



**Understanding Perceptions of Contemporary Antisemitism  
among Orthodox Jews in London**

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4 According to the Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW), hate crime has been on the  
5 rise (Home Office, 2017) and antisemitism is no exception (Community Security Trust, 2017),  
6 with Jews being the second most targeted religious group (Home Office, 2018). More  
7 specifically, the Community Security Trust (CST) statistics reveal that it is the Orthodox Jewish  
8 community which faces the highest rate of physical assaults among British Jewry (CST, 2017).  
9 It is their high visibility, high distinctive dress which makes them particularly vulnerable to  
10 attack and hence more likely targets than secular Jews. Unlike secular Jews who are not easily  
11 identifiable as a distinctive group and are more integrated into secular culture, the Orthodox  
12 Jewish community is prime target of antisemitic victimisation and most vulnerable to attack.  
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16 These CST records demonstrate the prevalence of antisemitic victimisation among the  
17 Orthodox Jewish community and yet the perceptions of the Orthodox Jewish community  
18 appear marginalised in the academic literature. Although there is a great deal of research and  
19 investigation into the subject of hate crime, to date, the voices of Orthodox British Jews on  
20 antisemitism have received sparse attention in the scholarly literature. This article adds to  
21 developing literature in considering whether the Orthodox Jewish community's perceptions  
22 are aligned with the evidenced rise in antisemitism. This article is important because it  
23 explores whether the perceptions of antisemitism were accentuated among this prime target  
24 group. This paper will first consider the shift in the manifestation of antisemitism which has  
25 been noted by Orthodox Jews and second it will consider the various contributory factors  
26 which influenced the framing of those varied perceptions. It should be noted that this article  
27 only focuses on the perceptions of the respondents and does not set out to evidence the rise  
28 in antisemitism nor seeks to present their perceptions as an uncontested reality.  
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33 The data were gathered at a time where antisemitism occupied a prominent place in the  
34 media. Records of antisemitic incidents in the UK have reached an all-time high in the past  
35 3-5 years. The Community Security Trust (CST), a charitable organisation that represents and  
36 advises the Jewish community on matters of antisemitism, security, and terrorism, has  
37 recorded the highest level of reported antisemitic crimes since statistics were first assembled.  
38 The previous UK Chief Rabbi, Sir Jonathan Sacks, warned of a 'tsunami of antisemitism'  
39 sweeping the world (Hastings, 2015). The Chief Rabbi, Rabbi Mirvis, in oral evidence given on  
40 the 14th July 2016 to the Home Affairs Committee, in preparation of the 2016-2017 report on  
41 antisemitism, echoed that overall, British Jews are happy to be living in the UK. But that within  
42 this context, the problem of antisemitism, which used to be smaller, is now getting bigger.  
43 'And it could get bigger and bigger, unless we deal with it effectively' (Home Affairs  
44 Committee, 2016, Q397). It is against this backdrop of a resurgence of antisemitism (CST,  
45 2017), and the increased risk of victimisation, that conducting research about their  
46 perceptions is of tangible significance.  
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## 50 51 **Research on Perceptions**

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54 Although there is a great deal of research into the subject of hate crime (including the  
55 Leicester Hate Crime Project by Chakraborti et al., 2014 and the Sussex Hate Crime Project by  
56 Brown et al., 2016), very few academic studies focus on antisemitism within the UK from a  
57 qualitative perspective. There are some quantitative studies, which investigated perceptions  
58 of antisemitism. The European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA, 2013) explored  
59 perceptions and experiences of antisemitism within the EU, and The Institute of Jewish Policy  
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3 Research (JPR) surveyed perceptions and experiences of antisemitism with the UK (JPR, 2014).  
4 Both studies have explored this topic from a quantitative perspective. A third and unique  
5 piece of literature is the study of Sweiry (2014), which explored perceptions and experiences  
6 of antisemitism within the UK from a qualitative perspective. This section will reveal the gaps  
7 which exist within the literature from a qualitative perspective and will highlight the  
8 contribution of the present study to this topic.  
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12 Using online surveys to explore perceptions of antisemitism within the UK, The Institute of  
13 Jewish Policy Research (JPR, 2014) demonstrated that respondents were virtually equally  
14 divided in whether they perceive antisemitism to be an issue in the UK. 48% of respondents  
15 maintained that antisemitism is 'a very big problem' (11%) or 'a fairly big problem' (37%)  
16 whereas 52% felt that it is 'not a very big problem' (47%) or not a problem at all (5%). They  
17 reported that 'there are other social and economic problems which are regarded as more  
18 problematic than antisemitism by a large proportion of respondents' (JPR, p.14).  
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22 Nevertheless, when these data were compared with seven other EU Member States, the  
23 perceptions of British Jews were put towards the bottom end of the scale in terms of  
24 seriousness (FRA, 2013). On the whole, the survey indicates that, in comparison to other  
25 Western European countries, the level of antisemitism in the UK is considerably lower and  
26 that consequently the level of anxiety is much lower among British Jewry (FRA, 2013). Apart  
27 from the UK and Latvia, antisemitism was perceived to be 'a very big' or 'a fairly big problem'  
28 in all other European Union member states (FRA, 2013, p.15). Assessing the level of fear of  
29 attack was integral to this study. The levels of worry that a physical attack would take place  
30 in the 12 months which followed, varied significantly. Whilst 60% of respondents in France  
31 feared an antisemitic attack, only 17% of respondents in the UK felt the same (FRA, 2013,  
32 p.32). Therefore, the FRA survey (2013) demonstrated that in 2013 Britain was considered  
33 more of an accepting and tolerant environment for Jews than certain other parts of Europe.  
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38 Levels of antisemitism in the US were also considered as a problem in a recent American  
39 Jewish Committee (American Jewish Committee, 2020) Survey which found that "nearly nine  
40 in ten American Jews (88%) believe antisemitism in the U.S. today is a very serious (37%) or  
41 somewhat of a (51%) problem..." and "Looking back over the past five years, more than four  
42 out of every five Jewish respondents (82%) say antisemitism has increased during that period"  
43 (American Justice Committee, 2020).  
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### 47 *Limitations of the quantitative research on perceptions*

