

Antisemitism Claims Mask a Reign of Political and Cultural Terror Across Europe

By [Jonathan Cook](#)

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Region: [Europe](#)

Theme: [Media Disinformation](#)

The Israeli newspaper Haaretz has run a fascinating [long report](#) this week offering a disturbing snapshot of the political climate rapidly emerging across Europe on the issue of antisemitism. The article documents a kind of cultural, political and intellectual reign of terror in Germany since the parliament passed a resolution last year equating support for non-violent boycotts of Israel – in solidarity with Palestinians oppressed by Israel – with antisemitism.

The article concerns Germany but anyone reading it will see very strong parallels with what is happening in other European countries, especially the UK and France.

In Germany, a Witch Hunt Is Raging Against Critics of Israel. Cultural Leaders Have Had Enough

Scholars are boycotted for signing a petition, artists are subjected to background checks and critical texts are censored. Now, in an unprecedented move, leaders of top German cultural institutions have joined forces to declare: enough

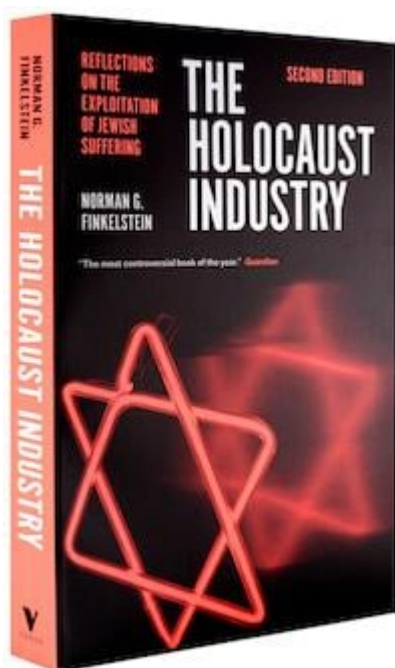
       Zen Read



The same European leaders who a few years ago marched in Paris shouting “Je suis Charlie” – upholding the inalienable free speech rights of white Europeans to [offend](#) Muslims by insulting and ridiculing their Prophet – are now queuing up to outlaw free speech when it is directed against Israel, a state that refuses to end its belligerent occupation of Palestinian land. European leaders have repeatedly shown they are all too ready to crush the free speech of Palestinians, and those in solidarity with them, to avoid offending sections of the Jewish community.

The situation reduces to this: European Muslims have no right to take offence at insults about a religion they identify with, but European Jews have every right to take offence at criticism of an aggressive Middle Eastern state they identify with. Seen another way, the perverse secular priorities of European mainstream culture now place the sanctity of a militarised state, Israel, above the sanctity of a religion with a billion followers.

Guilt by association



This isn't even a double standard. I can't find a word in the dictionary that conveys the scale and degree of hypocrisy and bad faith involved.

If the American Jewish scholar Norman Finkelstein wrote a follow-up to his impassioned book *The Holocaust Industry* – on the cynical use of the Holocaust to enrich and empower a Jewish organisational establishment at the expense of the Holocaust's actual survivors – he might be tempted to title it *The Antisemitism Industry*.

In the current climate in Europe, one that rejects any critical thinking in relation to broad areas of public life, that observation alone would enough to have one denounced as an antisemite. Which is why the Haaretz article – far braver than anything you will read in a UK or US newspaper – makes no bones about what is happening in Germany. It calls it a “witch-hunt”. That is Haaretz's way of saying that antisemitism has been politicised and weaponised – a self-evident conclusion that will currently get you expelled from the British Labour party, even if you are Jewish.

The Haaretz story highlights two important developments in the way antisemitism has been, in the words of intellectuals and cultural leaders cited by the newspaper, “instrumentalised” in Germany.

Jewish organisations and their allies in Germany, as Haaretz reports, are openly weaponising antisemitism not only to damage the reputation of Israel's harsher critics, but also to force out of the public and cultural domain – through a kind of “antisemitism guilt by association” – anyone who dares to entertain criticism of Israel.

Cultural associations, festivals, universities, Jewish research centres, political think-tanks, museums and libraries are being forced to scrutinise the past of those they wish to invite in case some minor transgression against Israel can be exploited by local Jewish organisations. That has created a toxic, politically paranoid atmosphere that inevitably kills trust and creativity.

