The *eSharp* editorial team recognises that this article has caused considerable offence, for which we would like to apologise. *eSharp* welcomes discussion and debate across the full range of topics, even those which are controversial. But along with such debate comes the responsibility for articles to be rigorous, well-balanced, and supported by evidence. This article does not meet those standards of scholarship. In particular, this article employs some discursive strategies, including a biased selection of sources as well as the misrepresentation of data, which promote what some would regard as an unfounded theory regarding the State of Israel and its activity in the United Kingdom.

eSharp is a student-led scholarly journal with the aim of publishing high-quality research produced by post-graduate researchers. eSharp is run entirely by postgraduate researchers from within the University of Glasgow's College of Arts, with a new editorial team being formed each year. Therefore, while we cannot speak for previous editorial boards, the eSharp team affirms that we strive for the highest standards in academic research and publishing. We would also note that, with the support of the staff at the Graduate School of the College of Arts, new checks and balances have been introduced to the *eSharp* editorial protocols since the publication of this article, to provide better assurance that the articles featured in future issues of *eSharp* are of the highest quality.

eSharp exists to provide opportunities for publication of researchers with little or no experience in academic publishing in order to educate those researchers in the publishing process as well as to refine their presentation of their work. Therefore, an additional benefit of publishing in *eSharp* is the pedagogical dynamic between the contributing scholars and the editorial team, by which the journal's editors can offer more gracious and constructive feedback than one might expect to receive from other academic publications. In recognition of this, the *eSharp* team affirms our commitment to the highest standards of academic research, the process of peer-review, and the publication of high-quality articles in our current and future publications.

The *eSharp* team is committed to transparently addressing the concerns raised about this article and to the integrity of the journal. There was considerable discussion among the members of the editorial team and College staff on this matter, but ultimately, with the aim of providing maximum transparency, we have decided not to remove the article from the journal, but to leave it as is with this editorial appended.

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eSharp editorial team
May 2021

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Note: This editorial was amended in September 2021 to address potential ambiguity in wording.

Advocating Occupation:

Outsourcing Zionist Propaganda in the UK

Jane Jackman (University of Exeter)

This essay explores the rise of grassroots Zionist advocacy since 2000, when the second Palestinian intifada (lit: uprising) effectively signalled the failure of the Oslo Peace Process to deliver on its promise of Palestinian self-determination. In response, rather than working to end its military occupation of Palestinian territory, Israel set about attempting to reverse the subsequent sharp decline in its international standing, and revised its global communications strategy. Whilst initially strengthening ties with the Jewish diaspora, Israel's longer-term objective was to conscript and resource a cohort of grassroots Zionist supporters to carry the Israeli narrative into the broader sphere of society. This paper focuses on Israel's strategy as it affects the UK, now widely construed by Zionists as a centre for anti-Semitic activity and therefore a key battleground over discursive hegemony. More specifically, the paper highlights the efforts of two prominent grassroots advocacy organizations to recruit and coach volunteers in the art of Israeli hasbara (lit: explaining). Their mission is to counter the rising tide of pro-Palestinian sympathy in the UK as embodied by Israel's nemesis, the Boycott Divestment & Sanctions (BDS) campaign, the grassroots pro-Palestinian movement that gained momentum from Israel's series of military incursions into Gaza (2008-2009, 2012, 2014). The paper argues that by outsourcing Zionist propaganda to grassroots activists, and exploiting their social networks to circulate biased information, Israel is buttressing from below the British government's customary support for Israel, and perpetuating its inertia over Israeli occupation of land allocated under international law for a future Palestinian state.

Key words: Israel, Palestinian, new anti-Semitism, grassroots advocacy, networks

A half-truth is the worst of all lies
(Solon 550 B.C.)

For Israel's ambassador to the Court of St. James, Mark Regev, 2017 could hardly have begun on a more discordant note. Centenary celebrations marking the Balfour Declaration, the 1917 document legitimizing Zionist immigration to Palestine, had been launched just two months earlier, with the British government endorsing plans for a year of special events. But by the end of 2016, relations between Britain and Israel were in crisis. On the eve of the Jewish feast of Hanukah, two days before Christmas, the UN Security Council had adopted a resolution (2334) condemning Israel's unabated expansion of Jewish settlements on land that international law identifies as Palestinian. Without warning, America had withheld its customary veto of UN censure of Israel, and abstained; Britain, together with the 13 other states on the Council, voted in favour. Worse still (in diplomatic terms) it was discovered that the British Foreign Office had played a leading role in scripting the offending resolution (Sanchez 2016).

