Antisemitism in Online Communication

Transdisciplinary Approaches to Hate Speech in the Twenty-First Century

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1. The Cases of Riley and Rooney

Intersections of Misogyny with Antisemitism and Counter Speech in British Online Discourse

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Despite the benefits of the intersectional approach to antisemitism studies, it seems to have been given little attention so far. This chapter compares the online reactions to two UK news stories, both centred around the common theme of cultural boycott of Israel in support of the BDS movement, both with a well-known female figure at the centre of media coverage, only one of which identifies as Jewish. In the case of British television presenter Rachel Riley, a person is attacked for being female as well as Jewish, with misogyny compounding the antisemitic commentary. In the case of the Irish writer Sally Rooney, misogynistic discourse is used to strengthen the message countering antisemitism. The contrastive analysis of the two datasets, with references to similar analyses of media stories centred around well-known men, illuminates the relationships between the two forms of hate, revealing that—even where the antisemitic attitudes overlap—misogynistic insults and disempowering or undermining language are being weaponised on both sides of the debate, with additional characterisation of Riley as a "grifter" and Rooney as "naive".

More research comparing discourses around Jewish and non-Jewish women is needed to ascertain whether this pattern is consistent; meanwhile, the many analogies in the abuse suffered by both groups can perhaps serve a useful purpose: shared struggles can foster understanding needed to then notice

the particularised prejudice. By including more than one hate ideology in the research design, intersectionality offers exciting new approaches to studies of antisemitism and, more broadly, of hate speech or discrimination.

1. Introduction

Close and systematic monitoring of reactions to news items in the context of antisemitic discourse can over time reveal certain regularities: it can highlight which antisemitic concepts are most widespread within a language community, or point to the most common triggers for the increase in antisemitism levels (Hübscher and Von Mering 2022). In terms of the online comment sections of UK mainstream media, such triggers tend to be news stories focusing on the State of Israel, which spark web-user debates on Israeli politics; genuine and legitimate critique of Israeli government or its policies will then sometimes cross the line into antisemitism (Schwarz-Friesel 2020). Another such type of trigger seems to be media coverage centred around a well-known figure and a statement they have made in relation to Jews or Israel, at times open to interpretation, or otherwise directly and unequivocally antisemitic. Whether they have made their name in the political arena, the arts or the world of show business, the controversy will inevitably attract the attention of both new and existing supporters as well as critics, resulting in a flurry of media reports about their statements and a lively discussion in the comment sections regarding the impact, seriousness and truthfulness of their words.

The framing of the public figure's pronouncement is likely to affect web-user reactions as well. An accusation of antisemitism in the press articles themselves seems to fuel the debate further, on the one hand prompting affirmation and agreement, on the other a proliferation of counter speech (see Ascone in this volume). This chapter focuses on two case studies in which well-known figures with similar visibility, television presenter Rachel Riley and novelist Sally Rooney, publicly voiced their opinions on issues regarding the cultural boycott of Israel, in both cases triggering a significant amount of coverage by mainstream media in the UK, broadly discussed by web users of the media in the comment sections. The chapter compares the findings in terms of

antisemitic hate speech found in the comment sections, but also the misogyny present in both debates. By comparing the two, it hopes to contribute to the conversation on the different hate ideologies co-existing in the same mainstream spaces, and their potential to be weaponised.

Over the past three years, the research team of the Decoding Antisemitism project analysed several discourse events centred around prominent figures and media personalities. These have included the 2021 case of the sociology lecturer Professor David Miller, who had made incendiary statements about the State of Israel,[1] as well as the British left-wing politician Diane Abbott and the US musician Ye (formerly known as Kanye West), both of whom have been accused of antisemitism on separate occasions—based on their comments about Jews in, respectively, her letter to the British weekly *The Observer*, and his social media posts. Outside of the UK, similar news stories in recent years have involved the French comedian Dieudonné M'Bala M'Bala[2] and German politician Hans-Georg Maaßen; all these events have provoked lively debates in the comments under the media posts on the topic in the respective countries. Such focus on a recognisable public figure makes the conversation more appealing to both the media and the public opinion, and the figure's actions provide a specific trigger for the discussions on antisemitism. Antisemitic ideology can then be pinned onto a particular individual rather than discussed in the abstract, allowing the media and the comment boxes to sidestep the difficulty of elucidating the long and rich history of antisemitism, its complexity and illogicality, and its ever-changing guises which often depend on their temporal, geographical or cultural context. It is perhaps easier for the public opinion to focus the discussion instead on one person's biography and the various aspects of their professional or private identity, using them as arguments or counter-arguments. The public figure is thus collectively dissected, and a narrative is built around them.

Studying such events purely from the point of view of the hallmarks of antisemitism and its specific stereotypes, analogies or strategies

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1   This resulted in Miller's dismissal from his post at the University of Bristol, which was later ruled unfair by Bristol Employment Tribunal on 6 February 2024, https://www.judiciary.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/Miller-judgment-1400780.2022-JDT.pdf.