But the psychosis runs deeper still. Israel, and anything related to it, has become such a combustible subject – one that can ruin careers in an instant – that most political, academic and cultural figures in Germany now choose to avoid it entirely. Israel, as its supporters intended, is rapidly becoming untouchable.

A case study noted by Haaretz is Peter Schäfer, a respected professor of ancient Judaism and Christianity studies who was forced to resign as director of Berlin's Jewish Museum last year. Schäfer's crime, in the eyes of Germany's Jewish establishment, was that he staged an exhibition on Jerusalem that recognised the city's three religious traditions, including a Muslim one.

He was immediately accused of promoting "historical distortions" and denounced as "anti-Israel". A reporter for Israel's rightwing Jerusalem Post, which has been [actively colluding](#) with the Israeli government to smear critics of Israel, contacted Schäfer with a series of inciteful emails. The questions included "Did you learn the wrong lesson from the Holocaust?" and "Israeli experts told me you disseminate antisemitism – is that true?"

Schäfer observes:

"The accusation of antisemitism is a club that allows one to deal a death blow, and political elements who have an interest in this are using it, without a doubt... The museum staff gradually entered a state of panic. Then of course we also started to do background checks. Increasingly it poisoned the atmosphere and our work."

Another prominent victim of these Jewish organisations tells Haaretz:

"Sometimes one thinks, 'To go to that conference?' 'To invite this colleague?' Afterward it means that for three weeks, I'll have to cope with a shitstorm, whereas I need the time for other things that I get paid for as a lecturer. There is a type of 'anticipatory obedience' or 'prior self-censorship.'"

Ring in the New Year

There is nothing unusual about what is happening in Germany. Jewish organisations are stirring up these "shitstorms" – designed to paralyse political and cultural life for anyone who engages in even the mildest criticism of Israel – at the highest levels of government. Don't believe me? Here is Barack Obama explaining in his recent autobiography his efforts as US president to curb Israel's expansion of its illegal settlements. Early on, he was [warned](#) to back off or face the wrath of the Israel lobby:

"Members of both parties worried about crossing the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC). Those who criticized Israeli policy too loudly risked being tagged as 'anti-Israel' (and possibly anti-Semitic) and confronted with a well-funded opponent in the next election."

Corbyn, it seems, has found an unlikely ally in former US President Obama. In his new autobiography, he writes of the Israel lobby's power: 'Those who criticized Israeli policy too loudly risked being tagged as "anti-Israel" (and possibly anti-Semitic)' <https://t.co/tKmy8q3Cws>

When Obama went ahead anyway in 2009 and proposed a modest freeze on Israel's illegal settlements:

"The White House phones started ringing off the hook, as members of my national security team fielded calls from reporters, leaders of American Jewish organizations, prominent supporters, and members of Congress, all wondering why we were picking on Israel ... this sort of pressure continued for much of 2009."

He observes further:

"The noise orchestrated by Netanyahu had the intended effect of gobbling up our time, putting us on the defensive, and reminding me that normal policy differences with an Israeli prime minister – even one who presided over a fragile coalition government – exacted a political cost that didn't exist when I dealt with the United Kingdom, Germany, France, Japan, Canada, or any of our other closest allies."

Doubtless, Obama dare not put down in writing his full thoughts about Israeli prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu or the US lobbyists who worked on his behalf. But Obama's remarks do show that, even a US president, supposedly the single most powerful person on the planet, ended up blanching in the face of this kind of relentless assault. For lesser mortals, the price is likely to be far graver.

No free speech on Israel

It was this same mobilisation of Jewish organisational pressure – orchestrated, as Obama notes, by Israel and its partisans in the US and Europe – that ended up dominating Jeremy Corbyn's five years as the leader of Britain's leftwing Labour party, recasting a well-known anti-racism activist almost overnight as an antisemite.

It is the reason why his successor, Sir Keir Starmer, has outsourced part of Labour's organisational oversight on Jewish and Israel-related matters to the very conservative Board of Deputies of British Jews, as given expression in Starmer's signing up to the Board's "10 Pledges".



It is part of the reason why Starmer recently suspended Corbyn from the party, and then [defied](#) the membership's demands that he be properly reinstated, after Corbyn expressed concerns about the way antisemitism allegations had been "overstated for political reasons" to damage him and Labour. (The rightwing Starmer, it should be noted, was also happy to use antisemitism as a pretext to eradicate the socialist agenda Corbyn had tried to revive in Labour.) It is why Starmer has imposed a [blanket ban](#) on constituency parties discussing Corbyn's suspension. And it is why Labour's shadow education secretary has joined the ruling Conservative party in threatening to strip universities of their funding if they allow free speech about Israel on campus.

