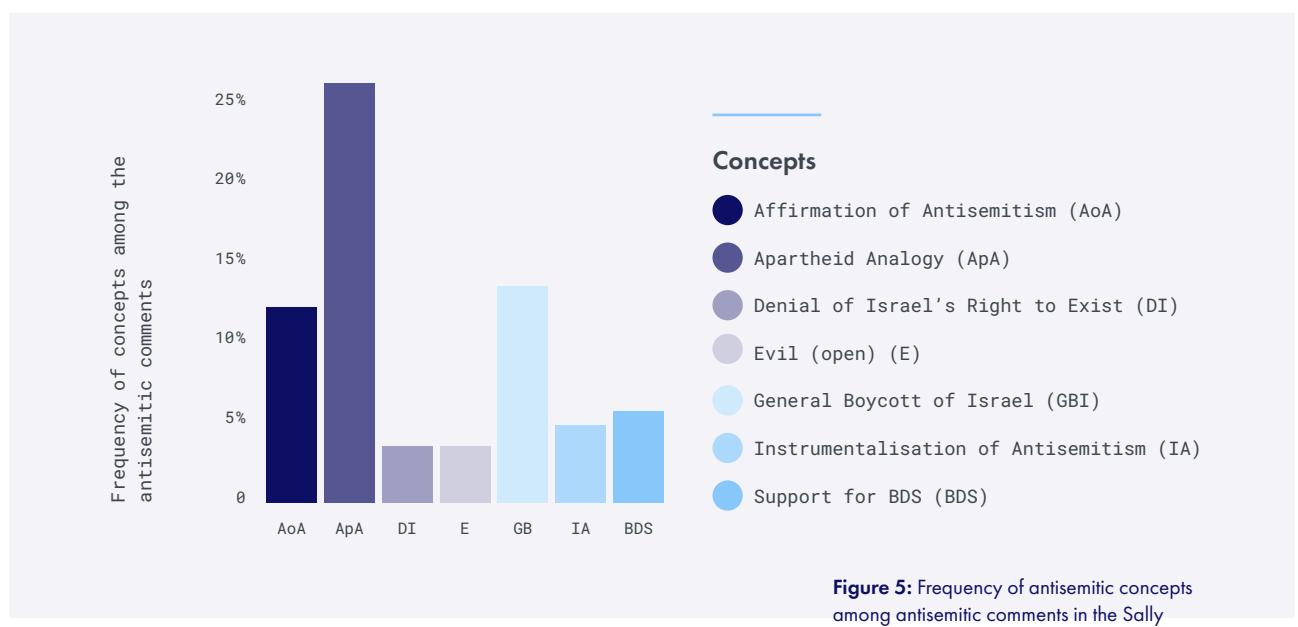
4. Four independent case studies

The comment not only evokes the stereotype according to which an inordinate amount of INFLUENCE is held by an alleged "Jewish Lobby" over world events, but also DELEGITIMISES Israel's status, declaring that it should be an "international parish" – a probable misspelling of "pariah" – and using the APARTHEID ANALOGY. The latter was the most frequent antisemitic concept in the corpus, identified in over a quarter of all antisemitic comments ("I'm glad she rejects the apartheid. Honestly somethings are above profit and loss. These are matters of right and wrong. Apartheid and the oppressed" (BBC-FB[20211104]).

The brief affirmations often drew on the notion of Israeli IMMORALITY – a modernised version of a traditional anti-Jewish ascription – by framing Rooney's decision as an expression of basic human morality or rationality, and thereby positioning anyone opposing her (including the Israeli state and Israeli bookshops) as opposing humanity as such. Some made a pun on the title of Rooney's best-known book "Normal People" to suggest that her boycott was "Beautiful. Why would any NORMAL person support an illegal, oppressive apartheid entity?" thus positioning her critics as AMORAL via an APARTHEID ANALOGY (INDEP-FB[20211013]).

Others suggested that there was "no way a rational or ethical human being" would take "the side of people who think routinely murdering children and other civilians is justified [i.e. Israel]" (INDEP-FB[20211104]), combining here the idea of IMMORALITY with CHILD MURDER and EVIL. As such, those criticising Rooney often faced DEHUMANISATION and insults: labelled "sub-human" (INDEP-FB[20211104]), or accused of "spread[ing] lies" – framed as "a typical Zionist maneuver" – and doing so because they are "paid by the Zionist terrorist state. Only mercenaries stand for unjust and evil" (INDEP-FB[20211104]). Here the concepts of LYING, TERRORIST STATE, GREED and EVIL are combined.