2   See Chapelan in the same volume for a discussion of French social media reactions to the Dieudonné and West's controversies.

undoubtedly helps construct a good overview of the overarching patterns of antisemitic discourse. However, taking into consideration other hate ideologies as well can provide further insights, particularly into the specific abuse suffered by various groups in connection with not just their Jewish identity, but also with their gender, sexual orientation, skin colour, ethnicity, age, disability. In the recent years, several public figures in the UK have been vocal about the particular type of hate speech they have been targets of as Jewish women, including the politicians Luciana Berger, Ruth Smeeth and Margaret Hodge, or actor and writer Tracy-Ann Oberman. On the other hand, looking at more than one hate ideology in the analysis of antisemitic discourse can also show how one can be instrumentalised in the fight against another: many comments countering antisemitism contain misogyny, racism, or anti-Muslim sentiment, which become an unwelcome feature of counter speech and create more and stronger divides instead of educating or fostering understanding. The many comments denouncing Diane Abbott's letter to *The Observer* in April of 2023, in which she seemed to relativise and downplay the seriousness of contemporary antisemitism (Scheiber 2024), attacked not just the accuracy of her statement or her professional competence as a politician and a Member of Parliament, but also her race, gender and age.[3] Outrage against Kanye West's antisemitic social media posts and claims made in an interview was at times expressed through the means of anti-Black discourse in comment sections and deriding his mental health diagnosis (Chapelan et al. 2023). In commentary on the ongoing events of the Arab-Israeli conflict, counter speech comments made by web users regularly rehash Islamophobic narratives. In other words, the specific identity (real or perceived) of a person or people at the receiving end of the criticism, even when the actual criticism is due, is unfairly instrumentalised against them in *ad hominem* attacks. Studying the interactions of the various hate speech ideologies, their

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3   Based on Decoding Antisemitism team's analysis of 4,000 online comments, posted under media reports about Abbott's letter in late April and early May 2023 on mainstream news websites and on their social media accounts. Examples include: "I also wonder why she straightens her cultural Afro hair ? If white woman are chastised for the Corning of their hair, why does this duplicitous cr.3t1n think nothing of cultural appropriation of a white persons hair ?" (EXPR[20230424]), "Sack the racist bint" (BBC-TW[20230424]), "I'm surprised the old 🐎 was awake long enough to write this 💩" (BBC-FB[20230504]).

possible correlations, and contextual or universal specificities yields a fuller picture of online hate speech.

Despite such clear indications of the benefits of this intersectional approach to the study of antisemitic hate speech, as well as counter speech—an approach which recognises that a person or group can experience discrimination, marginalisation or oppression in a distinct way, depending on the specific aspects of their individual identity (Cho et al. 2013, Thomas et al. 2023)—it seems to have been given little attention so far: "global antisemitism is only rarely included in intersectional theory, and Jews are often excluded from feminist anti-racist social movements that claim to be guided by intersectionality" (Stögner 2020). Its application in the field of antisemitism studies, or more specifically in the study of the structure of antisemitic speech online, could result in new, illuminating and more particularised findings, steering away from dichotomy and towards a more comprehensive and nuanced view of both the antisemitic discourse and counter-antisemitic narratives.

2. Antisemitism and misogyny

One such pairing of hate ideologies that seem to frequently intersect or interact in online discourses are antisemitism and misogyny. Misogyny—a contemptuous view of women—and sexism, an unequal view of the genders, are extremely widespread and hardly need an introduction; sexist and misogynistic discourses have been amply studied (Vickery and Everbach 2018, Cameron 2020), also in contemporary online spaces (Jane 2014, Ging and Siapera 2018, KhosraviNik and Esposito 2018), sometimes including the specific types of abuse encountered by transwomen or queer women (Jane 2016: 70–71). While men are, of course, also targeted by hate speech or 'cancelled' (that is, strongly criticised and ostracised), prominent female figures seem to bear the brunt of more frequent, and more violent, hate speech, including more death or rape threats; increased visibility can arguably increase the amount of hate speech they receive, and a positive public image does not immunise them from public opinion quickly turning on them.[4]

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4   Recent examples of this pattern in the UK context include e.g. member of the British royal family Meghan, Duchess of Sussex, or US actress Amber Heard, both