Disturbing to learn from this article that Labour backs threatening funding to universities to bully them into adopting the IHRA re-definition of antisemitism - a definition that protects Israel from criticism and would ban most forms of solidarity with Palestinians on campus

— Jonathan Cook (@Jonathan_K_Cook) [December 8, 2020](#)

Two types of Jews

But the Haaretz article raises another issue critical to understanding how Israel and the Jewish establishment in Europe are politicising antisemitism to protect Israel from criticism. The potential Achilles' heel of their campaign are Jewish dissidents, those who break with the supposed "Jewish community" line and create a space for others - whether Palestinians or other non-Jews - to criticise Israel. These Jewish dissenters risk serving as a reminder that trenchant criticism of Israel should not result in one being tarred an antisemite.

Leading Palestinians warn: 'The fight against antisemitism has been increasingly instrumentalised by the Israeli government and its supporters in

an effort to delegitimise the Palestinian cause and silence defenders of Palestinian rights' <https://t.co/Shu1Z7XYM1>

— Jonathan Cook (@Jonathan_K_Cook) [December 1, 2020](#)

Israel and Jewish organisations, however, have made it their task to erode that idea by promoting a distinction – an antisemitic one, at that – between two types of Jews: good Jews (loyal to Israel), and bad Jews (disloyal to Israel).

Haaretz reports that officials in Germany, such as Felix Klein, the country's antisemitism commissioner, and Josef Schuster, president of the Central Council of Jews in Germany, are being allowed to define not only who is an antisemite, typically using support for Israel as the yardstick, but are also determining who are good Jews – those politically like them – and who are bad Jews – those who disagree with them.

Despite Germany's horrific recent history of Jew hatred, the German government, local authorities, the media, universities and cultural institutions have been encouraged by figures like Klein and Schuster to hound German Jews, even Israeli Jews living and working in Germany, from the country's public and cultural space.

When, for example, a group of Israeli Jewish academics in Berlin held a series of online discussions about Zionism last year on the website of their art school, an Israeli reporter soon broke the story of a “scandal” involving boycott supporters receiving funding from the German government. Hours later the art school had pulled down the site, while the German education ministry issued a statement clarifying that it had provided no funding. The Israeli embassy officially declared the discussions held by these Israelis as “antisemitic”, and a German foundation that documents antisemitism added the group to the list of antisemitic incidents it records.

Described as ‘kapos’

So repressive has the cultural and political atmosphere grown in Germany that there has been a small backlash among cultural leaders. Some have dared to publish a letter protesting against the role of Klein, the antisemitism commissioner. Haaretz reports:

“The antisemitism czar, the letter charged, is working ‘in synergy with the Israeli government’ in an effort ‘to discredit and silence opponents of Israel’s policies’ and is abetting the ‘instrumentalization’ that undermines the true struggle against antisemitism.

Figures like Klein have been so focused on tackling criticism of Israel from the left, including the Jewish left, that they have barely noted the “acute danger Jews in Germany face due to the surge in far-right antisemitism”, the letter argues.

Again, the same picture can be seen across Europe. In the UK, the opposition Labour party, which should be a safe space for those leading the anti-racism struggle, is purging itself of Jews critical of Israel and using anti-semitism smears against prominent anti-racists, especially from other oppressed minorities.

Extraordinarily, Naomi Wimborne-Idrissi, one of the founders of Jewish Voice for Labour,

which supports Corbyn, recently found herself suspended by Starmer's Labour. She had just appeared in a moving video in which she explained the ways antisemitism was being used by Jewish organisations to smear Jewish left-wingers like herself as "traitors" and "kapos" – an incendiary term of abuse, as Wimborne-Idrissi points out, that refers to "a Jewish inmate of a concentration camp who collaborated with the [Nazi] authorities, people who collaborated in the annihilation of their own people".

In suspending her, Starmer effectively endorsed this campaign by the UK's Jewish establishment of incitement against, and vilification of, leftwing Jews.

The aggressive purge of Jews from the Labour Party under the repressive rule of [@Keir_Starmer](#) marches on.