Some users mobilised irony to mock the condemnations of Rooney's decision by Israeli ministers and the withdrawal of her books from Israeli bookshops, evoking ideas of JEWISH PRIVILEGE and VENGEFULNESS: "How dare she. We can do as we please! Dare anyone who speaks against us!" (DAILY[20211310]). The bookshops' move was also condemned by an implicit DENIAL OF JEWISH SELF-DETERMINATION, with a call to action demanding that the shop owners "Remove your shops from Palestine land, which you stole" (INDEP-FB[20211013]).



Many examples of counter speech sought to criticise Rooney by questioning her choice to boycott Hebrew and Israel while her books continue to be printed in other countries accused of human rights violations. However, some claims of Rooney unfairly singling Israel out resulted in suggesting that Israel was, in fact, guilty of such crimes, including GENOCIDE: "Russia has occupied Crimea. China has occupied Tibet and is engaged in a genocide presently. Surely comparable? And, thus, comparable measures should be taken in terms of Russian and Chinese translations?" (SPECT[20211104]).

4.2 The Pegasus case in France

The Pegasus spyware, developed by the Israeli cyber-arms company NSO Group, has supposedly been used by the government of Morocco to spy on various French politicians, including President Emmanuel Macron. This scandal saw the re-emergence of classic antisemitic stereotypes, such as the idea of Jewish global POWER. The themes of domination and control have always been central to the anti-Jewish imaginary. But in modern antisemitic folklore, the scheming "elders of Zion" plotting in ancient cemeteries gives way to slick, high-tech, and deadly spies. In the Pegasus case, topos of Israel as a "spy state" echoes older tropes of Jews being "born spies."³

The analysis was conducted on the comments sections of the Facebook and Twitter pages of a wide range of French mainstream media outlets across the political spectrum (*Le Monde*, *France Info*, *Le Figaro*, *Valeurs Actuelles*, *Le Parisien*, *Libération*, and *Marianne*). Applying the search item "Pegasus" allowed us to both collect the articles dealing with the Pegasus case and select the 33 threads under investigation. The analysis was then conducted on a total of 3,196 comments, 5 % of which were antisemitic. The Pegasus case shows how the topos of Jewish CONSPIRACY provides an easy explanation for geopolitical events when it comes to Israel's actions on the world scene (see Figure 6). Israel's "normalisation" agreement with Morocco – which allowed Morocco to access Israeli-designed cutting-edge spyware – is thus viewed by web users through the traditional antisemitic concepts of Jewish domination and subversion rather than a natural diplomatic process between two state actors: "In this case, Morocco has become the pawn that Israel makes advance in the Maghreb" ["Dans cette affaire le Maroc est devenu le pion qu'Israël fait avancer au Maghreb"] (FRANC-FB[20210720]). Israel is accused of using its allies as proxies to protect its cover, as implied by the metaphor of "an octopus with grafted tentacles" ["Une pieuvre qui utilise des tentacules greffées en préservant les siennes] (FRANC-FB[20210720]). In other instances, web users resort to the dog whistle "Who?", a rhetorical question already adopted by far-right circle to hint at a GLOBAL CABAL OF JEWISH ELITES.

³ – <https://millercenter.org/the-presidency/educational-resources/nixon-the-jews-are-born-spies>.