There is a considerable amount of literature on the specificities of historical gender-based antisemitic prejudice. Both male and female Jews have been presented at various times throughout history as sexually deviant and therefore reprehensible, depraved and abnormal (Drake 2013), feeding into the more general, classic antisemitic stereotypes of monstrosity and repulsiveness, both moral and physical. However, Jewish men have also been portrayed as emasculated and weak (Pellegrini 1997, Schüler-Springorum 2018), and Jewish women as deceitful and witch-like. These stereotypes find their way into later cultural, literary and cinematic tropes which dilute the message and are therefore not immediately recognisable as negative at their root, such as the nineteenth-century "*la belle juive*"—seductive and tragic (Rindisbacher 2018), the contemporary "nice Jewish boy"—gentle and respectful, the "Jewish American Princess"—somewhat spoilt and materialistic, a play on capitalistic greed (Keiles 2018), and the "Jewish mother"—overbearing and pushy (Ravits 2000, Abrams 2012: 47–48). The latter, present-day tropes often become reflected in pop culture, particularly in the films and television series created in the United States, which sustains them via such acceptable, light-hearted iterations and contributes to spreading them ever further.[5]

Expressions of gender-based antisemitic stereotypes found in the comment sections of UK mainstream media, especially once the content has been moderated by human or automated moderation, are likely to be similarly watered down and therefore deemed innocuous and inoffensive, or at least palatable. Likewise, the moderation will have removed the most extreme forms of anti-feminism and misogyny, such as pro-rape comments found, for instance, in the discourse of the antisemitic far-right; such discourse is expressed more freely in unmoderated spaces, including group chats on the messaging app Telegram, where it "actively promotes sexual violence as a political weapon" against women as well as the LGBT+ community (Lawrence, Simhony-Philpott and Stone 2021). Nevertheless, even casual expressions

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of whom had initially received favourable mainstream media coverage, which then switched to primarily negative portrayal.

5   Arguably, this dilution could also help the relevant groups reclaim such stereotypes, i.e., re-appropriate them as a positive or neutral aspect of their group identities.

of a hate ideology, as inconsequential as they may seem in isolation, have the potential to harm their targets and normalise the prejudice, for both the targets and anyone who comes across them. While very explicit hate speech can alienate a mainstream media reader, regular exposure to casually expressed antisemitism can lead them to, for example, accept outbreaks of violence against Israeli civilians as understandable. By the same token, institutional sexism and misogyny have been cited as an obstacle to investigating rape accusations made by women against men (Casey 2023). Often, the power of antisemitic or misogynistic statements is not in their individual shock value, but in their sheer repetition, accumulation and acceptability; while one comment or image might not radicalise a reader, their continued and persistent presence could lead to the boundary of what is acceptable to say and do moving ever further (Oboler 2021).

3. The two case studies: Riley and Rooney

In early 2019, mainstream news outlets in the UK reported that the next Eurovision Song Contest would take place in May of that year, in the Israeli city of Tel Aviv. Soon after the announcement, at the end of January, around 50 British artists and celebrities signed an open letter which called on the British Broadcasting Company (BBC) to petition Eurovision organisers (the European Broadcasting Union) to move the event to a different location in order to show their opposition to Israel's policies and actions in relation to Palestine. The letter stated that "Eurovision may be light entertainment, but it is not exempt from human rights considerations—and we cannot ignore Israel's systematic violation of Palestinian human rights", in effect calling for a cultural boycott of Israel (The Guardian 2019); the signatories included fashion designer Vivienne Westwood, actor Maxine Peake and musician Roger Waters. The letter followed on from an earlier, similar campaign organised by the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) movement in September of 2018, which had been supported by numerous artists from across Europe. BDS, a Palestinian-led initiative which aims to put pressure on Israel through encouraging economic, cultural and political measures, is shaped in the image of the anti-apartheid boycott actions

aimed at South African policies in the second half of the twentieth century (Barghouti 2011).

The appeal prompted a response from other figures within the UK entertainment, arts and culture industry. In a second open letter, made public in April of 2019, they opposed the boycott arguing that "while we all may have differing opinions on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the best path to peace, we all agree that a cultural boycott is not the answer", and calling Eurovision a "unifying event […] crucial to help bridge our cultural divides and bring people of all backgrounds together" (Creative Community for Peace 2019). Although the second letter was signed by over a hundred members of the industry, most media reports on the topic mentioned only a handful of best-known names in either the article headlines or content. Among these, they frequently included Rachel Riley, a popular television show presenter, who had spoken publicly about antisemitism in the UK, notably in relation to the antisemitism allegations in the Labour party. Riley has also related being a target of antisemitism and misogyny as a Jewish woman on various occasions; taking a stance on the issue of cultural boycott of Israel in the context of a popular entertainment event made her vulnerable to such attacks in the comment sections of mainstream news outlets. Was the discourse used against her different from the attacks on other women? Would a comparison of two case studies—one focusing on Riley, and the other on a non-Jewish woman with similar visibility, who has spoken publicly on a similar topic—reveal parallels or differences?