Then, with the ink scarcely dry on Resolution 2334, and amid Israeli threats of retaliation, coupled with fear over what might transpire at the Paris Peace Conference in mid-

January, the Qatari based network, *Al Jazeera English* broadcast a four-part series of undercover documentaries entitled The Lobby (*Al Jazeera* 2017). The series was to shatter any illusions about Israel's capacity to influence British democratic processes. Most controversially, the films exposed an Israeli Embassy official in the act of suggesting to a senior civil servant the 'take down' of British politicians, with Deputy Foreign Minister Sir Alan Duncan, a known supporter of Palestinian rights, at the top of the list.

The embassy official was Shai Masot, a former intelligence officer for the Israel Defence Forces (IDF). To Ambassador Regev's further embarrassment, Masot's interlocutor, Maria Strizzolo, a former ministerial aide employed in the Education Department, was filmed agreeing: 'If you look hard enough, I'm sure that there is something that they are trying to hide' (*Al Jazeera* 2017). The scandal mongering attempts of the pair were hard to deny in the face of the filmed evidence.

Further footage showed Masot boasting about his recent success in influencing British government policy over local council boycotts of Israeli goods and services (*Conservative Friends of Israel*). Equally damaging, he was seen mobilizing behind-the-scenes support for Israel through his close involvement with Zionist lobbyists amongst the political elite, and covertly fostering the spread of pro-Israel advocacy groups at the grassroots level of British society.

By the time the films aired, both Masot and Strizzolo had resigned. Ambassador Regev - well known as the Israeli prime minister's spokesman during Israel's 51-day military assault on Gaza in 2014, codenamed *Operation Defensive Edge* – insisted Masot had acted alone and that his behaviour did not reflect Israeli policy. He apologized to Sir Alan personally, and released a photograph of the two shaking hands.

Nevertheless, the documentaries caused outrage on all sides of the Israel-Palestinian debate in Britain. Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn demanded an inquiry on grounds of national security. Conservative MP Crispin Blunt told the *Independent* that Masot's conduct was an 'interference in another country's politics of the murkiest and most discreditable kind' (Merrick 2017). As they and others argued - with good reason - had Russia, Iran or indeed any other state been caught behaving in a like manner, there would have been a thorough investigation.

On the other hand, the Jewish press tended to minimize the importance of the series, scorning them as trivial and out-of-touch with the reality of everyday parliamentary lobbying. Others accused *Al Jazeera* of importing Middle Eastern anti-Semitism to Britain, or berated the deceitfulness of undercover reporting and complained to the communications regulator Ofcom.[1]

However, the furore was short-lived. House of Commons Speaker John Bercow made short shrift of MPs' demands for an inquiry, telling them it would not be 'helpful to discuss it further' (*Middle East Eye* 2017). A public petition collected more than 12,000 signatories demanding an investigation into the embassy's conduct but it too drew a terse response from the Foreign Office. Stressing Britain's strong ties with Israel, the response concluded: 'We consider the matter closed' (UK Government & Parliament 2017).

This paper is less concerned with *why* the British government appears to favour Israel in this way – bilateral trading figures of £4 billion are undoubtedly a factor – as it is with *how*

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[1] At the time of writing the outcome is still pending.

this position is maintained. In light of growing public unrest over Israel's policies towards the Palestinians in the West Bank and in Gaza, this question is particularly imperative. According to the UN, *Operation Defensive Edge* killed more than 2,250 Palestinians, including 1,462 civilians − a third of them children (OCHA 2015). In the UK, as elsewhere in Europe, protestors took to the streets in an attempt to press the government to intervene. One of these protests, in central London, attracted 150,000 marchers (Culzac 2014). In Manchester, there were clashes with police as pro-Palestinian activists demonstrated outside city centre shops selling Israeli products (Cox 2014). In Birmingham, the Stop the War Coalition organized a 2000-strong march demanding an end to the bloodshed (Cartledge 2014). Meanwhile, the Palestine Solidarity Campaign (PSC), a forerunner of BDS, gathered more than 38,000 signatures on an open letter to then prime minister David Cameron, protesting at Israel's 'collective punishment of the Palestinian people' (PSC [Letter] 2014).

Since the role of the media and political elites in promoting support for Israel has already been explored and documented (Mearsheimer & Walt 2007; Oborne & Jones 2009; Philo & Berry 2011), these elements of the public debate are not the focus here. Grassroots advocacy, however, is by its nature diffuse and harder to track, and with the exception of a report sponsored by *Spinwatch* (Mills *et al* 2013) on one of the newest and most sophisticated organizations, few efforts have been made to map its mechanisms or its effects. While one short paper is unlikely to go far in redressing the balance, its author hopes to encourage further research in this field.