4. Four independent case studies

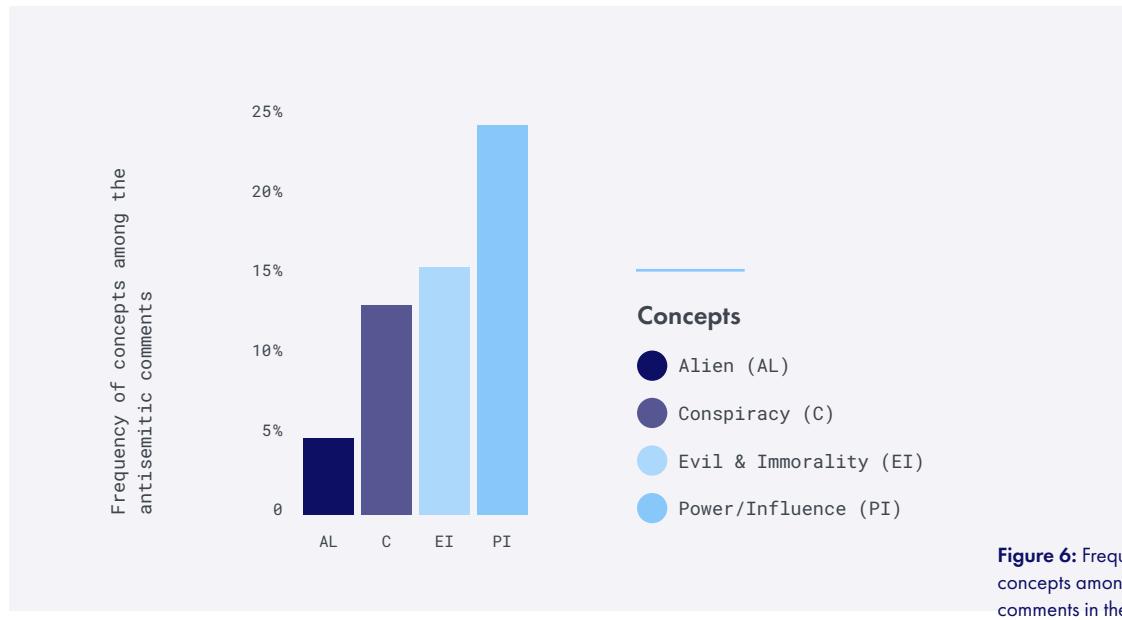


Figure 6: Frequency of antisemitic concepts among the antisemitic comments in the Pegasus corpus (n=170).

While most comments are highly hostile to Israel, some users indulge in romanticised tales of the supposed spying genius of the Jewish state: "They are capable of kidnapping the devil in hell if they received the order... Don't underestimate them" ["Ils sont capables d'aller kidnapper le diable en enfer si ils en recevaient l'ordre..Ne les sous estimez pas" (LEPAR-FB[20210719])]. Such forms of overt "philosemitism" ultimately cross over into antisemitism, as they circulate the same myths and tropes that constitute the building blocks of anti-Jewish prejudice.

The supposedly corrupt nature of Israel is frequently stressed, with the country's thriving IT industry being seen as proof of the strong emphasis placed on creating new tools of oppression: "Israel, always at the forefront when it's a question of control and oppression" ["Israël, toujours à la pointe quand il est question de contrôler et d'opprimer !"] (MONDE-FB[20210722]). Some web users contend that Israel is a state born out of violence and theft, and that its "siege mentality" and supposed paranoia are driven by the fear of the vengeance of its alleged victims. Going even further into the DEMONISATION of Israel, one web user asserts that the state's only contribution to the world has been more violence and misery: "We must say that... given its regime, this country can be worried; always on the alert...

the alert of those who are humiliated, robbed and killed by this country... its only contribution in the world" ["Faut dire que... étant donné son régime, ce pays a de quoi s'inquiéter ; toujours sur le qui-vive donc... le qui-vive de ceux que ce pays humilie, vole et tue... Sa seule contribution au monde] (MONDE-FB[20210722]).

Given this, many users consider there to be a natural affinity between Israel and other dictatorships: "Israeli apartheid at service of the dictatorships in the world" ["L'apartheid israélien au service des dictatures dans le monde] (MONDE-FB[20210722]). To highlight alleged Jewish AMORALITY and HYPOCRISY – but also their supposed manipulation of history – the Pegasus scenario is compared to the situation in Nazi-dominated Europe. The conclusion is that Israel is failing to uphold the moral standards it demands from others: "Israel allows dictatorships to persecute minorities or contestants... What does Israel say about the countries that helped Germany to persecute Jews in 1940! Jews love to recall their story when it suits them..." ["Israël permet à des dictatures de persecuter des minorités ou opposants... Que dit Israël des pays qui ont aidé l'Allemagne à persecuter des juifs en 1940! Les juifs aiment bien rappeler leur histoire qd cela les arrange...] (MONDE-FB[20210722]).

The Pegasus affair, despite being an international scandal, is deeply embedded in the complex politics of the Middle East. When castigating the actions of the Israeli firms and government, web users resort to epithets meant to highlight their ALIENNESS and ROOTLESSNESS. The French word “colon” – meaning “settler” – is often used not only to describe Jewish inhabitants moving into the West Bank, but Israelis in general: “Zionist settlers who stop at nothing” [“Des colons sionistes qui ne reculent devant rien”] (MONDE-FB[20211109]). Not only does it suggest that Jewish life is not “organic” in Israel, but it conveys images of violent colonisation, of the type perpetrated by Europeans between the 16th and 19th century. Apart from “Zionist settlers”, the Israeli population is also referred to as “military settlers”, which reinforces the narrative that Israel is a state whose very existence is organised around war, control and oppression: “for the moment, it's invaded by military settlers who love wars...” [“pour l'instant elle est envahi de colons militaires qui aiment les guerres ...”] (MONDE-FB[20211109]).