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50 The aforementioned FRA survey's findings (2013) showed some discrepancies by UK  
51 respondents. Most noticeably, the survey results revealed that the level of worry of becoming  
52 a victim of an antisemitic incident is higher than the actual experience among the respondents  
53 (28% of UK respondents were worried about becoming victims of antisemitism whereas only  
54 17% of respondents had been victimised).  
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58 This disparity between high levels of fear and downward trends in crime has been well  
59 researched (Hough, 2017). Fear of crime has historically been out of proportion to levels of  
60 crime (Hough, 2017). Research on fear of crime reflects that there are instances whereby

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3 individuals fear crime even though they had not been victims of crime (Prieto and Bishop,  
4 2016a). Prieto and Bishop (2016b) highlight that the majority of the population does not  
5 suffer any crime and yet that the fear of crime is more common than crime itself. Studies have  
6 also shown that fear of crime is most prevalent among women (Ferraro, 1995), the elderly  
7 (Fitzgerald, 2008) and the poor (Pantazis, 2000). Even though women report higher levels of  
8 fear than men, a closer examination of the relationship between gender and fear of crime  
9 reveals that this variation in gender could be due to a socialisation process whereby 'women  
10 are more prone to report their fears, while men are taught to suppress their fear of crime'  
11 (Cops et al., 2011, p.60). In the process of being socialised, or what it known as 'doing gender',  
12 men and women may respond in accordance with their expected roles (Sutton and Farrall,  
13 2009). Fear of crime is therefore based on complex social dynamics which is not dependent  
14 on being victimised (Rountree, 2016).  
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19 The variation of the FRA survey's findings (2013) between levels of worry and becoming a  
20 victim of crime, was not followed up with respondents and the discrepancy remained unclear  
21 until a recent survey was conducted by Staetsky (2017) which attempted to resolve the  
22 dissonance between the relatively low levels of antisemitism with the high levels of anxiety.  
23 This survey, which encapsulated 5,466 observations (on-line and face-to-face), found that  
24 approximately 2% of British population can be categorised as 'hard-core' antisemites  
25 (Staetsky, 2017, p.16). Staetsky (2017) posits that 30% of the British population hold at least  
26 one antisemitic attitude, at varying degrees of intensity (Staetsky, 2017, p.24). Staetsky  
27 explains that:  
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30 This does not mean that 30% of the population in Great Britain is antisemitic.  
31 A majority of people who agreed with just one negative statement about Jews  
32 in this survey also agreed with one or more positive statements about Jews,  
33 suggesting that the existence of one antisemitic or stereotypical belief in a  
34 person's thinking need not indicate a broader, deeper prejudice towards Jews.  
35 Rather, the 30% figure captures the current level of the diffusion of antisemitic  
36 ideas in British society, and offers an indication of the likelihood of British Jews  
37 encountering such ideas. (Staetsky, 2017, p.4)  
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41 If British Jews are likely to encounter someone who expresses an antisemitic attitude fairly  
42 frequently (even though they may not necessarily be antisemitic), it would erode feelings of  
43 security and may result in British Jews feeling anxious about their identity. This goes some  
44 way in explaining the dissonance between the level of worry of becoming a victim and the  
45 number of those actually victimised. For instance, overhearing antisemitic stereotyping will  
46 have the effect of increasing anxiety levels, but these often do not amount to an offence. This  
47 demonstrates the frequency which British Jews are likely to encounter someone who  
48 expresses an antisemitic attitude and therefore goes some way towards explaining the reason  
49 British Jews may feel anxious.  
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53 The qualitative research of Sweiry (2014) is perhaps more instructive in that it explored the  
54 experiences and responses of 50 Jews across Britain using in-depth interviews. The sample  
55 used was diverse, accessing Jews all across Britain from differing religious, social, geographic,  
56 gender and political lines. The findings show that antisemitism and its impacts were  
57 significantly dissimilar for different Jews across Britain. The effects of victimisation, despite  
58 the high prevalence rate, were less pronounced for religious Jews than the impact felt by the  
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3 more secular respondents. The latter group, perceived themselves to be fully integrated into  
4 British society and therefore felt excluded and shunned from mainstream British society when  
5 victimised.  
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### 8 *Research on Perceptions of Orthodox Jews*