The principal contention of this paper is that an Israeli state-sponsored strategy is focused on controlling public opinion in the UK. Israel's objective is to harness the resources of grassroots Zionist supporters in order to buttress from below the British government's traditionally staunch support for Israel and to combat increasing public antipathy to Israel, specifically in its military interventions in Gaza, known colloquially to IDF soldiers as 'mowing the lawn' (Rabbani 2014).

For its conceptual framework, the paper draws on the Foucauldian correlation between knowledge, discourse and power (Foucault 1980). Further, it resonates with the notion that discourse is a contested site of power, and whoever controls the discourse also controls what Teun van Dijk (2008) conceptualizes as 'the public mind', and in turn is able to exercise a level of control over people's actions (Dijk 2008: viii). Dijk claims that such high levels of control equate to an abuse of power that critical discourse scholars have an obligation to expose.

Before proceeding, it should be noted that since 1948 when the Israeli state was founded, scholars have fallen roughly into two camps: one engaged in presenting a carefully managed justification for Israel's occupation of Palestine, the other (after 1967) drawing on revisionist scholarship that continues to challenge the Israeli narrative and its resulting social inequalities. Also, whereas the new anti-Semitism has fomented a great deal of scholarly debate, not least over the conflation of terms such as pro-Israel and pro-Zionist, there is insufficient space here to examine the distinctions. Therefore for the purpose of this essay the terms pro-Israel and pro-Zionist are used interchangeably.

Therefore, in the spirit of critical inquiry, and focusing on pro-Israel advocacy in the UK, the paper provides a brief insight into recent developments in Zionist advocacy in the UK, focusing on the activities of one of the newest and most proactive grassroots organizations, *We Believe in Israel* (WBII). Then, highlighting the expanding network of *Friends of Israel* (FoI)

groups, it touches on the kinds of discourse supporters typically use to promote Israel to the UK public. It concludes that the Israeli narrative of events is being robustly outsourced to grassroots activists for the purpose of circulating Israel's chosen narratives through the Foucauldian 'capillaries' of the social body, through which discourse - and therefore knowledge and power - flows (Foucault 1980: p.96). The aim is to discredit and neutralize pro-Palestinian discourses. In essence this means that British Zionists, both Jewish and non-Jewish, are being mobilized to wage a proxy war for Israel via the digital realm. It may be clichéd to think of it as the Clausewitzian 'war by other means' but that is precisely what it appears to be.

The New Anti-Semitism

In September 2007, British politician Denis MacShane wrote an op-ed for the *Washington Post* in which he warned against a new and virulent form of anti-Semitism; one that he claimed threatened not only Jews and the state of Israel but also 'all of humanity' (MacShane 2007). This new type of prejudice, MacShane declared, had emerged to become an 'officially sanctioned state ideology', which he said was rife in British institutions, and even more pernicious than the racist version of anti-Semitism that infected Europe in the nineteenth century and paved the way for genocide in the twentieth. Moreover, a 'crusade' against Israel had been launched with the avowed intent of eradicating all traces of Jewishness from the Middle East. Unless confronted and contained this crusade would weaken the core values, rights and freedoms of the entire world.

As chair of the newly commissioned All-Party Inquiry into Anti-Semitism, MacShane was reiterating its first findings, published in 2006. Hyperbolic though his language was, he was not speaking alone or without warrant. Whereas the term new anti-Semitism is hardly new - a booklet bearing the title was published in 1921 - rising levels of anti-Semitic incidents across Europe since 2000 were giving the concept of a new manifestation of 'the longest hatred' (Wistrich 1994) greater political traction. With Israel's construal by Zionists as the world's 'collective Jew' (Klug 2003), and the gradual conflation of anti-Zionism with anti-Semitism over the first decade of the twenty-first century, virtually any censure of Israeli policy became open to a racist interpretation; as a result, critics of Israeli policy expose themselves to the possibility, indeed the probability, of being smeared as anti-Semites. As Butler (2004) observes in an essay debating the concept of a new anti-Semitism, fear of stigma has the potential to cause some people to self-silence their views on Israel, whether on policy or conduct, effectively distorting free and open debate (Butler 2004: p.101-127). Others, who refuse to be silenced, including many prominent Jews, risk seeing their characters publicly maligned and their views discredited.

Since the inception of Israel as the Jewish State, successive international governments and institutions have struggled to establish a workable definition of anti-Semitism. The most problematic aspect of defining contemporary anti-Semitism is the conflation of anti-Semitism with anti-Zionism. In 2013, the European agency responsible for protecting fundamental human rights (FRA) cited this difficulty when it abandoned attempts to formulate its own working definition. Nevertheless, in December 2016 - prior to relations with Israel turning sour over Resolution 2334 - UK Prime Minister Theresa May announced that Britain was to become one of the first countries to adopt a similar formulation as put forward by the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (Walker 2016).