In a similar vein, Jewish natives from Arab countries are accused of forsaking their cultures and traditions, mainly after France granted them political rights which supposedly caused them to side with the coloniser, rather than with the indigenous people:

“Given your surname, you must come from Northern Africa but not Moroccan nor Tunisian. You must be one of those haters that the Crémieux decree has pushed to hate their culture and traditions”

[“Vu votre patronyme vous devez être nord africain mais sûrement pas marocain ou tunisien. Surement un de ces haineux que le décret Crémieux a poussé à haïr leur culture et leurs traditions...”] (LIBER-FB[20210722]).

The Pegasus affair highlights that antisemitism still functions as a powerful interpretative framework for debating Israel's actions on the global stage. The myth of the GLOBAL JEWISH CONSPIRACY – attaching itself to objects such as the Mossad or Israel's high-tech firms – is often camouflaged as geopolitical analysis of Israel's soft-power strategies.

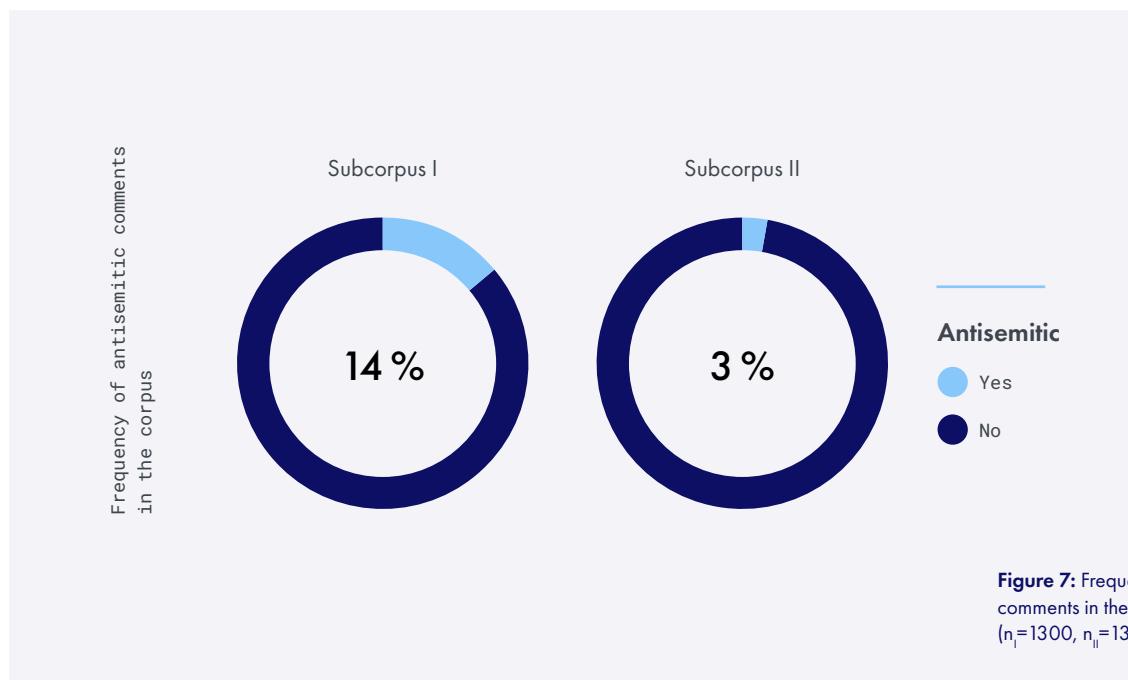
4. Four independent case studies

4.3 The Gil Ofarim case in Germany

On October 4, 2021, the German-Israeli singer Gil Ofarim published a short video on social media in which he accuses the Westin Hotel in Leipzig of turning him away from the reception desk because of his Jewish identity. After a storm of outrage and sympathy, doubts about Ofarim's depictions mounted and a defamation lawsuit was filed by the accused. Both the alleged antisemitic incident and its subsequent course evoked a multitude of comments and reactions.

