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“Frame resistance” in a *Daily Telegraph* comment thread. Public contestation of the left–wing official framing of the Manchester synagogue attack of 2 October 2025

Isabela Fairclough

Introduction

1 The terrorist attack on the Heaton Park synagogue in Manchester took place on Yom Kippur, on 2 October 2025, and left two Jewish people dead and three wounded. In the aftermath, Keir Starmer, the UK Prime Minister, made an official speech from Downing Street, promising that a “Britain of compassion, of decency, of love” would “come together to wrap [her] arms around” Britain’s Jews. The next day, Deputy PM David Lammy spoke at a vigil for the victims in Manchester, expressing his solidarity and warning against allowing “division” and “fear” to triumph. Predictably, the political establishment declared itself aggrieved and shocked. On that occasion, these messages were angrily received, by live and online audiences, as empty words and ideological obfuscation, in a context where weekly “pro-Palestine” marches were said to have created an unprecedented surge in antisemitism.

2 I have looked at reactions to the Manchester synagogue attack in the comment thread to the first *Daily Telegraph* article published on that day. The analysis shows a reading public that is immune to the intended framing effects of relentless anti-Israel propaganda, a public that can make a precise diagnosis of the sources of Jew hatred: radical Islam/Islamism, and its alliance to the radical “progressive” left. By contrast, the British establishment manages to completely avoid talking about “Islamism”, replacing it with vague terms like “hate”, “extremism”, “terrorism” and “vile

individuals", and warning against "division" and the "far right". Through years of exposure to "progressive" far-left discourse, the *Telegraph* public is able to ironically anticipate and ridicule every strategy of (what they call) the standard official script or playbook for responding to Islamist attacks and can see through the government's manipulative attempt to control the narrative.

1. Personal investment and the objectivity of research

3 In an old article (Fairclough and Fairclough 2018), I argued for an open–minded, non–ideological approach to critique in CDA (Critical Discourse Analysis), one that is willing to consider contrary viewpoints to the left-wing one that typically defines CDA, and I illustrated this with a discussion of Angela Merkel's decision to open Germany's borders in 2015. The article appeared in a special issue on *Ethics in Critical Discourse Studies*, edited by Phil Graham, a CDA stalwart. Speaking in the name of the CDA community, Graham argued that "[t]o pretend that CDA is anything other than a primarily moral pursuit would seem to me to be dishonest". Clearly, "CDA is primarily ethical. It aims to transform action and values such that the social scene becomes increasingly equal, more democratic, less victimizing...". CDA deals with "inequality, racism, violence, discrimination, religious extremism, right wing discourse more generally" (2018: 201-202).

4 The end of this quote is a give-away. CDA's position (essentially, said to be a "primarily moral pursuit") is conflated here with a particular ideological left-wing viewpoint, said to be not only opposed to racism, discrimination and extremism – widely criticized from socially conservative quarters as well – but to be explicitly against "right wing discourse more generally" and (as the writer says later) against the "crypto-fascist" Donald Trump, US hegemony, etc. The moral point of view, for Graham, is therefore that of left-wing politics. It seems to be subsumed under an "oppressor-oppressed" logic whereby the "powerless" are always morally right, and the "powerful" are always wrong, where (racial, ethnic, sexual, gender) minorities are good and majorities bad, and all power seems to be illegitimate. Taking the ethical standpoint to be left-wing has the predictable effect of positioning anyone who is conservative on cultural and/or economic matters outside the moral map, but this consequence does not seem to bother the CDA analyst. And this is how, I argued (Fairclough 2021: 269–270), CDA begins to look more like political activism rather than research, with its very particular ideological perspective, of economic and cultural socialism, masked as a universal impartial one.

5 A few years later (in a *Festschrift* I edited, Fairclough *et al.* 2021), this discussion was picked up by Ruth Amossy, who asked: from the vantage point of which values are critical discourse analysts undertaking their critique? On what basis do they decide what is "wrong" and in what way it should be "righted" and changed "for the better"? (2021: 90, 93). The dilemma of the CDA analyst, as she saw it, ought to be how to resolve the "tension between the *ethical* and the *ideological*", how to avoid collapsing the universal "moral" point of view into an exclusively left–wing ideological one (95).