I haven't seen a sustained campaign of overt anti-Semitism quite like the effort of Labour centrists to create lists of Good Jews & Bad Jews and purge the latter. <https://t.co/wVwnu47QJP>

— Glenn Greenwald (@ggreenwald) [December 3, 2020](#)

Earlier, Marc Wadsworth, a distinguished black anti-racism campaigner, found himself similarly [suspended](#) by Labour when he exposed the efforts of Ruth Smeeth, then a Labour MP and a former Jewish official in the Israel lobby group BICOM, to recruit the media to her campaign smearing political opponents on the left as antisemites.

In keeping with the rapid erosion of critical thinking in civil society organisations designed to uphold basic freedoms, Smeeth was recently appointed director of the prestigious free speech organisation Index on Censorship. There she can now work on suppressing criticism of Israel – and attack "bad Jews" – under cover of fighting censorship. In the new, inverted reality, censorship refers not to the smearing and silencing of a "bad Jew" like Wimborne-Idrissi, but to criticism of Israel over its human rights abuses, which supposedly "censors" the identification of "good Jews" with Israel – now often seen as the crime of "causing offence".

Ok, we've now officially moved from Alice Through the Looking Glass into the Twilight Zone.

Ruth Smeeth, ex-Israel lobbyist for Bicom and a key player in outlawing solidarity for Palestinians in the Labour party, is the new CEO of free speech group Index on Censorship! <https://t.co/UmHXbTQETS>

— Jonathan Cook (@Jonathan_K_Cook) [June 15, 2020](#)

Boy who cried wolf

The Haaretz article helps to contextualise Europe's current antisemitism "witch-hunt", which targets anyone who criticises Israel or stands in solidarity with oppressed Palestinians, or associates with such people. It is an expansion of the earlier campaign by the Jewish establishment against "the wrong kind of Jew", as identified by Finkelstein in The Holocaust Industry. But this time Jewish organisations are playing a much higher-stakes, and more

dangerous, political game.

Haaretz rightly fears that the Jewish leadership in Europe is not only silencing ordinary Jews but degrading the meaning – the shock value – of antisemitism through the very act of politicising it. Jewish organisations risk alienating the European left, which has historically stood with them against Jew hatred from the right. European anti-racists suddenly find themselves equated with, and smeared as, fledgling neo-Nazis.

If those who support human rights and demand an end to the oppression of Palestinians find themselves labelled antisemitic, it will become ever harder to distinguish between bogus (weaponised) “antisemitism” on the left and real Jew hatred from the right. The antisemitism smearers – and their fellow travellers like Keir Starmer – are likely to end up suffering their very own “boy who cried wolf” syndrome.

Or as Haaretz notes:

“The issue that is bothering the critics of the Bundestag [German parliament] resolution is whether the extension of the concept of antisemitism to encompass criticism of Israel is not actually adversely affecting the battle against antisemitism. The argument is that the ease with which the accusation is leveled could have the effect of eroding the concept itself.”

The Antisemitism Industry

It is worth noting the shared features of the new Antisemitism Industry and Finkelstein’s earlier discussions of the Holocaust Industry.

In his book, Finkelstein identifies the “wrong Jews” as people like his mother, who survived a Nazi death camp as the rest of her family perished. These surviving Jews, Finkelstein argues, were valued by the Holocaust Industry only in so far as they served as a promotional tool for the Jewish establishment to accumulate more wealth and cultural and political status. Otherwise, the victims were ignored because the actual Holocaust’s message – in contrast to the Jewish leadership’s representation of it – was universal: that we must oppose and fight all forms of racism because they lead to persecution and genocide.

Instead the Holocaust Industry promoted a particularist, self-interested lesson that the Holocaust proves Jews are uniquely oppressed and that they therefore deserve a unique solution: a state, Israel, that must be given unique leeway by western states to commit crimes in violation of international law. The Holocaust Industry – very much to be distinguished from the real events of the Holocaust – is deeply entwined in, and rationalised by, the perpetuation of the racist, colonial project of Israel.

In the case of the Antisemitism Industry, the “wrong Jew” surfaces again. This time the witch-hunt targets Jewish leftwingers, Jews critical of Israel, Jews opposed to the occupation, and Jews who support a boycott of the illegal settlements or of Israel itself. Again, the problem with these “bad Jews” is that they allude to a universal lesson, one that says Palestinians have at least as much right to self-determination, to dignity and security, in their historic homeland as Jewish immigrants who fled European persecution.