9 This study focused solely on Orthodox Jews. Orthodox Jewish individuals are considered at  
10 highest risk of attack due to their visibility. When considering the research of Orthodox Jews  
11 on antisemitism, the quantitative studies referred to above reveal that 'British Orthodox Jews  
12 are measurably more anxious about, and susceptible to antisemitic incidents, than non-  
13 Orthodox British Jews' (JPR, 2014, pp.28-29). It showed that 'over half of all Orthodox Jews in  
14 Britain are worried about becoming a victim of an antisemitic act, and that they are more than  
15 twice as likely as non-Orthodox Jews to have experienced antisemitic harassment or  
16 discrimination' (JPR, 2014, pp.28-29). The survey results revealed that nearly two-thirds of  
17 Orthodox Jews believe antisemitism to be a problem in the UK, compared with less than half  
18 of non-Orthodox Jews. Therefore, this study showed that the Orthodox Jews were most  
19 worried of future victimisation whilst 'those respondents who expressed low religiosity were  
20 least worried' (FRA 2013, p.33).  
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25 The sample in the JPR (2014) study is problematic. The authors sought to illustrate that there  
26 is a disparity in perceptions between the Orthodox and the non-Orthodox. However, only 4%  
27 of the respondents belong to a synagogue (this being one of the main prerequisites of being  
28 considered to be 'Orthodox') and yet 16% of the sample described themselves as 'Orthodox'  
29 despite the lack of synagogue membership (JPR, 2014, p.10). This discrepancy between  
30 synagogue membership and self-description, between the way people describe themselves  
31 and the way they behave, is noted in various US Jewish community studies (Aronson et al.,  
32 2015, 2019). Studies revealed that some Jews would describe themselves as affiliated Jews,  
33 who attend synagogues, but do not feel strong emotional ties to the Jewish world. These  
34 studies reveal that the way in which some contemporary Jews engage with their Jewish  
35 identities vary. Nonetheless, further research reveals that synagogue affiliation is 'a  
36 consistent indicator of Jewish belonging – a measure of proactive attachment and  
37 commitment to Jewish communal life'...and 'continues to be the principal arena of formal  
38 affiliation to the Jewish community' (Graham and Vulkhan, 2010, p.5). Jewish practice may  
39 vary worldwide, but within my sample in London, Orthodox Jews would belong to a  
40 synagogue. Therefore, the extent to which this JPR (2014) data are characteristic of the  
41 Orthodox Jewish community cannot be established with conviction.  
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47 Indeed, the findings in my study differs from this deduction and show that a high level of  
48 religiosity does not correlate with a level of fear of future victimisation. Sweiry's research  
49 (2014) also contradicted this deduction. Sweiry (2014) observed that despite higher  
50 frequency of incidents within the Orthodox Jewish community, the harmful impacts which  
51 was described by the less observant, was not reflected amongst the Orthodox respondents.  
52 Whilst secular respondents expressed fear, anxiety, anger and despair, being victimised did  
53 not present the same challenges to the Orthodox respondents, which Sweiry (2014)  
54 attributed to their strong minority identity. This research is in line with studies which have  
55 shown that religious involvement can reduce fear of crime (Matthews et.al., 2011). Research  
56 has shown that being religious, is a blanket, a safety net which can dampen anxiety levels.  
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3 While Sweiry's research (2014) is unique in its kind, world-wide events since the collection of  
4 data may have altered those perceptions. My research was compiled over a limited period of  
5 time and the data were homogenous in exploring the connection between perceptions and  
6 its overall global context. Moreover, the present study will take the current research a step  
7 further as it will test the perceptions of the Orthodox Jewish community exclusively.  
8 Moreover, the theoretical perspective adopted in my study, is not limited to personal  
9 perceptions, but also takes account of the structures around it (by structures I mean hearing  
10 from councillors, police officers, Rabbis and neighbourhood-watch volunteers).  
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14 The quantitative studies explored perceptions within specific EU member states and the  
15 qualitative study explored perceptions across Britain, but none have focused specifically on  
16 London nor exclusively on the Orthodox Jewish community. London today is more diverse  
17 than ever before. It is known for its cosmopolitan nature and the fact that it embraces a wide  
18 range of various cultures, races, religions and lifestyles. Therefore, it sets the context for  
19 exploring the hate crime experienced by one of its minority groups.  
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23 In summary, whilst there is vast amount of research on antisemitism, there is very little  
24 empirical research specifically on the way victims of antisemitism perceive the phenomenon.  
25 Other than this one meaningful qualitative study, it is largely absent from academic debates  
26 and analysis. Whilst the quantitative research is useful in informing my research, it tells us  
27 little about the personal and communal meanings that are attached to antisemitism.  
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## 30 **Methodology**

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33 This research is of an interpretative qualitative nature. A qualitative approach was adopted  
34 to gain a deeper understanding of participants' perceptions. Morrow (2000) notes that  
35 qualitative techniques are the 'most useful approach to understanding the meanings people  
36 make of their experiences' and 'delve into complex processes and illustrate the multifaceted  
37 nature of human phenomena'. Adopting qualitative research methods gives depth as to the  
38 personal and social meanings of antisemitism and the way victims observe and reflect on this  
39 phenomenon in their day-to-day lives. Conducting quantitative research, particularly in  
40 circumstances such as this research, where the sample is a 'hard to reach' group, would not  
41 give due insight to the complex issues behind this sensitive phenomenon. A qualitative  
42 approach was best served to explore this process.  
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46 This research employed two methods of data collection; semi-structured in-depth interviews  
47 and focus groups. To ensure transparency and rigour these research methods were combined  
48 (Lambert et al., 2008). Combining these two research methods contributed to the exploration  
49 of individual accounts (interviews) within contextual circumstances surrounding the  
50 phenomenon (focus groups). Hence, the focus groups were used to complement the  
51 interviews so as to gather richer data and expand the scope of the study, allowing the  
52 personal dimensions to be illuminated about the nature and impact of antisemitism to both  
53 the individuals as well as the community. In total, 28 interviews and 5 focus groups were  
54 carried out. Interviews were conducted with both genders from varying marital and different  
55 professional status. Focus groups were conducted with a range of local key stakeholders,  
56 voluntary neighbourhood-watch organisations and the police. Focus Group size ranged  
57 between 3-8 participants and were conducted in the charity or organisations' place of work  
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(Appendix 1: Focus Group Schedule). The collection of the data was research specific as it took place in two highly important locals in North London; these being the two most concentrated neighbourhoods where Orthodox Jews reside. Nvivo was used as a data management system allowing the research to remain transparent and rigorous and the data were analysed using qualitative thematic analysis (developed by Braun and Clark, 2006).

## Findings

The first theme which this article will explore the respondent's reflections and beliefs about the scale and significance of antisemitism. The data revealed that perceptions were uniform in that all participants felt that antisemitism was a reality in Britain. However, the extent of antisemitism and its expression were perceived and observed in a multitude of ways. Some participants felt secure and observed that antisemitism is not effecting them in their day-to-day lives. Other respondents felt that the status quo of antisemitism has not changed, whereas others held a more pronounced belief that antisemitism has become a serious issue in the lives of Orthodox Jews, and therefore emigration must be considered. But by far the largest group, which consisted of more than half of respondents, belong to the middle group which considered that there has not been a resurgence, but that there has been a shift in the expression of antisemitism. They regarded antisemitism to be a constant but that it has become more overt in its expression, particularly within four spheres; the Labour party, the media; university campus and the type of violence victims face. The first section of the findings will therefore focus on where this particular group felt that antisemitism has changed and the four key spheres which they regard for antisemitism to have become more blatant. In this article I will focus on this dominant narrative.