6 Western academia being mainly left-wing, and the Left having taken an identitarian turn, the meaning of "critical" is often conflated nowadays with a radical left "progressive" perspective. By contrast, the "critical" perspective that I defend, not belonging to the left–wing CDA fold, is that of (Popperian) "critical rationalism". In my

view, the normative standpoint from which discourse analysis is conducted ought to be non-ideological, and defensible in a systematic process of "critical discussion" (van Eemeren and Grootendorst 2004), part of a critical rationalist methodology. At the end of the day, it ought to withstand critical testing in response to the strongest challenges coming from those who do not agree with it. The requirement to take contrary viewpoints into account does not aim at some kind of neutrality, or relativistic non–judgmentalism. It requires making a choice (and not sitting on the fence), at the end of an ongoing process whereby all available counterarguments and objections have been considered. It also assumes arguers are ready to revise and change their views, in light of emerging evidence. This requirement opens a dialogue whereby the protagonists of alternative standpoints are free to criticize and reject an arguer's views, by bringing evidence that shows that arguer to be wrong. Alternatively, it will strengthen the original arguer's standpoint if no such evidence is shown to exist. The burden of proof to show that a standpoint is wrong is on those who disagree.

7 There are many genuinely controversial issues, where there are good arguments on each side, and it is not clear what is right to believe or to do. But there are also issues that can be settled by appeal to objective truth and evidence, where persistent disagreement is not reasonable but obstinate. A good example (which I discuss at length in Fairclough 2024a) is the unreasonable sex–denialist belief, displayed by transgender ideologues, i.e., that biological sex is not real and not immutable. This, I argued, is not a genuine irresolvable "deep disagreement", but a manufactured controversy that could be resolved, if the arguments on both sides were grounded in evidence and facts, as they ought to be, if the orientation of the dialogue was towards objective truth, and if both sides of the debate behaved reasonably.

8 Following a falsificationist logic of inquiry (with caveats of fallibility), it is in principle easier to decide where truth lies on epistemic factual issues. But not all moral–practical issues need be too "complicated" to be decidable. The comment thread I will look at displays the kind of critical rationality that I would defend. It shows people arguing vigorously against "elite" official discourse, with facts and evidence, and arguing against each other, with some views emerging in the battle of ideas as more reasonable than others, and with untenable standpoints being weeded out. For most of these *Telegraph* readers, the question whether Britain ought to stand with the Jews and fight the tsunami of antisemitism that has taken hold since October 2023 is not a complicated one. For them, there are clearly no equally good arguments on both sides, after all the facts have been considered. Antisemitism, in their view, ought to be rejected as pure Nazi–style racism, including in those deceptive manifestations (anti-Zionism, criticism of Israel, support for "Palestine") that try to shield it from accusations of Jew hatred. They have reached this conclusion, as the one that best survives criticism and is rationally defensible, both by appeal to evidence and by appeal to non–negotiable values (anti-racism and a commitment to freedom of expression).

9 For a critical rationalist, criticism of a (hypothetical) standpoint is not criticism of the premises on which it may be based but of the consequences that can be derived from assuming it to be true. Incidentally, Sam Harris's recent defense of his own pro–Israel stance is critical rationalist in spirit. Whatever legitimate criticism one may throw at Israel, he says, "the ethical difference between Israel and her enemies remains vast", unbridgeable, and can be assessed by asking this simple question: "What would each side do if it had the power to do whatever it wanted?" "If Hamas had the power, it

would perpetrate a real genocide in Israel". If Israel had the power, "there would be peace" and a "diverse, tolerant, and prosperous society between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea", and "there could have been one eighty years ago" (Harris 2026). This view is implicitly in agreement with a critical rationalist methodology that requires us to derive consequences from a hypothetical (normative) standpoint (e.g. "It is right that Hamas should have the power") and see what an examination of those consequences indicates about the reasonableness of that hypothesis.

2. Framing effects: frame acceptance or resistance

10 In the literature, framing effects are defined as changes in the beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors of an audience that occur because of being exposed to a particular framing of an issue. As intended by a message framer (e.g., a media source), framing effects can succeed or fail. Framing is an inherently rhetorical process, aimed at persuasion (as well as displaying the identity of the message framer). A media message will always interact with an audience's pre–existing beliefs and values, which may strengthen its persuasiveness, but may also subvert it, possibly leading to its replacement with a different message.

11 In Fairclough (2024b), I suggested that framing works via an inferential process, by "inviting" a conclusion which an audience may accept or reject (from premises they may accept or reject), resulting in a successful or failed "framing effect". Typically, the audience is either (a) being "invited" to see a situation as X (not as Y) (for example to see an attack as the result of "hate", not "Islamism"); or (b) is being "invited" to take a reason Z as one that ought to outweigh all other reasons in deciding what to believe or do (e.g., see the human rights of migrants as outweighing the rights to safety of the host population). Here, I will not reconstruct arguments according to underlying argument schemes (as I did in the 2024b paper) but focus only on framing effects – the successful or failed persuasion attempts associated with acts of framing. Audiences may accept the framing (and the invited conclusion), but they may reject it and draw other conclusions.