In an effort to answer these questions, a sample of web-user reactions in the 2019 cultural boycott case have been compared with a similar sample of responses to an event from October 2021, when the best-selling Irish novelist Sally Rooney announced her decision not to grant translation rights to an Israeli-based publishing house for her recently released third novel (BBC News 2021). Rooney explained her decision with her support for the BDS movement; her announcement was widely reported by the mainstream media in the UK across the political spectrum, and it prompted many web users to comment on it under the media posts (Ascone et al. 2022). While multiple comments agreed with Rooney's stance and similarly aligned themselves with the idea of a cultural boycott of Israel or expressed direct approval for BDS, others criticised her decision. Often, the criticism did not stop at her words and

extended to the person herself—her supposed political sympathies, for example—and, on occasion, the criticism became a xenophobic attack on her Irish origins, or misogynistic abuse based on her gender.

3.1 The dataset

Despite the fact that the two cases are two and a half years apart, there are significant parallels between them (see Fig. 1.1). Both central figures, Rachel Riley and Sally Rooney, are young white woman that have become famous in the UK by virtue of their professional activity in the British entertainment, arts and culture industry: Rooney as a popular and acclaimed novelist, and Riley as a successful television presenter, and later also an author. At the time of the media reports, they were of a similar age; ageism is often an element of misogynistic or sexist discourses and therefore a potentially relevant factor in this analysis. Both women have used their professional recognition as a platform to make a political statement on a similar issue, albeit on opposing sides. However, out of the two only Riley identifies as Jewish.

The issue on which they have both publicly expressed their views, in the context of this analysis, has been the idea of boycotting the State of Israel through the means of mainstream cultural output, on both occasions in connection with the broader BDS movement. In both instances, the mainstream media coverage of their stance on the issue sparked a lively debate in the comment sections of UK news outlets. In each of the two cases, the basis for analysis was a dataset built of eight online comment threads, taken from the comment sections of a range of UK mainstream media websites and their official social media accounts (Fig. 1.2). Each of these threads was the source of a 200-comment sample, totalling 1,600 user comments per case.[6]

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6   A larger dataset of 3,750 web user comments on the Rooney announcement has been analysed by the Decoding Antisemitism research team and presented in *Discourse Report 4* (Ascone et al. 2022).

Riley dataset	Rooney dataset
Common themes in dataset: cultural boycott of Israel, the BDS movement, apartheid analogy	Common themes in dataset: cultural boycott of Israel, the BDS movement, apartheid analogy
Central figure: popular British television show presenter in her early 30s, white, female, Jewish	Central figure: popular Irish novelist aged 30, white, female, not Jewish
Opposing cultural boycott of Israel (as reported in UK media in 2019)	Supporting cultural boycott of Israel (as reported in UK media in 2021)

Figure 1.1: An overview of the case studies.

3.2 Methodological approach

The methodological framework applied to the two datasets comes from the Decoding Antisemitism project, whose aim is to study the contemporary presence of antisemitic hate speech in the (politically moderate) mainstream in all its forms, including its implicit expressions which, due to their hidden or unfixed nature, evade immediate detection and therefore pass through moderation, with time contributing to the normalisation of antisemitic attitudes online. The project analyses three language communities: the UK, Germany and France, looking for both the universals in their antisemitic discourses online, and their specificities in terms of frequency, triggers and linguistic formats and patterns, bringing into focus the discourse and its potential impact rather than the identity of commenters or the intentionality of their statements.

The analysis presented in this chapter uses the project's approach to data collection and the same classification system. The online comment threads used to build the two datasets were first systematically collected using a custom crawling tool, based on selected key words and a specific date range, and downloaded in a text format retaining the comment thread structure. The threads were then organised into a corpus balanced in terms of representation of mainstream news outlets and their political alignment. Each of the longest comment threads in the corpus was sampled by selecting the first 200 comments, and manually analysed with two research tools. The first of these was content analysis software MAXQDA, which allows the researcher to annotate textual and visual content. The second instrument was a classification system

developed by the research project team based on classic and modern antisemitic concepts—both deductively and inductively, as the initial project analyses revealed further patterns in the examined data. Apart from a detailed and precisely defined conceptual categories and sub-categories, the classification system also allows for the content to be analysed in terms of linguistic structures and devices present in the comment, with categories such as irony, rhetorical questions, wordplay, and more.

While the classification system used in the project makes it possible to analyse the antisemitic content in minute detail, it does not currently reflect misogynistic ideology in the same fine-grained approach. For the purposes of analysing the two datasets, the above-mentioned inductive approach was therefore applied in order to identify the specifics of the misogynistic discourse they contained, referencing existing literature on such discourse. The Sally Rooney corpus had first been analysed by the research team in a report published in October 2022; this dataset was used in part (preserving the balance of sources) and reanalysed from the point of view of misogynistic hate speech for this chapter. Meanwhile, the Rachel Riley dataset has been collected and analysed in terms of both antisemitic and misogynistic content expressly for the purposes of presenting this comparison.