The second theme that this article will discuss, are the factors which contribute to these perceptions and which helped them gauge the scale and extent of antisemitism. This article will reveal that antisemitic incidents which interviewees were personally subjected to were not the main contributory factor to forming particular perceptions. There were several underpinning factors which influenced their perceptions in assessing antisemitism. However, I will only refer to two of the contributory factors of historical and religious context, as they were the ones which featured the most during the interviews. These contributory factors highlight that perceptions of the extent of antisemitism cannot be seen in a vacuum, but rather take account of a myriad of factors; linked to the context.

For the purposes of this analysis, the word 'perceptions' was defined as the respondents' views or understanding of antisemitism. The definition is based on the respondents' reflection on the phenomenon. The perceptions expressed herein by individuals as well as participants from focus groups, will assist in elucidating whether the Orthodox Jewish community is cognisant of the resurgence of antisemitism, whether anxiety levels are rising among the community and whether the time has come to reconsider whether life as a Jew in Britain is a wise choice.

### *Key Sites of Emergence of Contemporary Antisemitism*

Most respondents were of the view that antisemitism is not on the rise, but that there has been a shift in its expression, and that antisemitism has become more blatant. One interview

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3 respondent described antisemitism as a constant, as an inevitable phenomenon. She stated  
4 that 'it's not a question of rise, because I believe there has always been antisemitism. It's a  
5 phenomenon like the sun shines in the day and moon by night'. However, she described it  
6 changing its texture and becoming more open. She felt that this '*carte blanche*' to express  
7 antisemitic sentiments has extended to politicians. Another respondent commented: 'I don't  
8 think there is a rise. I think there is a rise in overt...I've lived with it all my life. It's not a surprise  
9 to me. It has just changed'. Another agreed with this perception that antisemitic prejudices  
10 are now more freely expressed. Boundaries which have previously not been traversed, are  
11 now being crossed.  
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15 Some respondents were cognisant of there being an oscillation between freedom of speech  
16 and expressions of hate. Freedom of speech can come under the guise of social justice. But  
17 when freedom of speech is abused it can become incriminatory. 'The overwhelming focus...is  
18 on the balancing of freedom of speech with other rights explicitly framed within a human  
19 rights perspective' (Chakraborti and Garland, 2014, p.158). There is a balancing of competing  
20 rights and interests.  
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24 Many respondents were of the view that certain spheres of insecurity have emerged.  
25 Respondents were aware that antisemitism has become more overt and blatant, particularly  
26 within four spheres: the media, the Labour party, on university campus and the type of  
27 perpetrators and violence Jews face. The spheres are inextricably linked and need to be read  
28 as a whole.  
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32 For the respondents, these blatant expressions of antisemitism within these spheres are  
33 insidious attempts to reinforce the pre-existing antisemitic sentiments. These were spheres  
34 that respondents felt were places that antisemitic rhetoric has become more overt and has  
35 the capacity to disseminate widely. It ought to be accentuated at this juncture that this study  
36 did not attempt to test the rise of antisemitism within these spheres, but aimed to recount  
37 the respondents' perceptions, be it right or misguided. This study is about the way that the  
38 Orthodox Jewish community perceived levels of antisemitism. I will now turn to discuss each  
39 in turn.  
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### 43 *Media*

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45 At the time of data collection, antisemitism was ripe within the media. Social media has  
46 increasingly become a platform for antisemitic rhetoric. This widespread increased expression  
47 of antisemitism within the media, was a dominant feature within the data, with reference to  
48 the disproportionate focus on Israel in some of the media (Gidley, 2014). Over the past four  
49 years, antisemitic rhetoric has intensified to an even greater extent in the media. The analysis  
50 was saturated with reference to both the discourse of antisemitism within the media and the  
51 Labour party. This is consistent with the JPR survey (2014), which highlighted that Jews in  
52 Britain today believe antisemitism in the media to be one of the most problematic forms  
53 (p.36). CST recorded 163 antisemitic incidents that took place on social media, comprising  
54 22% of the total of 727 incidents recorded during the first half of 2018 (CST, 2018a). In some  
55 of these recorded incidents, 'social media has been used as a tool for coordinated campaigns  
56 of antisemitic harassment, threats and abuse directed at Jewish public figures and other  
57 individuals' (CST, 2018a, p.3). Targeted social media campaigns may, at times, involve  
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3 hundreds or thousands of tweets and images, usually on neo-Nazi websites, the CST would  
4 record it as a single incident, even though it would include hundreds of posts.  
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7 'The antisemitism of the past, I'm not saying it disappeared, but if you are looking at the  
8 resurgence of antisemitism, the vast majority of it is on social media' (Male interviewee).  
9 Another respondents stated:

10 Certainly, the disturbing parts that antisemitic sentiments have become far  
11 more open in the media which is ordinarily worrying...When a thing becomes  
12 more open, it becomes more dangerous. So, I am personally very unquiet about  
13 it. And that's the media and that's the UK as a whole. (Female interviewee, in  
14 her 70s)  
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18 Another respondent stated:

19 There is a change in antisemitism by the media which never was. Growing up  
20 there was graffiti, insults, but now mainstream media, articles in the *Times*,  
21 show that they are much more comfortable to talk about Jewish stereotypes.  
22 There is more intellectual antisemitism. (Focus group male Rabbi, in his 50s)  
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25 The focus group of superintendents also supported the contention that antisemitism is most  
26 widespread within social media. One stated:

27 And I will tell you the reason for it. The traditional antisemitism has always  
28 been and will always be in the background and will effect certain religious  
29 communities more than others. The knocking off the hats, physical assaults,  
30 all of that has always gone on and will always go on. From my perspective, it  
31 has increased because of the increase in antisemitism that has spilt from social  
32 media, that that in turn increases the traditional form of antisemitism. (Focus  
33 group male superintendent, in his 40s)  
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37 Despite these respondents not experiencing any antisemitic incidents personally, the  
38 heightened anxiety levels caused by media discourse is apparent herein. This is in line with  
39 the research of Haavisto and Petersson (2013), which highlights that although respondents'  
40 attitudes may not alter as a result of the media, if a particular way of thinking or perspective  
41 is repeated tirelessly from various sources, it may affect respondents' self-image and  
42 understanding of the world.  
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## 45 46 *Labour Party*

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49 The other and linked sphere, which was consistently referred to as there being a noticeable  
50 shift, was within the Labour party. The Labour party has been the main source of recent  
51 allegations of antisemitism associated with political parties and has dominated the national  
52 headlines since Mr Corbyn's election as leader of the Labour party.  
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55 The data show the concern which respondents have in the levels of antisemitism present  
56 within the Labour party. One respondent, who has been living in this country since she was  
57 transported from Nazi Germany as a child, is concerned that antisemitism has shifted from  
58 being instigated by some drunken person, to it being expressed perpetually by Mr Corbyn,  
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3 who is in a position of leadership. Another male interviewee agreed that antisemitism has  
4 always been in existence but that it is 'starting to rear its head, especially with Corbyn and his  
5 gang'. A female interviewee, who felt that although there has always been antisemitism, was  
6 particularly upset that a political establishment, which is expected to uphold social values,  
7 demonstrates these levels of antisemitic rhetoric. A focus group female police officer agreed  
8 that the main threat was from the Labour party: 'But I find it much more insidious when  
9 you've got establishments doing it... that's what's dangerous'. Her perception was that the  
10 main threat was from the Labour party.  
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14 The concern expressed by respondents of the possibility of Mr. Corbyn becoming prime  
15 minister, was a reoccurring theme. 'I think I would feel threatened (if Jeremy Corbyn was  
16 elected as leader), I don't think it's rational though' (Female interviewee). Another expressed:  
17 If Corbyn would get in, I would feel so uncomfortable that I would pick myself  
18 up, leave this country and encourage other people to go. I would just be too  
19 afraid. (Female interviewee, in her 70s)  
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23 The timing of this research is apt. It is apparent that the way Orthodox Jews perceive the  
24 government has radically transformed in only four years. In 2014, the research of Sweiry  
25 found that the 'government provided support rather than presented a threat to Jews' (Sweiry,  
26 2014, p.258). Moreover, the JPR (2014) recounted that politics was seen as less of a problem  
27 – 65% considered it not to be a very big problem or not a problem at all (JPR, 2014, p.14). The  
28 timing of this research must be considered, as this study was conducted whilst the  
29 Conservative party was the governing party, but with respondents being concerned about the  
30 possibility of Mr. Corbyn, being elected in the 2022 election (or possibly sooner) as Prime  
31 Minister.  
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35 It was clear from this sample that anti-Jewish rhetoric within the Labour party played a  
36 significant role in framing perceptions of antisemitism. Respondents were conscious that the  
37 main shift in expression of antisemitism is apparent within the media as well as the Labour  
38 party, or in other words, that these two spaces have been increasingly accepted as well as  
39 used as platforms for antisemitic rhetoric.  
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43 The perception of there being a shift in antisemitism manifesting itself in the media as well as  
44 the Labour party cannot be taken lightly. For as long as respondents felt that antisemitism  
45 was confined to low level criminality experienced during the day-to-day-lives, that can be  
46 managed. Now it is perceived that the volume has increased as it has become more  
47 institutionalised and stemming from the middle class.  
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### 50 *University Campus*

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52 Antisemitic discourse on campus was another sphere where respondents felt that there has  
53 been a shift in the levels of antisemitism. The Chief Rabbi has highlighted his concerns about  
54 the rising of antisemitic expression within campus and expressed specific concerns about the  
55 situation faced by Jewish students (Home Affairs Committee, 2016, Q401). The CST showed a  
56 doubling of reporting incidents involving Jewish students and academics, with 41 incidents in  
57 2016, compared with 21 the year before (CST, 2016). NUS survey findings report a similar  
58 pattern evident in their recorded incidents against Jewish students. Jewish students had the  
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3 highest incident rate of targeting, among other religious groups, with 21% of students  
4 reporting being victimised (NUS, 2012).  
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7 A councillor in Barnet had expressed this noticeable shift in the expression of antisemitism:

8 The kids on campus, this is anti-Israel, BDS, the environment for them on  
9 campus is much more threatening than it ever was. The amount of work the  
10 Chaplains have to do, being involved in BDS debate, for which they have won,  
11 Daniel Hochauser in UCL... So, I think the students on campus feel under siege.  
12 (Focus group male participant, in her 60s)  
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16 A male interviewee accented his feelings of isolation on campus:

17 A lot of the Jews in my uni have just graduated. It's pretty thin now. I have now  
18 made friends with a few Christians and atheists. And a few Muslims. It's all  
19 well and good but the overall feeling is that I am still incredibly isolated, no  
20 matter how many more I make. Because at the end of the day, if it hits the fan,  
21 are they going to stick up for me? (Male interviewee, in her 20s)  
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24 These concerned views are consistent with the Universities UK report, which found that 26%  
25 of Jews in further or higher education were either fairly worried or very worried about being  
26 subjected to victimisation as a result of their religion (Universities UK, 2016, p.27). If we only  
27 look back four years, predominant studies on antisemitism did not place any emphasis on  
28 antisemitism on campus (JPR, 2014; Sweiry, 2014). The timing of this research is also pertinent  
29 because all these data were collected at a time that the Conservative party's agenda was on  
30 diversity, preventing discrimination and there being freedom of expression in higher  
31 education. This was the political context at the time of collecting the data. Yet, antisemitism  
32 manifesting itself on campus remained evident within my data.  
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36 Antisemitism used to be confined to street level, the throwing of eggs, the swearing, but is  
37 now manifesting itself within higher education. Lady Deech cautioned of antisemitism  
38 spreading in universities to the *Guardian* reporter: 'In the 1920s and 1930s discrimination  
39 against Jews started in German, Austrian and Polish universities, long before the Second  
40 World War,' Lady Deech said. 'Attacks on Jewish students in universities today should be seen  
41 as the canary in the coalmine. It starts there and it spreads' (The Guardian, 2017).  
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### 45 *Type of perpetrator and type of violence*