This matters for three main reasons. Firstly, the new interpretation of anti-Semitism sets limits on free speech where Israel is concerned, entrenching its current immunity to international censure. Secondly, debates over the new definition distract attention from Israel's treatment of the Palestinians, either as Israeli citizens or under occupation in the West Bank, or under sanctions in Gaza. And thirdly, there is a real danger of the new definition resulting in unintended consequences for Jewish communities, not just in Britain but also around the world. This is because over-zealous use of the charge of anti-Semitism 'radically dilute[s]' it (Butler 2004: p.109-110), making genuine cases of anti-Semitism harder to identify and challenge. By this logic, and contrary to MacShane's warnings, prohibition on criticizing Israel renders Jews more, rather than less, vulnerable to racist abuse.

Pro-Israel Advocacy: A Changing Landscape
During the years leading up to the new formulation of anti-Semitism, Israel's international image had already been in steady decline. This was partly due to the failure of the Oslo Peace Process to deliver on its promises, specifically to the Palestinians. For example, despite Israel agreeing to withdraw from 90% of the occupied Palestinian territories, by 2000 it had only withdrawn from 18% (Mills *et al* 2013: p.24). At the same time, other events were being broadcast around the globe. These included the onset of a second Palestinian *intifada* in September 2000, one that was to last for five years – the first having ended in 1993 with the signing of the Oslo Accords - and secondly, a highly publicized fiasco involving the Israeli delegation at the *World Conference Against Racism* in Durban in 2001. The conference ended in turmoil after the Israeli and their American counterparts staged a walkout in protest of a draft proposal equating Zionism with racism. Despite the offending motion being rejected, the spectacle tarnished Israel's image and served to further polarize debate over its policies, now gaining widespread publicity due to the Palestinian uprising (Swarns 2001).

Meanwhile, rather than fixing the main cause of its unpopularity - the military occupation of territory assigned to the Palestinians under international law - Israeli policy makers blamed 'viral anti-Semitism' together with an ineffectual communications strategy (Schleifer & Snapper 2015). All Israel required, or so they thought, was a radical overhauling of its *hasbara* (lit: explanation), and a more proactive approach to communicating with the international community.

The Institute of Jewish Policy Research (IJPR) had already commissioned a report recommending how best to serve the interests of the Jewish diaspora in Britain, and how to communicate Jewish issues to the wider public. Published in March 2000 the report, A Community of Communities (IJPR 2000), was to become a blueprint for the eventual formation of an Israeli-sponsored network of advocacy groups aimed at combatting perceived attempts to delegitimize the Jewish state overseas. The report recommended the development of a co-ordinated network of key agencies to lead quickly on issues affecting the Jewish community in the UK, feeding information into a network of 'targeted coalitions of Jewish organizations and agencies in order to formulate a strategic response' (IJPR 2000). Basically, the idea was to form a series of interconnected hubs tasked with the coordination and dissemination of facts, not only to political and media elites but also to smaller, satellite groups and then on through grassroots volunteer networks to a wider public - in the Foucauldian analogy, to 'the point where power reaches into the very grain of individuals' (Foucault 1980: p.39).

It was out of this broader initiative that the ad hoc *Cross Community Emergency Co-ordinating Group* (CCECG) emerged in 2002, instigated by then Israeli Ambassador Dror Zeigerman in association with a group of leading UK businessmen. One of the group's first initiatives was to commission top public relations experts Frank Luntz and Stan Greenberg to research public attitudes to Israel in the UK (Mills *et al* 2013). On their advice, the CCECG began sponsoring trips to Israel for British journalists, the first led by then Chief Rabbi Jonathan Sacks. Its information centre was referred to as the war room. A rebuttal desk was set up to combat negative media reports and brief opinion-formers, framing the ties between the UK Jewish community and Israel as more solid than in reality they were.

Having emerged as a contingency measure, the group was soon able to establish a more permanent footing as the Britain Israel Communications and Research Centre (BICOM) whose objective was (and still is) 'to cultivate a policymaking environment in Britain that is favourable to Israel' (Mills *et al*: p.40).

From Israel's perspective, any investment in these efforts - both from the Israeli state and private individuals - was well spent, as subsequent events proved. The infamous Jenin massacre of 2002 was followed in 2003 by the death of a young American activist, Rachel Corrie, who was crushed by an Israeli bulldozer as she resisted house demolitions at Rafah, on the Gaza border. In 2006, Israel's devastating invasion of Lebanon coincided with the publication of former American President Jimmy Carter's book, *Peace Not Apartheid,* for which he was ostracized by much of the American political establishment. The publicity surrounding both events – the tragedy of one, and the furore over the other – attracted public attention to the Palestinian plight and cast doubt on Israel's true intentions in the peace process.