12 I have no space here to be more analytical in my use of the "frame" concept. Suffice it to say that in this thread (as always, in my view), framing was done via various argument schemes, e.g. from classification (Israel's response to the 2023 attack as "genocide"), from criterion (diversity being a "strength" as a criterion for diversity being a good thing), from cause to effect and effect to cause (evident in the way the sources of antisemitism were diagnosed very differently by the readers versus the official discourse they were rejecting), etc. From a strategically chosen salient noun or verb phrase in the first premise, a conclusion seems to follow inevitably, which (usually taken as a premise in subsequent argumentation) always leads to a final normative–practical conclusion about what should be believed or done. Yet it will be up to the audience to accept or reject the framing premise and the conclusion they are being steered towards.

13 There are limits to how framing will influence an individual's beliefs, attitudes, emotions and behaviors. Citizens are not "puppets, voting thumbs up or down depending on how issues are framed, their strings being pulled by elites" (Sniderman and Theriault 2004: 158). They are almost always aware of competing ways of framing a situation and will tend to accept the one corresponding to their own (pre-existing)

belief and value system. Later, this insight was theorized under the name of "moderators" of framing effects (Lecheler and de Vreese 2018), seen as factors that place limits on how successful a framing attempt can be. Together with the possibility of exerting huge influence on how an audience responds to an event, and therefore effectively shaping public opinion, there is also *frame resistance*, and consequently there may be failure to produce framing effects.[1]

14 My analysis in what follows can be read in part as an illustration of how well–rehearsed ways of framing situations can fail to influence an audience when they are moderated by the audience's preexisting political orientation, knowledge, and values. The official left–wing discourse on the causes of antisemitism will be seen to fall completely flat on a *Telegraph* readership. Similarly, I will show how the accusation that Israel is committing genocide was roundly rejected by *Telegraph* readers, who came up with facts and evidence, with knowledge about the war and history that their interlocutors either did not possess or wilfully ignored, hence presumably the latter's vulnerability to what were called the "lies" and "propaganda" promoted by the BBC, *The Guardian* and other anti-Israel media.

15 The comment thread I collected was in response to the first *Telegraph* article published after the news of the attack broke out, entitled "The Manchester synagogue attack is where anti-Semitism inevitably leads". It was authored by Jewish journalist Danny Cohen (former director of BBC Television and controller of BBC One). It was uploaded to the *Daily Telegraph* website at 12:17 on October 2, before the ethnicity, name and motivation of the terrorist were confirmed (Jihad Al–Shamie, of Syrian descent, had pledged allegiance to Islamic State).

16 Cohen wrote about the normalization of antisemitism, with impunity, since the 7 October pogrom. Against the "steady, ever-louder drumbeat of Jew-hate", "anti-Semitism has become normalised, the only acceptable form of racism", he said. "On [the "pro-Palestine"] marches, people have been allowed to display virulently anti-Semitic, pro-terrorist signs without consequence", and Jews are experiencing racism daily in the NHS, at schools and universities, in the street and at work. He blamed the British state for failing to act and thus creating a toxic environment for violent individuals to turn Jew hatred into murderous action. The fact that many Jews are wondering if they have a future in Britain, he says, "is a terrible indictment of what has been allowed to happen in British society and the failure of those in positions of power to really deal with it" (2025).

17 The article resonated strongly with the readers, based on evident congruence of values and beliefs. Like Cohen, they blamed Keir Starmer, the Labour Party, the police, the BBC and other media for the rise of antisemitism. The most interesting feature of the thread, however, was its anticipation of the official discourse to be rolled out. In predicting and even parodying the official response, *Telegraph* readers drew on years of previous exposure to left–wing ideological messages and showed a critical awareness of how a predictable playbook is deployed in every crisis to defuse inter-ethnic tensions, distract from a clear identification of causes, and strategically shape public opinion and action. The thread is therefore a good illustration of "frame resistance", of the failure of "elite framing" to produce its intended effects on those British audiences that have learned to see through the establishment's ideological maneuvers, and possess political opinions and factual knowledge that are incompatible with the typical "progressive" discourse on Israel, Gaza and British Islam.