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47 The final sphere where there has been a shift in antisemitism, which is linked to the previous  
48 spheres, concern the type of perpetrators as well as the type of violence which Jews may be  
49 face. In discussing the shift in perception of who the perpetrators are, a male focus group  
50 Rabbi stated that the increase in levels of security is not a fear of 'council estate' white lower-  
51 class individuals, 'it is for something far more sinister than 35 years ago'. A male interviewee  
52 agreed and said antisemitism demonstrated by street culture, is on the decline but that  
53 institutional antisemitism, 'from the higher world, from academics and higher society' is on  
54 the rise and is 'more powerful'. Another interviewee who echoed these thoughts said: 'you  
55 see in universities, in BDS, in the Labour party, all this Anti-Israel activity... It's on a more  
56 intellectual level, rather than played out in the street' (female interviewee). These remarks  
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3 highlight that respondents believe that it is not low-level antisemitism which is on the rise,  
4 but the more powerful institutional antisemitism which is on the rise.  
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7 Respondents also indicated that there is a shift in the type of violence that Jews may now  
8 face. A focus group Rabbi reported: 'People are scared of being knifed on the street. There is  
9 a step up in violence in general... what used to be insults is now knife attacks'. Respondents  
10 commented on there being a shift in wide spread rallies and demonstrations. A focus group  
11 male participant said that only a few years ago, there would have been no rallies directed  
12 against Jews in NW London. 'I don't remember we ever heard or dreamt of such a thing'. A  
13 female interviewee said it would have been unthinkable some years ago to have these overt  
14 antisemitic demonstrations.  
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18 It is apparent that its perceptions of antisemitism reveal that new sites of antisemitism have  
19 emerged. Participants expressed that antisemitism has become more overt. That whilst  
20 antisemitism used to be confined to a punch or a spit, it has now shifted to expressions of  
21 hostility in the media, within the Labour party, on campus as well the type of perpetrator and  
22 violence which one may face.  
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### 25 *Contributory factors to respondents' perceptions*

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28 The second section of this article will examine two of the seven factors which influenced the  
29 framing of those varied perceptions. The factors which allowed respondents to gauge the  
30 extent of antisemitism were the historical and religious context, the traditional antisemitism  
31 versus the 'new antisemitism', measuring antisemitism in the UK against other places, an  
32 awareness that levels of security have been heightened, support received from by-standers  
33 and finally experiencing antisemitic incidents personally. These various factors highlight that  
34 measuring the extent of antisemitism is a complex and multifaceted issue, but they go some  
35 way in explaining the reason many respondents felt that antisemitism as a constant and an  
36 inevitable phenomenon. For the purposes of this article, I chose to focus on the two  
37 contributory factors which featured most frequently; historical and religious context.  
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### 41 *Historical context*

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44 The Holocaust has been an unprecedented event in human history and holds a deep imprint  
45 in the memory of Jews. It forms a central part in the upbringing of a Jewish child and in  
46 forming the identity of the Jew (Sagi, 2010). In the JPR survey (2014) 20 available choices were  
47 given to respondents in assessing their Jewish identity. 'Remembering the Holocaust' was  
48 ranked second (p.13). In a study of American Jews (Pew Research Center, 2016), ranking first,  
49 were the 73% of those surveyed who stated that remembering the Holocaust is an essential  
50 part of what it means to be Jewish (Pew Research Centre, 2016, p.62) .  
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54 When assessing their own perceptions on antisemitism, a key influence for interviewees was  
55 their perception of the Holocaust. Interviewees interpreted current antisemitism against the  
56 backdrop of the Holocaust and repeatedly made reference to the Holocaust in assessing  
57 contemporary antisemitism. The frequent referencing to the Holocaust, in measuring levels  
58 of contemporary antisemitism, was also noted by Sweiry (2014).  
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The Holocaust has a particular Jewish significance: Jews were murdered because of their Jewishness. Interviewees, in their responses, expressed an awareness and a sensitivity of future victimisation. The Holocaust was not a historical phase in the distant past. It was not something that people delved into only in books. It was personal and real, either because they were children of the Holocaust or because they were the second or third generation of those in the Holocaust.

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The attempt to exterminate European Jewry is not far removed from them and therefore those participants will have different experiences of antisemitism at the time of the research. By way of example, one female interviewee, who was a child survivor of the Holocaust stated: 'I am part of the Holocaust...and to my horror, I see that antisemitism is alive and well', 'I think there is always a sense of fear, given that we all carry personal story, personal stories of persecution; being victims of antisemitism'. She continued: 'I have felt unsafe just because of our history and being Jewish...and to some extent, we have all experienced it on some very small scale'. The reference to 'very small scale' is an example of the atrocities of the Holocaust used as a measurement of contemporary antisemitism:

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I have a lot of baggage...the whole Holocaust business was in my mother's family. When I was 10, and I got asked in school, I told them my grandparents were gassed in the war. And she jumped up. It's always been very close to me and I don't see a way out. (Female interviewee, in her 60s)

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Many participants normalised the abuse within the historical backdrops. The historical roots of endless persecutions against the Jews spanning over hundreds of years appeared to reinforce the conception within the interviewees that some level of antisemitism was unavoidable. 'It's always been there, it's been around for thousands of years, it's not going to go away' (male interviewee), 'I know that there is a history of antisemitism within the world. It's an issue, it's a recurring issue that will never go away' (male interviewee). Another echoed these thoughts:

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Antisemitism started 'since then'. And it's never going to stop... They've come around since the Holocaust and they have to behave themselves. But deep down, nothing changed. ... It's never going to go away. (Male interviewee, in his 40s)

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Participants of the focus groups also assessed contemporary antisemitism vis-à-vis the atrocities of Nazi Germany:

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I would put it like this. Baruch Hashem (thank G-d), we are not living in anything which resembles the 1930s...antisemitism among the general population is nowhere in that leagues. (Male focus group participant, in his 70s)

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It's not as if we are being put into cattle cars and being shipped off. Someone is just shouting at us. But to be honest even that is unacceptable. In today's age, 2016, where there is so much on hate crime, it is unacceptable. (Male focus group participant, in his 30s)

A focus group participant shared that he recently had a conversation in a bakery with a man in his 80s. The man told him that he grew up in Nazi Germany. When he was five, he ran to

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3 the police to inform them that his father was being attacked by the fascists. The police  
4 proceeded to take out an iron bar and hit the boy over the head. That was 1933. This focus  
5 group participant, in assessing antisemitism today against the atrocities of Nazi Germany said:  
6 'Baruch Hashem (thank G-d), today we are nowhere near that league'.  
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9 A theme has emerged whereby security is perceived as being close or further in time. The  
10 notion of 'then' and 'now' appears in the context of Nazi Germany. Nazi Germany was  
11 considered by respondents as the most insecure time faced by Jews. By comparing their  
12 current level of security, to the level of insecurity during Nazi Germany, by pushing that level  
13 of criminality back in time and to another place, the levels of security in the present seem  
14 higher.  
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18 Other respondents expressed no delusion that it could happen again. 'History has a wicked  
19 habit of repeating itself' (Female interviewee). Another stated:

20 We all cast our mind back to a period of time where antisemitism became  
21 unfortunately the norm across Europe. And I am not naïve enough to think that  
22 it cannot happen again. I worry in general that there is potential for  
23 antisemitism to rise up again. (Female interviewee, in her 40s)  
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26 This remark also indicates that participants were holding onto a mixture of secure and  
27 insecure feelings simultaneously. Respondents expressed feelings of security regarding living  
28 as British Jews in the UK, whilst holding onto feelings of insecurity because this sense of safety  
29 is not to be trusted and is tenuous. It shows that one can express feelings of security regarding  
30 the present, but feelings of insecurity about the future.  
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33 A further theme which emerged was that some of those closer in age to the events of the  
34 Holocaust were extremely sensitive to contemporary antisemitism. This is consistent with the  
35 findings of JPR (2014) whereby those further away from the Holocaust did not feel that  
36 antisemitism needs to be combatted (p.12). One of the clearest observations of this survey is  
37 that, within all categories, younger people consider combating antisemitism to be a less  
38 important part of their Jewish identity than older people. An interviewee stated:

39 I think in the older generation there might be an overall sense of fear...maybe  
40 the further away we get from the Holocaust, the more secure we feel about  
41 our Judaism... But I think that my parents' generation is much closer to the  
42 whole thing. (Female interviewee, in her 20s)  
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47 Neusner (2003) contrasts the emotional effects on those who survived Nazi Germany with  
48 the generation which followed. He made a differentiation between the effects of the  
49 Holocaust on those who were part of it who would be distrusting and hostile, and the new  
50 generation who regard the world as neutral and have the capacity to trust the outside (p.70).  
51 One female interviewee who was a child survivor of the Holocaust expressed most anxiety  
52 about living as a Jew in Britain, despite not facing any physical antisemitic incidents herself.  
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55 The responses of participants suggested that antisemitism cannot be seen in isolation for  
56 some, that it is measured and assessed against the backdrop of the Holocaust. Assessing  
57 contemporary antisemitism against the backdrop of the Holocaust has two possible  
58 implications. Current experiences of physical and verbal assaults now become almost  
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3 insignificant, when compared to the victimisation which was experienced by Jews during Nazi  
4 Germany. This has the effect of lessening the threat of contemporary antisemitism.  
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7 However, the Holocaust also stands as the backdrop of the need to be cautious and on guard.  
8 The sense of comfort which Jews felt in Germany and the fact that Jews in Europe did not  
9 recognise the danger signs, was frequently referred to. 'Before the war Jews were in love with  
10 Berlin, and in love with Germany' (Male interviewee). An interviewee stated:  
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12 I'm afraid that it was in Germany that people felt most comfortable. Polish Jews  
13 before the war moved to Germany because they were very happy there. And  
14 the Jewish community, both secular and the Orthodox felt very comfortable  
15 and had perhaps more rights than anywhere else. And the rest is history.  
16 Because it all happened so suddenly. (Female interviewee, in her 70s)  
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19 Jews in Germany felt very comfortable until 10 years before the war, until 1933,  
20 people felt incredibly safe and comfortable in Berlin, that kind of feeling cannot  
21 be confused with real safety. That's been throughout history and I don't think  
22 anything can be done about it. (Male interviewee, in her 30s)  
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25 My grandfather lost his whole family in the camps. We are all survivors. I  
26 definitely think that there needs to be an awareness and that we need to be  
27 proactive. (Female interviewee, in her 40s)  
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30 In summarising this section, historic antisemitism needs to be seen as part and parcel of the  
31 identity of the Jew. In this case, the historical context of Nazi Germany, provided a framework  
32 within which antisemitic incidents were often contextualised and by providing a yardstick  
33 against which one can measure contemporary antisemitism.  
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### 36 *Religious Context*