Riley dataset	Rooney dataset
1,600 comments	1,600 comments
8 comment threads	8 comment threads
Data sources: *Facebook* pages of *The Independent, The Guardian, The Metro, The Spectator, Evening Standard, The Daily Mail.*	Data sources: *Facebook* pages of *The Independent, The Guardian, The Times, The Spectator, The Telegraph* and *The Daily Mail* website.

Figure 1.2: An overview of the datasets.

4. Discussion of findings

4.1 Antisemitic content: Frequency and concepts

The in-depth empirical analysis of the two datasets has uncovered many similarities, not least in the level of antisemitic comments they contain, as well as the types of stereotypes, analogies and strategies used by the commenters to convey antisemitic attitudes. The average share of antisemitic comments, both explicit and implicit, reached just over 11% in both corpora—a finding not dissimilar to the typical percentage revealed in regular analyses of similar datasets in the Decoding Antisemitism project. The antisemitic comments typically revolved around the same themes and triggers; that is, Israeli politics in the context of the Middle East conflict, including frequent comparisons of Israel to an apartheid state, and support for the BDS movement.

4.1.1 *"Support the boycott"*

Riley dataset	Rooney dataset
(1) Boycott the Fcuking <a>Izrahells so that they learn they are not gods chosen. (SPECT-FB[20190506]) (2) [...] WE NEED TO BOYCOTT ISRAELI GOODS, CULTURAL EVENTS ETC PLEASE BOYCOTT TO PUT PRESSURE ON THE RACIST STATE OF ISRAEL (INDEP-FB[20190430])	(3) do your own research. I'm defending her decision to support the boycott. (TIMES-FB[20211012]) (4) She should boycott Hebrew altogether. Modern Hebrew was invented as part of the Zionist project. (TIMES[20211012])

In both datasets, many web users took to comment sections simply to express respect, support or admiration for the cultural boycott of Israel, and often calling for others to do the same, as in (1), (2) and (4). While some comments, such as (3), simply affirmed the antisemitism (in 9% of antisemitic comments in the Riley dataset and 8% in the Rooney dataset), the support was often accompanied by, or argued through, the attribution of further problematic concepts to Israel. In (1), the commenter hinted at two such antisemitic stereotypes: first, the idea

of supposedly EVIL Jewish nature is expressed in the pun "Izrahells" (Bolton 2024b); second, the reference to the "chosen one" trope signals the commenter's disapproval for the alleged PRIVILEGE enjoyed by the Jewish state (Placzynta 2024b). In (2), Israel is called a "RACIST STATE", and in (3) the legitimacy of its existence is placed into doubt by alleging that "[m]odern Hebrew was invented as part of the Zionist project". Referring to Israel as a "project" rather than a country or state is a vivid feature of Israel-related antisemitic discourse or, to be more precise, of DENIAL OF ISRAEL'S RIGHT TO EXIST (Vincent and Bolton 2024); all of the above concepts are consistent features of English-language antisemitic discourse online.

4.1.2 *"The brutal, racist apartheid state"*

Riley dataset	Rooney dataset
(5) Togetherness with an apartheid state—that sounds like a good idea—yeah right. GUARD-FB[20190429])	(7) How is it that when it's Jews having an Apartheid state suddenly opposing it is allegedly 'racist'? (INDEP-FB[20211012])
(6) #BDS ISRAEL is an exterminationist genocidal apartheid colonialist settler state#FreePalestine 🇵🇸 (METRO-FB[20190519])	(8) Well done girl. Expose the brutal, racist apartheid state. (TIMES-FB[20211012])

In the comments supporting the cultural boycott, multiple user comments employed the apartheid analogy as an argument for their attack on Israel, either on its own or in combination with several other accusations. The frequent (23% and 28% of antisemitic comments respectively) use of the analogy in the two datasets is perhaps to be expected in this context, as the BDS movement has modelled itself after the anti-apartheid campaigns in South Africa in the latter half of the last century, contributing to the construction of the analogy in the public imagination. The application of the apartheid analogy also seems to be a common strategy to prepare ground for other, less socially acceptable and more controversial characterisations of Israel as "genocidal"[7] (6),

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7   It should be acknowledged that at the time of writing the validity of the genocide accusation levelled at Israel due to its military actions in Gaza is a topic of an urgent debate. On 26 January 2024, the International Court of Justice (ICJ)

"brutal" or "racist" (8) (Bolton et al. 2023, Bolton 2024a). However, it is also often used on their own, rendered even more subtle by the use of linguistic structures that obscure the sentiment. One example of this is that the use of irony in (5) gives the comment the appearance of agreement with the letter signed by Riley and other artists, which called for unity between the supporters of Israel and Palestine; this illusion is broken by the contextual, pejorative reference to Israel as "an apartheid state". Similarly, a rhetorical question asked by (7) uses the same label, further suggesting that antisemitism is instrumentalised to allow "Jews [to] hav[e] an Apartheid state" (Becker 2024a).