18 The thread is at the same time a sweeping rejection of the master narrative frame that has structured the Israel-Gaza conflict in the perception of the Western liberal left. According to Melanie Phillips (2025b), the ideological template common to both Western left–liberal “progressives” and the Palestinian cause is the *oppressor-oppressed* logic, whereby the alleged “oppressed”, being powerless, automatically have the moral high ground, while the powerful “oppressors” are by definition guilty, regardless of the way each side acts. Consequently, being a good, moral person, as a left-liberal, demands supporting the Palestinians, victims of Israeli “colonial oppression” and “apartheid”. This is how, she argues, the West “has framed antisemitism and anti-Zionism as conscience itself”, with “virulent anti–Zionism and demonization of Israel” serving to disguise and “launder” Jew hatred. “The laundromat has been the Palestinian cause” – the cause that virtue-signaling leftists, including white left–liberals, have embraced as a supreme moral duty (Phillips 2026).

19 The comments also call into question common ways of framing Islam (as a religion) and Muslims (as a race). Contrary to left–wing narratives, the rising power of “Islamism” (or radical political Islam) is viewed by conservative critics (Burmawi 2025, Goodwin 2026, O’Neill 2024, Murray 2025, Phillips 2025a, Simons 2024) as part of a war against Europe and the West waged by Iran and its proxies, a war against the Western Judeo–Christian world whose roots are in Judaism, and against the West’s Enlightenment inheritance. Crucially, these critics point out that Islam is not only a religion but a system of government coupled with a faith, a militant political–ideological system with global ambitions of conquest, and that the protections granted to it by equality laws in the West, as a consequence of wrongly seeing Islam exclusively as a private faith (and Muslims as a race) are barriers against what should be serious critical scrutiny and resistance. These errors, they say, are shielding the political dimension of Islam and giving it undeserved immunity while its global influence is spreading. As the thread shows, this kind of analysis has seeped into public opinion and is shared by many ordinary people.

3. Official messages and avoidance strategies

20 On the evening of 2 October 2025, Keir Starmer delivered an official message from Downing Street expressing his solidarity with the Jewish community, offering condolences, and deploring the “terrorist attack” committed by a “vile individual”, who “attacked Jews because they are Jews, and attacked Britain because of our values”. He spoke about the “antisemitic hatred” that is “rising once again” and must be defeated, and about how Britain has historically provided safety for Jews “fleeing the greatest evil ever inflicted on a people”. He expressed his faith in a Britain of “compassion, of decency, of love” that would protect the Jews (Gov.uk. 2025a). Deputy Prime Minister David Lammy was dispatched to Manchester the following day, to speak at the vigil for the victims. Lammy’s speech, which began with the words “Friends, we must stand together today. We must stand in grief, in solidarity and in defiance”, mentioned pain, suffering, fear, hate, thoughts and prayers, and above all solidarity with the Jewish people. The whole nation, Lammy said nine times, stands together, in solidarity with, and grieves for the Jewish people (Gov.uk. 2025b). (Both speeches can be read at the links in the reference list.)

21 The most striking feature of both speeches was the absence of any mention of "Islam/Islamism" (replaced by "terrorism/terrorist" six times in Lammy's speech, although by then the facts were known). Both Starmer and Lammy spoke about "terrorism", "violence" and "hate" as free–floating concepts, without attaching them to any religion/ideology. Undefined terrorism and hate are allegedly perpetrated by "those who think bombs and blasts will break us", by "vile individuals" who aim to sow "division" in the bosom of a nation united by bonds of love and neighborliness, a "tolerant nation", "built on mutual respect".

22 To Lammy's apparent surprise, his message was not well received. As soon as he took to the stage, he was loudly booed and heckled by the crowd, interrupted with calls of "shame on you", "go to Palestine, leave us alone", "you have allowed Jew hatred in Manchester on the streets", "you are all guilty", and "you have blood on your hands" (YouTube 2025). This should not have been surprising, as his view of the whole of multicultural, multi–faith Britain united in love and solidarity against antisemitism clearly collided not only with the opinions of Manchester Jews, but with the reality of public opinion, revealed in polls. The Henry Jackson Society (2024) found that only one in four British Muslims believes Hamas committed murder and rape in Israel on October 7th; only one in four British Muslims believes Israel has a right to exist as a Jewish homeland; almost half of British Muslims feel more sympathy with Hamas than with Israel; and 53 percent of 18-34-year-old Muslims sympathize with Hamas. Large majorities said they wanted to adopt Sharia law in Britain and declare Islam a national religion.