The analysis is based on a corpus of 2,609 comments posted on the websites, Facebook and Twitter pages of eleven German mainstream media outlets (*Welt, Tagesspiegel, taz, Zeit, Spiegel, Süddeutsche Zeitung, Bild, Focus, rheinische Post, Frankfurter Rundschau, and ntv*). The corpus was divided into two subcorpora to account for the different

temporal dynamics of the incident. Subcorpus I – consisting of 13 threads and 1,300 coded comments – comprises comments produced after the incident became public, running from October 5 to 13, 2021. Subcorpus II – consisting of 13 threads and 1,309 comments – contains comments voiced after doubts about Ofarim's accusations arose, posted between October 17, 2021 and January 4, 2022. Subcorpus I contained 14% antisemitic comments, with just 3% of the comments in subcorpus II identified as antisemitic (see Figure 7). This discrepancy can be explained by the different time periods, since comments in the second phase, accusing Ofarim of instrumentalising antisemitism, could no longer be identified as such, insofar as such an accusation was now a plausible possibility.



Antisemitic statements within the first phase (subcorpus I) tended to explain the allegedly antisemitic incident by reference to Ofarim's own behaviour or even his Jewish identity. They either accused him of fraudulently INSTRUMENTALISING antisemitism to his advantage, or sought to attribute the incident to his behaviour as a Jewish person.

A whole series of comments thus accused Ofarim of being solely interested in profiting from such an accusation: "If you have no other success and if no one else is interested and you absolutely want to become famous, you just make a big mainstream splash. I'm sure a lot of people will jump on it. Ergo: goal achieved" ["Wenn man keinen anderen Erfolg hat und wenn sich sonst niemand dafür interessiert und man unbedingt berühmt werden will, dann macht man einfach einen großen Mainstream-Splash. Ich bin mir sicher, dass eine Menge Leute darauf anspringen werden. Ergo: Ziel erreicht"] (B-FB[20211006]), and sometimes to have staged the entire scene solely out of a desire for recognition: "What a spectacle, some people really do everything to get into the media. If you don't get noticed as a musician, you have to increase your reach in other ways" ["Was für ein Spektakel, manche Leute tun wirklich alles, um in die Medien zu kommen. Wenn man als Musiker nicht wahrgenommen wird, muss man seine Reichweite auf andere Weise erhöhen"] (B-FB[20211006]). Although the argumentation of a supposed INSTRUMENTALISATION of antisemitism is attributed independently of Ofarim's Jewish identity, it is more concretely expressed in comments which insinuate that Ofarim, as a Jew, has a special disposition for such behaviour, or that he is even to BLAME FOR ANTISEMITISM because of his Jewish identity:

"But why does he have to carry his star around like that? We don't run around with the German flag every day either"

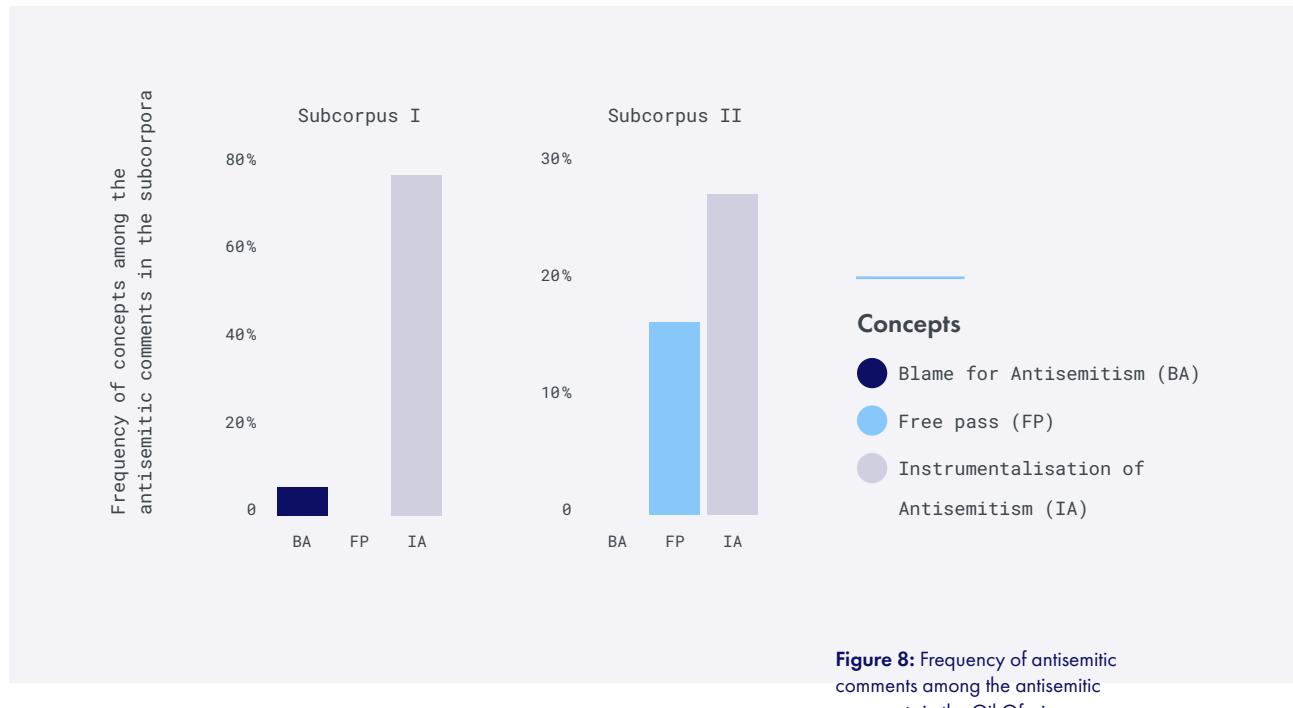
[“Aber warum muss er seinen Stern so herumtragen? Wir laufen doch auch nicht jeden Tag mit der deutschen Flagge herum”] (TAZ-FB[20211007]).