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39 Other than the historical context, religious context also provided a factor (be it to a lesser  
40 extent), through which some respondents assessed the extent of contemporary antisemitism.  
41 Some participants raised the notion that antisemitism was Divinely ordained and originates  
42 in the Torah. There are two religiously based notions which framed and influenced the  
43 perspective of some participants. First, the hostility shown between Esau and Yaakov (Jacob)  
44 in the Torah. Second, the notion which was referenced from the Torah of galus (diaspora). A  
45 Diaspora (galus, exile) is a dispersion, an exile, an unnatural state of being. A central part of  
46 Orthodox Jewry is the notion of galus or exile. Or in other words, that they are temporary  
47 residents, who actually belong elsewhere and that with the arrival of the Messiah, they will  
48 return to Israel, the spiritual homeland.  
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52 These two religiously based notions framed and influenced the perspective of some  
53 participants. 'It doesn't surprise me. It's all there in the Chumash (in the Torah)' (Female  
54 interviewee), 'We are brought up to know that this is Toras Yaakov (the Torah of Yaakov) and  
55 this is going to stick and stay with us forever. So, we have embraced that before it happens.  
56 So, when it happens... it happened' (Focus group male participant). 'People just accept it  
57 (antisemitism). They say we are in galus and this is part of being in galus.' (Focus group male  
58 participant).  
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In line with Sweiry's research (2014), religious factors influenced perceptions of antisemitism. It was used as a point of reference when assessing the current position of Jews in Britain. Using religion as a point of reference has its benefits. By interpreting the religious teachings to be that antisemitism is inevitable, than the experiences of victimisation also become inevitable. This gives a way for participants to cope with their victimisation and to accept it. Therefore, the religious teachings helped participants manage their emotions.

Further research from a Jewish philosopher in the Jewish community querying as to whether there is a Torah source which states that antisemitism is an unyielding phenomenon, illuminated that in fact antisemitism is not Divinely ordained. 'It might be our generalised experience from the generations. But it is not set-in stone' (Jewish Philosopher). Therefore, despite there not being a Torah source for ongoing antisemitism, some participants appeared to mitigate their perceptions of antisemitism by placing it under the label of religious teachings. Being able to compare victimisation with the conflict between Esau and Yaakov or the fact that they are in galus, appeared to provide security to respondents. If the forefathers and Torah leaders endured antisemitism, why shouldn't they?

### ***Concluding thoughts***

This research is an important step in seeking clarity regarding antisemitism by drawing upon lived social experiences of respondents. Exploring the scale and significance of antisemitism during interviews has revealed that the large majority of respondents felt that antisemitism has been a constant. However, the key contribution that this paper makes is in highlighting that respondents observe that there are perceived changes in various sites where antisemitism is open and being played out. Whereas antisemitism was confined to the throwing of the traditional black hats, some graffiti or some verbal insults, new and powerful sites have now emerged which have become more blatant. The expression of antisemitism is now seeming to be more powerful and institutionalised. Social media, which has boundless impact, is seen to be more open to the discourse of antisemitism and politically there seems to be institutional antisemitism which is more powerful. Moreover, despite the emphasis by the government on preventing discrimination in higher education, university campuses, was also a sphere where antisemitic expressions seemed more overt. Overlapping with the other spheres, the seemingly antisemitic street culture is seen therefore to be on the decline with a reverse upward trend of institutional antisemitism. The political climate which was previously marked by a high degree of tolerance, epitomised by the upper echelons of society, is perceived to have changed.

This second contribution which this article makes it to emphasise that these perceptions are often based on a multicity of factors. Respondents perceived and observed the framing of antisemitism in multiple ways. The historical and religious context were two of the seven contributory factors which framed the perceptions of respondents. These two factors were the dominant narratives which the respondents referred to in gauging the extent of antisemitism today. Specifically, the historical context of antisemitism provided a yardstick against which respondents measured antisemitism. Contemporary antisemitism, when measured against the atrocities of the Holocaust, seems insignificant and trivial. Perceptions of contemporary antisemitism cannot be seen in isolation to the backdrop of the Holocaust.



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3 The historical context was therefore one contributory factor which was used as a point of  
4 reference when assessing the current levels of antisemitism.  
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7 Moreover, the religious context provided a backdrop to contextualise contemporary levels of  
8 antisemitism. Respondents sought comfort in believing that antisemitism was Divinely  
9 ordained and originated in the Torah. Despite there not being a Torah source for ongoing  
10 antisemitism, placing it under the label of religious teaching seemed to provide some  
11 reassurance and security for respondents. Combined together, the historical and religious  
12 context led to the belief that some form of antisemitism is inevitable. It highlights that  
13 perceptions of the extent of antisemitism cannot be seen in a vacuum, but rather take  
14 account of a myriad of factors; linked to the context.  
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18 This article draws attention to the fact that, overall, Orthodox Jews do not perceive a  
19 resurgence of antisemitism. Rather the dominant perception is that new powerful sites have  
20 emerged which are allowing for antisemitic discourse to fester. It highlights that in reaching  
21 this conclusion, there are various underpinning factors which are considered, and illuminating  
22 that perceptions of the scale and extent of antisemitism among Orthodox Jews is a complex  
23 and multifaceted issue.  
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## APPENDIX 1: Focus Group Schedule

### 1. Antisemitism in London:

- How has the North London Orthodox Jewish community been effected by antisemitism?
- Do you think antisemitism effects the way the Jewish community has integrated within main stream society?
- Can we talk about how people feel about their sense of security?
- Do you think that antisemitism makes the community more cohesive / stick together / split apart / sense of community is being eroded?

### 2. Coping Mechanisms:

- What mechanisms has the Orthodox Jewish community adopted in coping with antisemitism?
- Do you think that people's religious levels are compromised in order to integrate into society? Or does it cause people to become more resolute? (identity negotiation)
- Does antisemitism effect the way people express their Jewishness in public?
- Do people need to conceal or negotiate their Jewishness?
- Do people avoid certain areas?

### 3. Agencies:

- Can we talk about existing agencies which monitor antisemitism? Police, CST, Shomrim
- In your opinion, what existing policies are working? What policies are not working
- What else is needed?
- Would you choose between seeking help between Shomrim / CST

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