23 In line with the government's apparent strategy of avoidance and obfuscation, messages like those of Starmer and Lammy continued to drip from official quarters for many days afterward. In *The Guardian*, Sadiq Khan (2025), London's Muslim mayor, deplored the rise in both anti–Semitic and anti–Muslim attacks, warned against "division" and praised the spirit of London, "our diverse city", where people of all faiths can peacefully live side by side, showing that "our diversity is a strength to be celebrated, not a weakness to be hidden". As in Lammy's message, allegiance to political Islam, to its avowed mission to eradicate Israel from the Middle East and kill Jews wherever they are, was not part of Khan's explanation for antisemitic atrocities in Britain. The official line illustrated by all these messages traces terrorism back to isolated "extremists" of unknown persuasion. They have been "radicalized" online, by implication not in Britain's mosques, and are exceptions to the general population. The fault does not lie with any systemic, collective ideological and political forces, nor with the government's own failure to stamp out radical Islam.

24 In the next section, I will show how *Telegraph* readers diagnosed the causes of Jew hatred, how they anticipated and lambasted the official response to the synagogue attack, including the government's refusal to put a clear name on the threat to the Jews. Where relevant, I will briefly draw on another analysis I have carried out (not included here) of ten days of coverage of the synagogue attack in *The Guardian* (45 articles), as representative of the left–wing media's reporting of the event.

4. Public opinion in a *Telegraph* comment thread

25 The comment thread corpus comprises 3202 comments, of which 1410 are main comments, and the remainder are replies to these comments or replies to replies. The

total word count is a little over 125000 words. The comments were posted throughout the 2nd and into the 3rd of October, when they were closed. They offer a snapshot of sections of public opinion (*Telegraph* subscribers), with arguments and counterarguments, and can be grouped into two categories:

- Naming the sources of antisemitism in Britain: (1) Islamism, facilitated by the liberal left; (2) "multicultural" and "diversity" policies, against a background of uncontrolled mass migration from Muslim countries; (3) anti-Israel, pro-Hamas propaganda, particularly the lie that Israel is committing genocide in Gaza.
- Anticipating how the government and left–wing media will try to control the narrative and dissimulate the real causes of antisemitism by drawing on a ready–made "playbook".

26 I have very limited space here to illustrate only some of these themes, but the whole set of comments can be read at the link in the reference list (Cohen 2025). "Frame resistance" is best illustrated by the way readers dealt with accusations of genocide aimed at Israel and anticipated the official "scripts" to be rolled out. It was also evident in the way commenters diagnosed the causes of Jew hatred, differently from official discourse.

5. Who is to blame for attacks on Jews in Britain: radical Islam and the Left

27 The very first posted comment (with 1507 likes) set the tone, blaming the government: "Hamas supporting Labour have blood on their hands today". Overall, there are 80 concordance hits[2] for "blood", mainly in "blood on his/their hands", over 25 in contexts blaming Starmer directly, and the others blaming the government and the police, the BBC, the London mayor and the "pro-Palestine" ("pro-Hamas") marchers; e.g., "If you allow thousands of people on the streets of our cities screaming for the globalisation of the intifada do not be surprised to see dead Jews lying in pools of blood on those same streets".

28 Keir Starmer's recognition of the "Palestinian state" is said to be a "reward for terror". It has "emboldened the extremists", rewarded Hamas for the atrocities of October 7th, and contributed to violence in Britain. There are 138 hits for "recognising Palestine" (*recogni**), all in the same context. About 20 of these also say that the state of "Palestine" does not exist (or is a "non–existent" state, is a "fantasy", "imaginary" or "phantom" state, and a "terrorist" state).

29 Recognition of "Palestine" is seen as "appeasement" of Islamists, for the sake of preserving the Muslim voting bloc. There are 63 hits for "appease/appeasement"; e.g., "This is what appeasement of terrorists leads to! This is what recognising a state under terrorist rule and vilifying a democracy for the sake of Islamic votes leads to. This is what buying into lies and Hamas propaganda leads to!"

30 The BBC is mentioned 123 times, all in the context of accusing it of disinformation and anti–Israel bias, of allegedly taking their evidence from Hamas; e.g., "The BBC … the publicity wing for Hamas"; "The BBC has described Hamas as 'militants'. It has used the words 'genocide' and 'starvation' from the evidence of Hamas. They are guilty of propaganda which has inevitably led to this atrocity". (There are also eleven hits for *The Guardian*, eleven for Sky News, four for ITV, accusing them of anti-Israel

propaganda.) Schools and universities, as well as the NHS, the Police and the Civil Service, are also blamed for fostering "blatant antisemitism".

31 There are 245 hits for "marches" (*march**) almost all in contexts stating they are "hate marches" and/or that they ought to be "banned" or "stopped", and that failing to do so has fuelled atmosphere of antisemitic incitement leading to violent attacks against Jews. The "deranged antisemitism" of the white liberal "useful idiots" (seven hits for this expression) – the "purple–haired", "keffiyeh-clad", "extreme-left, Hamas-supporting Corbynistas" has been encouraged by Labour on the "pro-Palestine" marches. Sadly, someone says, the "marchers screaming for mass murder of Jews ('Globalize the Intifada') and ethnic cleansing of Jews ('From the River to the Sea, Palestine will be Arab' – the trans. from Arabic) are clearly not all foreigners but British demonstrators". There are 189 concordance hits for "hate", of which 61 are to the "hate marches/rallies".