Comments of this kind were joined by those which tried to reject antisemitism as such by RELATIVISING the antisemitic element of the incident: "Whoever owns the hotel, well, they decide who comes in, with a star or without, with a mask or without, with a bra or without?" ["Wem das Hotel gehört, der entscheidet doch, wer reinkommt, mit Stern oder ohne, mit Maske oder ohne, mit BH oder ohne?"] (NTV-TW[20211005]). By ignoring the differences between these hypothesised denials of entry, antisemitism is presented as negligible.

The second phase of the discourse (subcorpus II) is characterised by a significantly lower proportion of antisemitic comments. This can be attributed to the changed dynamics within the discourse: once video recordings had emerged which made the possibility that Ofarim had invented the accusations more plausible, comments which claimed he had INSTRUMENTALISED antisemitism could no longer be construed as antisemitic. Of course, this is not true if they explicitly tied the idea of INSTRUMENTALISATION to his Jewish identity; such comments remain coded as antisemitic.

Most of the antisemitic comments continued to make accusations of INSTRUMENTALISATION, but also other concepts appeared prominently (see Figure 8). Of particular interest were comments arguing that Jews have an especially PRIVILEGED position, or a FREE PASS, to act as they please – "All someone has to do is claim that he was attacked as a Jew and crowds of people with banners and flags parade in front of the hotel" ["Jemand muss nur behaupten, er sei als Jude angegriffen worden, und schon marschieren Menschenmassen mit Bannern und Fahnen vor dem Hotel auf"] (Z-FB[20211017]) – along with those making more traditional accusations of LYING: "Our new Pinocchio" ["Unser neuer Pinocchio"] (W-FB[20211021]), with the allusion to Pinocchio used to represent both the lie and the stereotypical Jewish nose.

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4.4 The documenta 15 case in Germany

The *documenta 15* art festival triggered the biggest antisemitic scandal of 2022 in Germany: although there had been early warnings and reservations from many sectors of society and representatives of Jewish organisations against the artist group *ruangrupa*, they were nevertheless trusted with the task of curating the exhibition. The warnings were confirmed after the opening, when antisemitic depictions were identified in the exhibited works. These depictions triggered a widespread social debate.

The basis of the analysis is a corpus of 1,700 comments collected from the Facebook pages of *Bild*, *Spiegel*, *FAZ*, *taz*, and *Focus*, the YouTube channel of *Bild*, and Twitter profiles of figures who actively speak out against antisemitism, as well as that of the Israeli embassy in Germany. Of the analysed comments, 7% were identified as antisemitic. The most common antisemitic concepts in the *documenta 15* corpus were the cluster of DENIAL, RELATIVISATION and AFFIRMATION OF ANTISEMITISM. These three appear above all in connection with the web users' assessment of the antisemitic quality of the

individual depictions in the respective artworks. In addition, the accusation of INSTRUMENTALISATION OF ANTISEMITISM is more often encountered.