4.2 Misogynistic content: Parallels and differences

The issue of the validity of a cultural boycott as a measure against the State of Israel, debated in the two datasets, provoked strong responses on both sides of the discussion regarding the topic, as well as the figures named in the media coverage around the issue. The two women were both targeted by misogynistic language which often, if not always, followed similar schemata, despite the fact that the two represented opposing sides of the boycott debate. At times they took the forms of straightforward insults, many of which were gendered, but also of disempowering or undermining language or negative characterisation; it was the latter that revealed especially telling differences. Only 3% and 5% respectively of all the analysed comments in the Riley and Rooney datasets were considered clearly misogynistic; their lower share in comparison to antisemitic comments could perhaps suggest greater sensitivity of either human or automated moderators on the platforms the comments were taken from. However, a more likely reason for this imbalance is the focus of the media trigger on Israel and antisemitism, with the female identity of the figures at the centre purely incidental. The higher amount of misogyny in the Rooney corpus could reflect the fact that she was the only figure involved in the event reported on by the media, rather than one of a few, as in the case of Riley.

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ordered Israel to "take action to prevent acts of genocide", https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/key-takeaways-world-court-decision-israei-genocide-case-2024-01-26/. See also Bolton in this volume.

4.2.1 Insults: "Zionist cow" vs. "ignorant cow"

Riley dataset	Rooney dataset
(9) Rachel Riley signing is is the give away, Zionist cow. (INDEP-FB[20190430])	(11) Make no mistake. This is Jew hate. She is Some whiny 🇮🇪 Harpy (SPECT-FB[20211014])
(10) So Rachel Riley says that we shouldn't boycott it! Quelle surprise that she supports an apartheid state. Nasty piece of work. 🇵🇸🇵🇸 (INDEP-FB[20190430])	(12) Ignorant cow.... actually terrible reviews... maybe she thinks the notoriety will help book sales...oh, I forgot...most BDSers are too dumb to.....read! (TEL-FB[20211012])
	(13) mad old trout (TEL-FB[20211012])
	(14) silly girl (TIMES-FB[20211012])

In the two analysed datasets of web-user comments, misogynistic comments contained insults (present in 16% of all comments categorised as misogynistic in the Riley dataset, and 21% in the Rooney dataset). Some were expressed through gendered words or phrases whose dictionary definition specifies that the referent is only ever a woman or a girl. In (9), Rachel Riley is called a "cow", and in (11) and (13) Rooney is dismissed as "[s]ome whiny 🇮🇪 Harpy" and a "mad old trout". Interestingly, all of these insults dehumanise their targets by comparing them either to animals or, in the case of "Harpy", a mythical half-human, half-bird creature known for her malevolence. Additionally, in two of the examples, the insults were personalised with references to the women's identity, real or perceived—in one, it is Rooney's Irish nationality,[8] in the other, Riley's Jewish identity and possibly her defence of Israel against a cultural boycott; although, in the UK discourse, a "Zionist" label is often simply a stand-in for the attribute of "Jewish" or "Israeli".

Some insults included lexical items which could be applied to any gender but are most commonly used when referring to women. Frequent examples of this in the English language are adjectives like "bossy",

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8 Throughout the dataset, Rooney's Irishness is a reference point in many more comments, both negative or positive, but not necessarily linked to her gender and therefore not of relevance here. Examples include: "the irish understand and celebrate antisemitism" (INDEP-FB[20211012]) or "A racist irish author is not going to be missed" (SPECT-FB[20211014]).

"abrasive" or "hysterical"; such discrepancies can be addressed through corpus linguistic studies into the discourse about women (Baker 2013). This could also be true of the word "whiny", more often than not used to characterise children or women, and akin to the gender-marked epithet "shrill" (Cameron 2016). One of the comments calls Riley a "[n]asty piece of work"; the epithet of "nasty"—though again applicable to people of any gender—has been highlighted by discourse analytical studies as unproportionally targeting women. One of its most-known connotations in recent years has been the pervasive portrayal of Hillary Clinton in public statements made by Donald Trump as "a nasty woman" (Harp 2019). The ubiquity of such words reinforces the so-called likeability bias—the social expectation towards women which dictates the greater need to be pleasant and approachable; that is to speak, act and present themselves in a non-intimidating way, or even to be less visible (Menegatti and Rubini 2017).[9] The use of the attribute "nasty" towards Riley may also, to some extent, echo the stereotypes of a loud and pushy Jewish woman, or that of EVIL Jewish nature (Bolton 2024b); however, without further study of this specific word in more contexts, it is impossible to say if it indeed conveys any antisemitism-specific overtones here.