32 Antisemitism (including "antisemitic") is mentioned 355 times; several comments state that antisemitism is "racism"; e.g., "Antisemitism is racism. Why is it not being policed and why has it been allowed to become normalised?"; "Every decent thinking person must stand firm against this vile antisemitism/racism". Throughout the thread, the "normalisation" of antisemitism is associated with the "progressive" left (the "toxic left", "woke left", "left-wing fascists"; left-wing lunacy/madness/idiocy). Labour is said to be "the Woke–Left's very own Fascist Party", "supporter of Islam terror", "facilitator of Racism and Division" (around 120 concordance hits for the Left in such contexts). Many comments address the rise of antisemitism under the mask of humanitarian concerns for Palestinians, and the protection of freedom of speech rights; e.g., "The liberal left cannot be absolved from encouraging naked antisemitism to exist in the public sphere hiding under pro-Palestine protest"; "These marches are antisemitic dressed as Palestine support."

33 The "unholy alliance" between the Left and Islam, their "shared responsibility" for the attack, is mentioned several times, with someone calling it an "islamo-leftist axis of evil"; e.g., "The unholy alliance of Islamists and Leftists inculcated in our university madrassas will be celebrating tonight"; "The secular left and Islamists work together in this country. How did the same combination work out in Iran and Lebanon?"

34 In the thread, the growing power of Islam/Islamism is seen as the ultimate cause of antisemitism in Britain, coupled with the state's unwillingness or inability to deal with the rise of Islam's influence. *Islam** appears 252 times in the thread, 47 times as "Islamophobia", 50 times as "Islam", and the rest as "Islamic/Islamist*/Islamism" (including three hits for "Islamo-fascists" and "Islamo-leftist"):

> London saw radical Islamists drive through their Jewish community with megaphones blasting "kill the Jews rape their daughters"/ If we must import Islamist hordes then we must expect Islamist atrocities/ The problem is Islamism, which is a radicalised offshoot of Islam.

35 A proportion of the comments is not about Islamism but about Islam. The tenor of these comments matches the findings of a 2025 YouGov poll, according to which 53% of respondents believe that "Islam is not compatible with British values" (*Daily Telegraph* 2025).

> Islam is blatantly incompatible with UK life. Anyone who has the slightest doubt must read the Koran. It is supremacist to its very core/ The UK is slowly being subjugated under Islam and being turned into part of the Global Caliphate/ Antisemitism and ideological supremacy are embedded in the DNA of the religion of

> peace/ [Islam] is supremacist, antisemitic, homophobic, misogynist, anti-democratic, and completely at odds to the British traditional way of life...

36 It is comments like these that are most worrying, from the perspective of social cohesion in Britain, especially considering the extreme polarisation of society since October 2023. While they can be read as an "Islamophobic" stereotyping of all Muslims, they also show that criticism of Islam is increasingly based on its perception not as a benign private faith, but (in the commenters' words) a "political movement", an "ideology" with "militant" ambitions of conquest. It has been protected and placed "on a pedestal" by the Government, as a "religion of peace", while "thousands of Young Girls [were] Raped. Hundreds [were] killed and injured in terrorist violence".

5.1. False accusations of genocide

37 While there is unanimity on the "guilt" of Starmer, the BBC, the government, police and other institutions, there is some disagreement on whether Israel committed "genocide in Gaza", as part of a causal explanation for the Manchester attack. (Jihad Al-Shamie had shouted "This is what you get for killing our children".) The word "genocide/genocidal" appears 64 times, and "war crimes" (as in "Netanyahu's war crimes") four times. There are several dialogues like the ones below, where someone suggests that public opinion has turned against the Jews because of the Gaza "genocide", and other commenters reject this accusation with arguments:

> (1) [Comment] Genocide unfortunately leads to this. These people [in Manchester] did nothing wrong – like the 10s of thousands of Gazans murdered by Israel.
> [Reply 1] There is no genocide, and the casualties in Gaza are a direct result of Hamas terrorism and the use of human shields. Hamas kill people who try to leave an area after being warned by the Israelis.
> [Reply 2] There is no genocide. Hamas has the open intention to commit genocide, as it frequently promises. Wake up.
> (2) [Comment] While the Manchester synagogue attack is a monstrous act that deserves collective grief and solidarity with the Jewish victims, it is profoundly wrong ... to exploit this tragedy as a smokescreen for the barbarism unfolding in Gaza. [...]
> [Reply 1] No mention of the starving hostages or barbaric rape and murder of women and children of all nationalities on October 7th? Must have slipped your mind.
> [Reply 2] What do you suggest Israel should do, except try and wipe out Hamas for good? If they cannot achieve that, then Hamas will do what they have promised, which is to repeat the murders and atrocities of October 7th again and again, until they have achieved their stated aim of wiping every Israeli Jew off the face of the earth – now that really is genocide. Innocent people are only getting killed because the cowards of Hamas hide behind them.

38 Every time, the accusation of genocide is turned on its head, by pointing out that Hamas is the genocidal party, not Israel, by objecting to the word "genocide" being used for the "inevitable civilian casualties of war", or to the drawing of spurious parallels with the Holocaust.

> There is no genocide in Gaza. You want to learn about genocide, go to Auschwitz. The terrorists and their supporters deserve everything they're getting.../ Every single death lies with Hamas and radical Islam. Every single one.

39 The genocide accusation is said to be the "prevailing view of dilettantes in the Grauniad [*Guardian*] and BBC, Islamist propagandists". Indeed, *The Guardian* coverage spoke about the "genocide" committed by the Israeli army as an indisputable fact and hammered

home how neither criticism of Israel's war strategy, nor anti–Zionism, can be equated with antisemitism. It defended the marches as legitimate protest against the "moral catastrophe" of the Gaza "genocide" (Jones 2025).

40 Accusations of "indiscriminate killing" were rejected similarly, by pointing out that "in no previous conflict or war has one of the combatant forces dropped leaflets, sent messages to people's mobile phones and broadcast warnings to leave certain areas and buildings"; "no previous army in history has been held to the standards currently being applied to Israel, and no army has tried harder to comply with them". "Hamas's callous disregard for the safety of its own population", the use of civilians as human shields, were said to be part of a deliberate strategy to cause civilian deaths and turn public opinion against Israel.

5.2. Predicting the official framing of the attack

41 The comment thread also reflects the public's expectations of how the attack would be officially framed, what the official left–wing "narrative" would be (with eleven relevant occurrences of the word "narrative" alone, two of "playbook", six for "spin") from among "all the normal BBC and *Guardian* scripts" said to be always available for such occasions. Official discourse is not only rejected but also parodied or anticipated with irony and sarcasm. There are 20 predictions for the "mental illness angle" (and "playing the mental card again"), 48 for the attacker being possibly "far right" and 20 for being a "lone" individual, a "lone wolf"/" lone nutter", allegedly not connected to any ideology or religion, and an "ordinary guy". Commenters anticipated there would be "pious statements of sympathy and support for the victims", "thoughts and prayers", various other "weasel words" and "empty words/ platitudes/ rhetoric", a call for love and unity (not "hatred", not "division"). There would be declarations that "Hate has no place in Britain…", all part of a "vision" of "one big happy family living in harmony".

42 The script that shows how, after every atrocity, "community tensions" must be quickly defused, and public anger drowned in messages of peace, love and unity, would be promptly activated, the readers said. There are six hits for the "don't look back in anger" message, reminiscent of the 2017 Manchester Arena attack (where the crowd assembled at the vigil for the victims was encouraged to sing the Oasis anthem):

> Let's all have a vigil and light some candles. That should sort it all out… / I'll bring the teddies and the balloons, we can have a rousing rendition of Don't look back in anger/ "Don't look back in anger" eh? How many more innocent lives will it take before you get angry? / Tea lights have sold out in Manchester and "Don't look back in anger" will be no.1 at the weekend.

43 Readers also foresaw that no explicit connection would be made with the rise of home–grown Islamism, that there would be a refusal to name the ideological source of the threat, its origin within sections of British Muslim communities, and that the inspiration would be relegated to some remote online medium. Moreover, that the attack's religious nature would not be in focus, that Islam would be said to be a "religion of peace" (20 hits), and only the words "terrorism" and "extremism" would be used:

> Almost 10 hours later… still no mention of the perpetrator… still no name… still unwilling to say that this was a religious attack… it's easier to say it's terrorism/

> more two–tier activity from our cowardly Prime Minister. No mention of Islamism/ Apparently it is all about hatred (undefined) and extremism (undefined). Hmm...