Meanwhile, the so-called separation barrier between Israel and the West Bank, justified on grounds of Palestinian terrorism during the second *intifada,* was taking shape largely on Palestinian land, in defiance of the International Court of Justice (ICJ) opinion in 2004 that it was illegal. Elsewhere, the transnational BDS movement – established in 2005 on the anniversary of the ICJ opinion - was making advances in further galvanizing British public opinion (Hitchcock 2016). The task for Zionist strategists was now one of explaining and justifying Israel's actions, not just to the political and media elites, but also to the public at large.

Outsourcing To The Grassroots

In December 2009 the *Global Forum for Combatting Anti-Semitism,* convened by Israel's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, called for the fight against BDS to be taken to the grassroots of Jewish diaspora host countries (Innovative Minds 2010). The Working Group on Delegitimization, co-chaired by Canadian Professor Gil Troy, listed 12 steps in a five-year plan to combat BDS. The first step is headed Let's Reframe to Name and Shame, while the second is Dig Deep to Undermine. Further steps included engaging bloggers 'to target BDSers and delegitimizers, exposing their tactics', and 'pursuing a strategy of ridicule and satire – especially on the internet' (Innovative Minds 2010). Troy later claimed the document was 'the start of a conversation' and the launch of 'a grassroots movement against a well-organized but ultimately failing and marginalized effort' (*Jerusalem Post* 11 March 2010).

Then in January 2010, a major theme at the *10th Herzliya Conference*, Israel's main policy-making forum, was Winning the Battle of the Narrative. The emphasis was on the same

networking model recommended a decade earlier in the Community of Communities report. Policy advisors presented papers in Herzliya listing ways to outsource political messages via NGOs, academic institutions, and advocacy organizations, as well as ways to coach grassroots activists in the use of digital platforms to 'get the message out'. For example, one Working Paper urged advocates to develop 'an online personality' to create a 'positive resonance' with western audiences, and to use only language that works culturally and politically with them (Michlin 2010). Further emphasis was on strengthening diaspora identity with Israel, and outsourcing its messages to grassroots activists whereby Israel would gain maximum spread of pro-Israel discourse at minimum cost.

A document issued by the Reut Institute, Building a Political Firewall Against Israel's Delegitimization (Reut 2010), set out a detailed strategy of grassroots engagement in the diaspora to mobilize support from the bottom up, as a supplement to Israel's top down pressure on political and business elites (Reut 2010: p.14). It then offered extensive advice on ways to 'delegitimize the delegitimizing networks'.

Besides formulating a coordinated response to events in Israel, the larger hub organizations would be tasked with marshaling background information for feeding to the smaller, satellite groups. These would recruit and train volunteer advocates to disseminate selective messages, using both traditional methods - street stalls, letters to MPs, complaints to the media - as well as digital, with an emphasis on social media networking. The idea was to achieve a united front at the grassroots of British society, based on discourse originating in Israel itself.

The following year (2011), BICOM launched its satellite organization, *We Believe in Israel* (WBII) with the explicit purpose of mobilizing and resourcing an army of loyalists to challenge detractors, promote Israel and defend its actions. Its purpose according to its website is to foster a 'broad-based and inclusive coalition' and to: 'create a fair and balanced political environment for Israel in the UK', as well as to 'broaden active support for Israel beyond existing advocates to include a wide range of Jewish and non-Jewish voices'; and to 'ensure support for Israel is heard in debates whether online, in the traditional media or at public events' (WBII website). By operating largely in the virtual realm as a resource centre and capacity-building network, the WBII brand benefits from the kind of fluidity that is unavailable to the longer-established organizations representing Jews in Britain like *The Board of Deputies,* and the *Zionist Federation*.

Proving that WBII has become a significant force in building Zionist support, the organization staged its second major conference in 2015 under the banner, Winning the Communications Battle for Israel. Opening the event, WBII's director Luke Akehurst told more than 1,000 delegates there were more than 7,500 people on the organization's mailing list, 45% of them non-Jews, and that the support of 450 councillors had been secured in 200 local authorities across the UK (WBII [Online Video] 2015). He warned, 'We're up against a new scale of anti-Israel activity, and at the edges of that activity we're seeing a merging between anti-Zionism and anti-Semitism, a kind of new anti-Semitism dressed up as anti-Zionism'. WBII would equip those willing to counter this movement with the knowledge and skills to become 'allies in the battle for Israel's reputation' (WBII [Online Video] 2015).