Elsewhere, a comment refers to Rooney as a "silly girl". The adjective "silly" is, once again, not applied to female referents exclusively, but much more commonly so. Its use serves to undermine or dismiss the target: not just her intelligence or rationality, but also her stature, especially in combination with the infantilising reference "girl" attributed here to an adult woman, in the context of a debate provoked by a statement she had made publicly, using her professional platform and considerable recognition and following. Instead of countering her words on the same level, the anonymous comment chooses to ridicule and diminish (Krook 2022). Similar intelligence-based insults are a feature of the counter-commentary on Diane Abbott's recent statements comparing discrimination encountered by various groups, including Jews. It did not, however, seem to be part of the characterisation of David Miller during the 2021, likewise accused of antisemitism based

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9   The bias may be experienced even more strongly by women of colour, who are often burdened with the 'angry Black woman' stereotype and forced to counteract it in social interactions.

on his public statements, where the personal attacks focused mainly on his carelessness of incompetence as a university lecturer, rather than his intelligence or autonomy of views (Becker et al. 2021).[10]

4.2.2 Disempowering language: "Sour, dull, petulant"

Riley dataset	Rooney dataset
(15) Rachel Riley signed it!!! Obviously heavyweights … (GUARD-FB[20190430])	(17) A nobody wanting to be noticed for her inferred virtue signalling (SPECT-FB[20210114])
(16) there is nothing pretty about Rachel Riley, her spite shows in her face (SPECT-FB[20190506])	(18) should worry about fixing those yellow teeth first (INDEP-FB[20211012])
	(19) Photos of Rooney would seem to perfectly capture her personality. Sour, dull, petulant, disapproving, misery guts (TEL[20211012])

Several more examples in both datasets use comparable language which attempts to undermine or disempower the two women in a range of ways. One strategy is to reduce their professional standing. (15) ironically quips "Rachel Riley signed it!!! Obviously heavyweights …", while (17) calls Rooney "[a] nobody wanting to be noticed for her inferred virtue signalling". By objective measures, Sally Rooney is a successful professional, who has published three bestselling and critically acclaimed novels by the age of 30; Rachel Riley is similarly accomplished in her respective field of work. Referencing them as a "nobody" or as a "lightweight" denies their importance and influence, and by extension the potential impact of their statements in the debate around the cultural boycott of Israel.

Another discursive method aiming to disempower the target is to distract from the topic of the discussion and the views or ideologies the person has expressed by commenting on their physical appearance. This

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10   Based on the analysis of a dataset comprising 1,750 online comments, comparable in size and structure to the two presented in this chapter.

seems less prominent in debates surrounding male figures.[11] In (18), the web user suggests that Rooney "should worry about fixing those yellow teeth first", while (16) and (19) make judgments about Rooney's and Riley's looks and extrapolate these judgments to their character: "[p]hotos of Rooney would seem to perfectly capture her personality"; "[Riley's] spite shows in her face". Both these strategies—that is, not acknowledging the opponent's clout and denigrating them based on their appearance—are commonly used against women, e.g. in political debates.

4.2.3 Divergent narratives: Naïve vs. devious

Riley dataset	Rooney dataset
(20) sadly shows lying grifters do profit (METRO-FB[20190519]) (21) Rachel Riley known for screaming anti-semitism at every opportunity because she uses the Natanyahu definition "the new antisemitism is to be anti Israel". Probably the most famous on that list - internationally - is Gene Simmons, born in Tel Aviv. Hardly surprising he supports his home city. (INDEP-FB[20190430]) (22) Rachel Riley regularly raises money for Israeli soldiers to murder children. of course she signed it (INDEP-FB[20190430])	(23) She isn't a hero though. She is a not very bright anti-Semite (SPECT-FB[20211014]) (24) Rooney's laughably naive gesture politics are amusing enough but also a demonstration of stupidity (TIMES-FB[20211012]) (25) It's not her fault she's a stupid ..... (MAIL[20211013]) (26) Another brainwashed woke c**t (TIMES-FB[20211012])

While most of the derogatory examples presented so far seem to follow a similar pattern, this is not true of all of the analysed comments. The first hint of that was the portrayal of Rachel Riley as a "nasty piece of work" in (10) and of Sally Rooney as a "silly girl" in (14). In subsequent

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11   It should be said, however, that Jewish figures in general are frequently represented, verbally or visually, as grotesque caricatures, which dehumanises and depersonalises them, de-emphasises their individuality, and insinuates their supposed moral monstrosity. However, this strategy normally aims not to distract from the discussion at hand but to emphasise its premise, e.g. the alleged evil or amorality of all Jews/Israel.

analysis, this characterisation of each woman seems to be confirmed further. Rooney is, on more than one occasion, referred to as limited and unaware, with comments such as (23) and (24) calling her "a not very bright anti-Semite" and her pronouncement "laughably naive gesture politics" and "a demonstration of stupidity". Further comments narrowly avoid using derogatory swear words, but make their contempt for Rooney clear by referring to her as "a stupid ....". in (25) and "[a]nother brainwashed woke c**t" in (26). The narrative which emerges from these and other examples dismisses the idea that she might hold her own, independent views; while interpreting her decision regarding the Hebrew translation of her book as antisemitic and then criticising it, the comments arbitrarily deny her both intelligence and agency.