Despite a broad consensus on the antisemitic character of the objectionable depictions, some web users negated this antisemitism, and rejected the explanations put forward by others: "These pictures are not antisemitic, they are apt and original!" ["Diese Bilder sind nicht antisemitisch, sondern treffend und originell!"] (SP-FB[20220626]). Some argued that such depictions should not be taken seriously because they appear as satire, something that allegedly only Germans fail to understand: "Exactly, worldwide they call such things satire. Except here, in Germany" ["Genau weltweit nennt man sowas Satire. Nur hier in Deutschland nicht"] (SP-FB[20220621]). By claiming that this supposed satire is directed against legitimate targets – state institutions and secret services such as the Mossad – antisemitism is passed off as legitimate criticism. These claims are supported argumentatively primarily with a reference to artistic free-

dom, as this is above all: "The Mossad with a pig's head is not antisemitic but critical of the Mossad. Apart from that, art and satire are allowed to do anything" ["Der Mossad mit Schweinekopf ist nicht antisemitisch sondern kritisch gegenüber dem Mossad. Im übrigen darf Kunst und Satire alles"] (FAZ-FB[20220621]). The commenters ignore the fact that artistic freedom is not attacked when works of art are attributed a certain quality – namely being antisemitic. The pig mask, for example, refers to the traditional vilification of Jews by associating them with pigs or depicting them as such. Artistic freedom allows this to be depicted, but does not change the antisemitic quality of the stereotype depicted.

Comments RELATIVISING ANTISEMITISM place the antisemitic content in relation to other topics, or expand contexts in order to minimise their antisemitic character: "Allegedly, however, other actors are similarly depicted in other pictures of the group. In other words, the form of representation is presumably not exclusively against Jews..." ["Angeblich sollen aber andere Akteure auf anderen Bildern der Gruppe ähnlich dargestellt sein. Sprich: die Form der Darstellung geht vermutlich nicht exklusiv gegen Juden..."] (LEONA-TW[20220620]). Strategies of relativisation can also imply ideological attitudes – for example of so-called "wokeness", which is perceived as a restrictive and undemocratic orientation and attributed to the critics of the antisemitic works: "that's just Germany and Germany is woke. Antisemitism is forbidden, criticising other religions is allowed" ["das ist halt Deutschland und Deutschland ist woke. Antisemitismus ist verboten, andere Religionen zu kritisieren, ist erlaubt"] (FAZ-FB[20220621]). In the course of this, Jews are ascribed a PRIVILEGED position, antisemitism is reinterpreted as criticism, and thus a TABOO ON CRITICISM is also asserted. It is interesting to note here that, for this user at least, "wokeness" in a German context seems to be associated with taking an overly hard line on antisemitism – whereas in other contexts, such as the UK and the USA, "wokeness" is, on the contrary, associated with antisemitism, particularly Israel-related antisemitism. Furthermore, another form of RELATIVISATION seeks to reinterpret the antisemitic content as social criticism or as legitimate criticism of the State of Israel: "Perhaps it is only a reflection of how Israel is perceived on the other side of

the world" ["Vielleicht ist es ja auch nur das Abbild dessen, wie man Israel auf der anderen Seite der Welt wahr nimmt"] (ARAS-TW[20220620]). Such forms of relativisation are in turn extremely close to the AFFIRMATION OF ANTISEMITISM when the antisemitic content is presented as an accurate depiction of the State of Israel, or when this is indirectly expressed via an endorsement of the artists: "Respect to the artist!!!!" ["Respekt an den Künstler!!!!"] (BILD-YT[20220621]). Endorsements of the depictions are also frequently articulated with the help of a moral accusation, as a result of which the criticism of antisemitism in the works is characterised as limited to Germany and thus as particular and insubstantial: "Playing the morality card. Absolutely great art. Hard but good" ["Die deutsche Moralkeule. Absolut grossartige Kunst. Hart aber gut"] (BILD-YT[20220621]). References to artistic freedom were a popular strategy when seeking to AFFIRM ANTISEMITISM – for example in indirect affirmations of antisemitic depictions: "God, that's art! Do you have to put antisemitism everywhere?" ["Gott, das ist Kunst! Muss man gleich überall Antisemitismus in den Raum heben"] (LEONA-TW[20220620]).

Furthermore, both the endorsement of the antisemitic content and the denial of the antisemitic character of the works were often accompanied by an accusation of an INSTRUMENTALISATION OF ANTISEMITISM, in that criticism of antisemitism is interpreted as a strategy to prevent critical representation of Israel: "The accusation of antisemitism serves Israeli lobbies as a tool to silence their opponents and nip necessary debates in the bud" ["Der Vorwurf des Antisemitismus dient israelischen Lobbies als Instrument, ihre Gegner mundtot zu machen und notwendige Debatten im Keim zu ersticken"] (LEONA-TW[20220620]).