Part of the organization's success is due to Akehurst himself. He runs regular pro-Israel workshops for trade unions, church groups, schools, and FoI groups – the kind of groups that

Shai Masot had a covert hand in spreading, and at which a representative of the Israeli Embassy is normally present. In addition, WBII regularly promotes campaigns and petitions on Facebook and Twitter. These include calls for the banning of Hezbollah flags on British streets; an end to British aid 'being used to educate children to hate'; and for government legislation against local council boycotts of Israeli goods and services - the policy issue Shai Masot claimed he influenced (*Al Jazeera* 2017). Supporters are encouraged to write to their MPs as issues arise, for which templates are provided. As a result of these efforts, Akehurst was able to announce in March 2017 that WBII's list of activists had doubled to 15,000 (WBII [website]). These now include 650 local councilors from all parties. It was an important milestone, he said, 'sealing [WBII's] reputation as the UK's fastest growing pro-Israel campaign' (WBII [website]).

Singing From The Same Hymn Sheet
Since the emergence of WBII, small local FoI groups have been springing up in an ad hoc manner across the UK, affiliated to a web of other campaigning groups such as *Stand With Us*, *Christians United for Israel*, and the *Israel-Britain Alliance*. Two of the most active, the *North West* FoI and *Sussex* FoI were launched in 2014, the former in response to boycotts of Israeli goods, the latter responding to clashes outside during the protests against *Operation Defensive Edge*. In Scotland, 12 groups have emerged in the last two years, together forming the *Confederation of Friends of Israel Scotland* (COFIS). Others are planned. Their shared approach is to challenge criticism of Israel both online and in conversation on the streets. Advice on how best to do this, using the most effective discourses, is readily available on the WBII website.

Whilst the various FoI groups are free to establish their own constitutions and act accordingly, their common enemy - according to social media posts - is the BDS movement, which they claim is a broad anti-Semitic alliance comprised of left and right wing extremists in coalition with Islamic fundamentalists (APPIA 2006). The groups are open to all regardless of religious beliefs though some, like the one based in Manchester, attract members from local Jewish communities, whereas others like the *Morecambe Bay* FoI are largely Christian in character. However, they all share the same corporate image and express similar viewpoints, recycling a high proportion of the same information from the same sources in the form of video clips, articles and blogposts. These include messages from Israel's Prime Minister Benyamin Netanyahu, Ambassador Regev, and former Chief Rabbi Sacks, all of whom make claims that distort the pro-Palestinian narrative, or omit it altogether.

Rabbi Sacks demonstrates this well in his voiceover of an animated clip discrediting the BDS movement, posted on the COFIS Facebook page and widely circulated elsewhere. He begins by stating that the BDS campaign is 'dangerously wrong because beneath its surface is an attempt to delegitimize Israel, as a prelude to its elimination' (Sacks [Online Video] 2017). This is problematic in two key ways: firstly in its assumption that to oppose Israeli policy is tantamount to seeking Israel's destruction. Secondly, and equally important, is the normative value with which he, as an authority figure, imbues his assertion. As Butler (2004) argues in a different but related case, such utterances carry weight by virtue of the speakers' status, thereby influencing how their hearers understand issues and potentially 'setting a norm for legitimate interpretation' (Butler 2004: p.108). Moreover, where charges of anti-Semitism are leveled

against critics of Israel, authority figures have the power to 'exercise a chilling effect on political discourse, stoking the fear that to criticize Israel […] is to expose oneself to the charge of anti-Semitism' (Butler 2004: p.102). They affect the conditions of audibility and set limits on what one is willing to say out loud' (Butler 2004: p.127). The omission of alternative narratives and possibilities further serves to foreclose debate (Butler 2004: p.110).

To advance the FoI mission, the Israeli Embassy annually invites representatives of the newest groups to London for a day's advocacy training. In November 2016, there were more than 100 representatives from new groups across the UK, the highest number to date. Besides Ambassador Regev, speakers included Israel's Deputy Foreign Minister, Tzipi Hotovely, and David Collier, a blogger under the banner heading *Beyond the Great Divide*. Given that his posts are frequently recycled and applauded on Facebook and Twitter, he is highly regarded among grassroots Zionist supporters. His writing, however, is peppered with inflammatory language. For example in January 2017 he referred to UNSC Resolution 2334 as '[f]odder for the anti-Israel lynch mob' and the UN itself as 'a rabid Jew-hating forum' (Collier 2017).

Collier's self-appointed mission is to attend and report on pro-Palestinian events and academic conferences. He refers to these as 'hate-fests'. He told his embassy audience in November that 'BDS is an umbrella group under which all Israel haters unite' to 'smear Zionists as bullies and Nazis'. [2] His posts frequently single out prominent supporters of Palestinian rights such as Ilan Pappe and Ghada Karmi to name-and-shame. Overall, Collier's blogposts exemplify the discursive categories typical of an extreme ideological perspective. These include outright denials of Israel's human rights violations beginning with the displacement in 1948 of the indigenous Palestinian population (Pappe 2006); the shifting of blame for the conflict through discourses that claim (for Israel) the right to self-defense, and which imply that Palestinian violence is a random expression of Arab anti-Semitism rather than resistance to decades of dispossession, discrimination and humiliation; dehumanization of Palestinians as a people who routinely sacrifice their children in order to kill Jews; a strong antipathy for anyone supporting Palestinian human rights; and frequent resort to ridicule.