However, where Rooney is presented as someone who does not realise the weight of her words or actions, Riley is shown as not just aware and intentional, but also taking an opportunity to manipulate and profit. Suggesting that she is dishonest or duplicitous, (20) states resignedly that "lying grifters do profit". The following comment accuses her of exercising the taboo of criticism (Chapelan 2024c), claiming she is "known for screaming anti-semitism at every opportunity because she uses the Natanyahu definition 'the new antisemitism is to be anti Israel'".

Both these comments seem to echo antisemitic stereotypes constructed around the idea of untrustworthiness: one—the alleged LYING, DECEITFUL OR IMMORAL as well as INSTRUMENTALISING and exploitative Jewish nature (Becker 2024a, Becker 2024b, Krasni 2024), and the other—a supposed JEWISH CONSPIRACY (Chapelan 2024a). Meanwhile (22), while referencing the signing of the open letter opposing the boycott of Israel, implicates her in the BLOOD LIBEL trope (Placzynta 2024a), implying that her morally reprehensible behaviour is to be expected. The comment not only suggests that one of the aims of Israeli soldiers is to "murder children", but also apportions at least part of the blame to Riley, since she supposedly makes this crime financially possible. In contrast to the "naive" and "stupid" Rooney, Riley is painted as manipulative and IMMORAL. Such portrayal is not, of course, necessarily gender-based or particular only to Jewish women; similar accusations are present in the narratives around well-known male Jewish figures such as the entrepreneur and philanthropist George Soros (Becker and Troschke 2022), routinely portrayed in online media discourses as EVIL (Bolton

2024b). However, the comments about Riley's alleged dishonest nature are also in line with the historical stereotype of a deceitful Jewish woman. It is therefore possible that the Jewishness of the object of the commenters' allegations could have led to activating the association with the negative character traits central to the historical stereotype, mentioned in an earlier section, in a way that is absent from the case where the target is a non-Jewish woman.

5. Closing remarks

Contrastive analysis of web-user reactions to the two cases has indicated several points of interest, and the directions in which further research can advance. The first of these points is that misogynistic language can be, and is, weaponised on different sides of the debate in antisemitic discourse. The very same notion of a cultural boycott against Israel is debated in the comment sections of the same media, in the same country and therefore the same cultural and social setting, set two years apart. Within the same topic of conversation, two women are targeted by misogynistic language that often follows similar schemata. This illogicality is not necessarily surprising, as the public opinion can very quickly turn against women who were previously admired (cf. Lawrence, Simhony-Philpott and Stone 2021). The many analogies in the prejudice and abuse suffered by both Jewish and non-Jewish women can perhaps serve a useful purpose: that of highlighting the shared struggles and perhaps even building more understanding as a result. This may then become a point of departure for noticing the differences and the particular struggles of people identifying as female and Jewish, both online and in real life.

The presence of both antisemitism and misogyny in the same comment sections of mainstream news outlets, albeit to different degrees, is also a signal that many of the harmful antisemitic and misogynistic stereotypes are similarly normalised or expressed implicitly in everyday discourses, and that both pass unnoticed by the moderation. Some of them are only circumstantial: it is their context or co-text which determines their antisemitic or misogynistic message; a different target—non-Jewish or non-female, respectively—would deprive the comment of this interpretation. This suggests that the research design

tools developed in the Decoding Antisemitism project can be extended and adapted to studying the mechanisms of both hate ideologies.

Where the two cases diverge in terms of the content of the attacks on the figures central to each event is the characterisation of each woman. While both are insulted, dismissed and undermined, the Jewish woman is additionally vilified and presented as untrustworthy and devious. This portrayal echoes the negative stereotypes more broadly ascribed to Jews, Israelis or the Jewish state as well as some of the historical representations of Jewish women. These findings could, of course, be unique to these two cases; more research comparing discourses around Jewish and non-Jewish women is required to ascertain whether this pattern is consistent.

Further research is also needed in order to build an understanding of how antisemitism and misogyny relate to and intersect with each other. Further examinations could also focus on the specific experiences of abuse encountered by Jewish transwomen as opposed to Jewish ciswomen, or focus on more than one gender. The analytical framework can be applied to various pairings, in a way that is increasingly popular in the broader field of discrimination and prejudice research. An upcoming project by a group of British scholars aims to examine Jewish and Muslim women's experience of abuse online in order to improve practice in the area of legislation (Bakalis et al. 2023), and a recent report by the Milan-based L'Osservatorio antisemitismo (2023) raises awareness of online insults which blend antisemitism and homophobia. As the intersectionality approach aims to grant all identities express consideration, while still including those already given attention by research or professional practice, it offers exciting new perspectives on approaching and designing studies of hate speech online.

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