Overall, the discourse runs much less along the lines of a discussion about artistic freedom than previously assumed – although this is often used as an argument. Instead, the antisemitic content shown in the documenta 15 works is usually simply negated or relativised in the online comments (which often happens via a reference to Israel that is supposed to legitimise the negative depictions), and antisemitism itself is thus marginalised.

5. Post-content analysis: Automated solutions for detecting antisemitic hate speech online using logistic regression

In the preceding reports, as well as in the previous chapters of this report, we presented detailed analyses based on annotated web user comments from news websites and social media platforms. In this chapter, we will shed light on first results related to Step 2 within the project's research design, dedicated to using annotated data sets to build algorithms that replicate the human coders' decisions. Here, artificial intelligence approaches will enable the project to automatically detect antisemitic web content on a large scale.

Among the various techniques made available by artificial intelligence, our first experiments focus on logistic regression, a simple yet efficient approach that serves as a baseline for more complex models.

Logistic regression⁴ is a binary classification algorithm which responds well to our situation of classifying comments for what we call "ideation", i.e. whether they exhibit antisemitic or non-antisemitic statements.

For this technique, our colleague Flip Jansen,⁵ a specialist in applied computer science, has trained a model that gives the probability of a comment being one or the other ideation based on the words used in the comment.

A subsection of our data set was used, which consisted of user comments from the following British sources: *BBC News*, *Ben & Jerry's Twitter account*, *Daily Mail*, *Daily Express*, *Financial Times*, *The Guardian*, *The Independent*, *The Mirror*, *Metro*, *The Spectator*, *The Telegraph*, and *The Times*. Parts of our annotated data were used to build a machine learning model. The other part of the data was used to evaluate the accuracy of the model by comparing the probability of a comment being antisemitic given by the model and the annotation by our team.

Given that the data is clearly unbalanced – most comments in the data set are not antisemitic – the metric chosen to evaluate the accuracy of the model is not the correct classification rate, but the F1 metric: the harmonic mean of precision and recall, which does not take into account the classification of non-antisemitic comments but focuses on true positives (antisemitic, classified as such), false positives (non-antisemitic, classified as antisemitic) and false negatives (antisemitic, classified as non-antisemitic), see Equation (1) to (3).

⁴ – See Skansi 2018 and Géron 2019.

⁵ – This work was done in the context of her bachelor thesis, see Jansen 2022.

$$\text{Precision} = \frac{\text{TruePositives}}{\text{TruePositives} + \text{FalsePositives}} \quad (1)$$

$$\text{Recall} = \frac{\text{TruePositives}}{\text{TruePositives} + \text{FalseNegatives}} \quad (2)$$

$$\text{F1} = \frac{2 \cdot \text{Precision} \cdot \text{Recall}}{\text{Precision} + \text{Recall}} \quad (3)$$

With logistic regression, Flip's work reached an F1 value of 0.752. Two research projects on AI-supported antisemitism detection can serve as a comparison point to these results. The study "Antisemitism on Twitter: Collective Efficacy and the Role of Community Organisations in Challenging Online Hate Speech" (Ozalp et al. 2021) looks at Twitter content related to Jewish identity in the UK between October 2015 and October 2016. The authors use artificial intelligence to detect antisemitic content in their data set. An F1 value of 0.716 was achieved with support-vector machines using a bag-of-words approach. The project "'Subverting the Jew-tocracy': Online Antisemitism Detection Using Multimodal Deep Learning" by Chandra et al. (2021), focuses on posts from Twitter and Gab and showed that BERT models were more efficient in their case. Building on logistic regression, we have been exploring our own complex deep learning models whose results will be presented in the months to come.

In addition to building the algorithm, Flip's work provides a complete pipeline from the raw data and the data annotated by our team, to an application allowing to predict the ideation of a given comment and correct the algorithm through a feedback loop. The pipeline includes the algorithm, written in the Python programming language with the data analysis package scikit-learn, the databases (MongoDB), the text parsing (using the library Beautiful Soup), and preprocessing of the data regarding – amongst others – hashtags, emojis and stop words.

This first attempt at building an algorithm to detect antisemitic content in the context of the Decoding Antisemitism project is very promising. The F1 value of 0.752 obtained with the logistic regression approach gives us very optimistic prospects for the other artificial intelligence approaches currently examined. The upcoming fifth Discourse Report will provide further insights into the automated detection of online antisemitism.

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