Keir Starmer needs to listen to the 'proudly pro-Israel' Americans for Peace Now. They reject the IHRA definition for 'weaponising' antisemitism and allowing 'McCarthyite witch hunts' of Israel critics. Only those living in a 'black hole' could support it <https://t.co/mNCj0LqCky>

In contrast to the “bad Jews”, the Antisemitism Industry demands that a particularist conclusion be drawn about Israel – just as a particularist conclusion was earlier drawn by the Holocaust Industry. It says that to deny Jews a state is to leave them defenceless against the eternal virus of antisemitism. In this conception, the Holocaust may be uniquely abhorrent but it is far from unique. Non-Jews, given the right circumstances, are only too capable of carrying out another Holocaust. Jews must therefore always be protected, always on guard, always have their weapons (or in Israel’s case, its nuclear bombs) to hand.

‘Get out of jail’ card

This view, of course, seeks to ignore, or marginalise, other victims of the Holocaust – Romanies, communists, gays – and other kinds of racism. It needs to create a hierarchy of racisms, a competition between them, in which hatred of Jews is at the pinnacle. This is how we arrived at an absurdity: that anti-Zionism – misrepresented as the rejection of a refuge for Jews, rather than the reality that it rejects an ethnic, colonial state oppressing Palestinians – is the same as antisemitism.

Extraordinarily, as the Haaretz article clarifies, German officials are oppressing “bad Jews”, at the instigation of Jewish organisations, to prevent, as they see it, the re-emergence of the far-right and neo-Nazis. The criticisms of Israel made by the “bad Jew” are thereby not just dismissed as ideologically unsound or delusions but become proof that these Jews are colluding with, or at least nourishing, the Jew haters.

In this way, Germany, the UK and much of Europe have come to justify the exclusion of the “wrong Jew” – those who uphold universal principles for the benefit of all – from the public space. Which, of course, is exactly what Israel wants, because, rooted as it is in an ideology of ethnic exclusivity as a “Jewish state”, it necessarily rejects universal ethics.

What we see here is an illustration of a principle at the heart of Israel’s state ideology of Zionism: Israel needs antisemitism. Israel would quite literally have to invent antisemitism if it did not exist.

This is not hyperbole. The idea that the “virus of antisemitism” lies semi-dormant in every non-Jew waiting for a chance to overwhelm its host is the essential rationale for Israel. If the Holocaust was an exceptional historical event, if antisemitism was an ancient racism that in its modern incarnation followed the patterns of prejudice and hatred familiar in all racisms, from anti-black bigotry to Islamophobia, Israel would be not only redundant but an abomination – because it has been set up to dispossess and abuse another group, the Palestinians.

Antisemitism is Israel’s “get out of jail” card. Antisemitism serves to absolve Israel of the racism it structurally embodies and that would be impossible to overlook were Israel deprived of the misdirection *weaponised* antisemitism provides.

An empty space

The Haaretz article provides a genuine service by not only reminding us that “bad Jews” exist but in coming to their defence – something that European media is no longer willing to

do. To defend “bad Jews” like Naomi Wimborne-Idrissi is to be contaminated with the same taint of antisemitism that justified the ejection of these Jews from the public space.

Haaretz records the effort of a few brave cultural institutions in Germany to protest, to hold the line, against this new McCarthyism. Their stand may fail. If it does, you may never become aware of it.

The fraudulent 'Labour antisemitism' controversy has empowered the most thuggish elements in the organised British Jewish community.

Case in point: the Campaign Against Antisemitism effectively calls for Professor David Feldman to keep quiet or be sacked. <https://t.co/QWvNg84c2E>

— JamieSW (@jsternweiner) [December 4, 2020](#)

Once, the “bad Jews” have been smeared into silence, as Palestinians and those who stand in solidarity with them largely have been already; when social media has de-platformed critics of Israel as Jew haters; when the media and political parties enforce this silence so absolutely they no longer need to smear anyone as an antisemite because these “antisemites” have been disappeared; when the Jewish “community” speaks with one voice because its other voices have been eliminated; when the censorship is complete, you will not know it.

There will be no record of what was lost. There will be simply an empty space, a blank slate, where discussions of Israel’s crimes against Palestinians once existed. What you will hear instead is only what Israel and its partisans want you to hear. Your ignorance will be blissfully complete.

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This essay first appeared on Jonathan Cook’s blog: <https://www.jonathan-cook.net/blog/>

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