When the *Al Jazeera* documentaries aired, Collier was quick to deride the series, downplaying the seriousness of Israel's tampering with British public opinion, and citing Marcus Dysch, Political Editor at the *Jewish Chronicle*, who on 12 January attacked the series as 'harassment of Jews dressed up as entertainment' (Collier 2017b). Similarly, Collier reproduced the remarks of fellow blogger Jonathan Hoffman, whose piece on the Zionist website *Harry's Place* summed the films as 'voyeurism for anti-Semites' (Collier 2017b).

It would be easy to dismiss such social media exchanges as inconsequential hot air. But propaganda thrives on the repetition of catchy slogans such as these, and the constant exchange and recirculation of misleading information - Collier's comments reappear across a range of social media - arguably spreads and entrenches already strongly held Zionist beliefs, inflaming antagonism towards pro-Palestinian supporters and muting their messages. The possibility of free and fair debate is severely limited.

The dissident journalist Chris Hedges highlights this well when he draws on George Orwell (and Adolf Hitler) to observe that states wielding 'the Big Lie' - as he claims Israel does to maintain its hold on Palestine - do so not just at the expense of the truth, but also of

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[2] Excerpted from notes made by a *Morecambe Bay* FoI attendee, supplied with permission for research purposes.

reality (Hedges 2014). Hedges offers a striking example from his own experience of how language can be made to promulgate the Big Lie. More than once, he writes, whilst reporting from Khan Younis during the bombing of Gaza, he witnessed Israeli soldiers baiting small boys, swearing at them through loudspeakers mounted on armored vehicles; then, when the boys responded by throwing stones at the jeeps, the soldiers opened fire, with devastating results. 'Such incidents, in the Israeli lexicon, become *children caught in crossfire'* (Hedges 2014 (emphasis in original)). Similarly, the carnage following the bombing by F16 jets of 'overcrowded hovels in Gaza city' becomes *'a surgical strike on a bomb-making factory'*; and the demolition of Palestinian homes to create a buffer zone around Gaza becomes *'the demolition of the homes of terrorists'.* Meanwhile, he adds, Israel lays claim to being 'the most moral army in the world' that never attacks civilians (Hedges 2014).

Be that as it may, it is by means of language that binary terms are forced on events, thus disallowing 'the nuances and contradictions that plague the conscience', which is why, Hedges suggests, Israelis and supporters of Israel are able to maintain their cognitive dissonance over the occupation and its consequences. 'And when facts no longer matter', he says, and there is 'no shared history grounded in truth, when people foolishly believe their own lies, there can be no useful exchange of information' (Hedges 2014).

Capitalizing On Celebrity

Finally, in addition to grassroots social media interventions, there are a number of well-known public figures willing to use their celebrity to repeat selective discourses in order to reinforce the Israeli narrative. One such celebrity is the British comedienne Maureen Lipman, who won widespread affection in the 1980s for her portrayal of a Jewish mother in a series of British Telecom advertisements. In 2014 she publicly tore up her Labour Party membership card in protest at the then party leader Ed Miliband's backing of a Commons motion to recognize a future Palestinian state. In a syndicated newspaper interview she railed colourfully at supporters of the motion, characterizing them as 'footling backbenchers in this ludicrous piece of [anti-Israel] propaganda' (Press Association 2014). Many followed her example, deserting Labour in droves (Hodges 2014).

Lipman came to the fore again in February 2017 when the *Israel Britain Alliance* scripted an appeal in protest of the annual Israel Apartheid Week events on university campuses (Lipman [Online Video] 2017). According to Lipman, Apartheid Week 'creates an atmosphere of intimidation and prejudice' that contravenes the 2010 Equality Act under which universities are legally bound to foster good relations between students regardless of nationality, ethnicity or religious beliefs. Universities allowing their premises to be used for Apartheid Week events were failing in their duty of care, specifically to Jewish students.

However, Lipman's script contains a number of half-truths and red herrings. For example, within the first 20 seconds of speaking to the camera, she claims that, 'All people in Israel have equal rights and 1.6 million Arab Israelis have exactly the same rights as 6.8 million Jewish Israelis'. This is only half the truth. While Israel's Declaration of Independence affirmed social and political equality for all its citizens, in reality there are now more than 50 laws discriminating against Palestinians, ranging from legislation barring their return after 1948, to laws restricting land and planning rights. One law bans married couples from living together where one spouse is an Israeli citizen and the other a resident of the occupied territories

(Adalah). Yet Lipman closes her video by demanding (without irony) that 'universities must refuse to allow university property to display false and inflammatory propaganda, including the phrase Israel Apartheid Week'. The video quickly went viral across Zionist social platforms.

At the same time, FoI groups were running a letter-writing campaign to UK university chancellors, urging them to ban the event. One such letter, to the vice-Chancellor of the University of Central Lancashire (UCLAN), was posted on Facebook as an exemplar. Its writer, Nigel Goodrich on behalf of COFIS, decried 'this shameful and discredited hate-fest' and focused, as had Lipman, on the university's legal duty of care for all students regardless of race, nationality or ethnicity. Its core demand appears in bold type: 'To comply with this important duty, universities must refuse to allow university property to display <u>false</u> and <u>inflammatory</u> (emphases in original) propaganda that includes the phrase Israel "Apartheid Week" '. The writer goes on to argue that to allow the event would make the university 'complicit in encouraging racist propaganda' and '[t]he hostile, aggressive and untruthful rhetoric likely to be inflicted upon your students will, in our view, cross the line into hate incidents, hate crimes or even anti-Semitism' (Goodrich 2017).

It took UCLAN just 24 hours to consider the warning and ban Apartheid Week on campus (Doherty 2017). Emboldened by the outcome, campaigners went on to flood other institutions with similar messages. As a result, a number of other universities, including Exeter and Central London, outlawed a number of student demonstrations on campus, including the setting up of mock checkpoints, citing the racist nature of the events and security concerns.

Summary

In 1983, the year before his death, Foucault wrote that his life's work had been 'to create a history of the different modes by which […] human beings are made subjects […] of power' (Dreyfus & Rabinow 1982: p.208-209). His strategy was to seek out the practices and micro-practices that constitute and pervade everyday life and within which knowledge accrues. Despite Foucault's flaws - and there are many - perhaps his greatest legacy was to show how the discourse-knowledge paradigm is intrinsic to what is deemed to be true. Therefore, discourse constitutes an important weapon in the struggle for power.

The issues raised in this paper concern discursive practices aimed at spreading the state of Israel's preferred meta-discourses beyond its own borders as means of gaining hegemony in the public sphere, and power to influence the political and media elite. Grassroots Zionist advocacy organizations have been identified as increasingly vital conduits for selective pro-Israel discourses with the aim of combatting criticism of Israel over the Israeli occupation of Palestinian territory - which Israel disputes - and justifying its treatment of the Palestinians.

This paper has demonstrated the outworking of Israel's policy since 2000 to sponsor and resource the growth of grassroots advocacy in the UK, and to coordinate a hegemonic discourse across a range of social platforms. It has endeavoured to show how Zionist organizations in the UK are engaged in a determined strategy to reinforce from below the British government's long-standing support for Israel, dating back to the Balfour Declaration of 1917.

These contentions are based on three key observations: firstly, that the definition of anti-Semitism has been extended in such a way as to make critics of Israeli policy and

behaviour susceptible to spurious charges of anti-Semitic racism and the stigma to which that charge exposes them.

Secondly, it has been observed that since the start of the Palestinian *intifada* in 2000, and particularly following public demonstrations over Israel's series of military interventions in Gaza, Israeli efforts to strengthen diaspora ties to the Jewish homeland have intensified. The discourse of existential threats to Israel, including regular reminders of the Nazi Holocaust, have further energized efforts to recruit grassroots advocates to discredit pro-Palestinian activists, particularly those promoting boycotts of Israel.

Thirdly, the disconnection between public outrage and UK policy on Israel has never been starker. Notwithstanding the street protests of 2014 - and the raft of official reports condemning Israel's human rights violations - the British government's allegiance to Israel remains staunch. Even the debacle over Resolution 2334 caused no more than a brief pause in the relationship, and the *Al Jazeera* exposé scarcely even that.

In conclusion, it should not be forgotten that the Israel-Palestinian conflict involves complex issues and strongly held beliefs. This paper has merely highlighted one aspect of Britain's part in perpetuating what continues to be an intractable and bloody conflict in the Middle East. As yet, these processes and mechanisms are under-researched but if human rights mean anything at all - and even Rabbi Sacks admits that 'human rights are universal or they are nothing' (Sacks [Online Video] 2017) - they surely demand scrutiny. Equally, the negative consequences for free speech in the UK of applying the concept of a new anti-Semitism have yet to be fully comprehended. To understand these processes more fully, and to expose the hidden power structures underpinning them - as Foucault urged - there is a need for further scholarly attention and empirical studies, not least as prerequisite to a more meaningful international response to ending the conflict. The alternative to such a response is bleak indeed.

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