44 These observations were accurate, witness the absence of any mention of Islam/ Islamism from the speeches of either Keir Starmer or David Lammy, and the use of generic words instead. The reluctance to say "Islamism" was also shared by *The Guardian*. In a 10–day coverage, there were zero hits for "Islamism". Islam was hardly mentioned (four hits as in Al–Shamie's "fanatical interest in Islam"); there were 22 mentions of "Islamic/Islamist", but mainly in the context of reporting on Al-Shamie as an individual ("pledged allegiance to Islamic State", "an extreme Islamist mindset", an "Islamist motivation", "Islamic dress"). Not one of these contexts speaks of Islam/ Islamism in connection with the rise of antisemitism in Britain, i.e. as originating in British Muslim communities or being preached in mosques. While *The Telegraph* ran an article on the mosque much "loved" by Jihad Al-Shamie, where the imam was fulminating regularly about the "treacherous" Jews, calling for them to be killed, *The Guardian* made no mention of this mosque.

45 *Telegraph* readers also correctly foresaw there would be immediate warnings against potential backlash against the Muslim community, against the rise of "Islamophobia", as part of (what they said is) the official playbook for Islamist attacks, which requires portraying Muslims as (potential) "victims".

> Leftist commentators coming on TV to say we should protect our Islamic communities in the wake of these murders is a disgrace/ Can we all please start a countdown to the BBC articles about the way this may impact the local Muslim community?/ ... Radio 4 Sarah Montague going on about Islamophobia when Jews have just been murdered/ On the BBC every mention of "growing antisemitism" is immediately followed by "...and Islamophobia" – I must have missed all those attacks on Mosques during Eid somehow... Did anyone spot them?

46 *The Guardian* also warned against Islamophobia. Within a few days of the attack, and without an obvious reason, it reported the "worries" of Baroness Shaista Gohir, head of a Muslim charity and promoter of the new definition of "Islamophobia". Deploring the "normalisation of stereotyping and anti-Muslim rhetoric", she lamented that the government seems to be saying to Muslims that "we don't care about you and you don't really matter", and asked for "support now, when we're actually enduring the worst possible time to be a Muslim in Britain" (Abdul and Syal 2025).

47 With Keir Starmer being notorious for blaming all opposition to Labour policies on the "far right", it was also anticipated that the attack would be weaponised against the "far right", by accusing it of fuelling "division". The "far right" is mentioned 51 times, in the same contexts, including "the mythical far right" (four), the "far right bogeyman" (one) and the "Far Right – formerly known as the general public":

> Expect lots of blithering about the risk of the Far-Right, deliberately ignoring the elephant in the room/ No doubt Starmer will blame this atrocity on the far right... Or on Nigel Farage/ Go on, Kier. Tell us again that the problem lies with the Far Right.../ Watch as Starmer and the rest attack us as right wing, fascist, Nazis while they ignore the true threat to our way of life.

48 While the "far-right" is standardly blamed for creating "division", the "far–left" is never incriminated; in fact, it is never spoken of. That the far-left has allied itself to the Islamists, calling for the destruction of Israel, is not a view one could form by listening to the Labour government or reading *The Guardian*, and in this the commenters were once again correct. In a ten-day *Guardian* coverage, only one article, by Dave Rich (2025)

(not a *Guardian* journalist but director of policy at the Community Security Trust, the organization that monitors antisemitic attacks), accused the left unambiguously of encouraging antisemitism and abandoning the Jews. Nowadays, Rich argued, hatred of Jews "comes in neo-Nazi, jihadist and extreme leftwing varieties". The comment thread, by contrast, was quite unreserved in blaming the Left and its "unholy alliance" with the Islamists. In March 2026, former Prime Minister Tony Blair (2026) himself warned against the "unholy alliance" between the British Left and the Islamists, which he considered the latest mutation of antisemitism. He was promptly denounced by *The Guardian*'s Owen Jones (2026).

49 "Diversity is our strength" was cited ironically ten times, including with some variations: "Diversity is our greatest strength, comrade"/ "Diversity is our nemesis"/ "Diversity is strength. LOL"/ "We must surely be reaching peak peace and diversity by now". Keir Starmer was predicted to play the "diverse community card", and the government to "keep pushing immigration and diversity being a good thing".

50 The official rolling out of the "don't divide us" mantra was accurately foreseen, with calls to stand against those who want to "foment division":

> The same calls for "Don't divide us", candles being waved & a rousing song of Kumbaya. It doesn't wash anymore. We all know this country is utterly broken and is headed for a sectarian hell. But Jews won't stand alone this time. Millions of gentiles in the UK will stand by their Jewish brothers & sisters. We all know... that your fight, for your right to exist in this country, is our fight too.

51 "Division" ("divided/divisive/divisiveness") occurs 30 times, accusing Labour, "leftist ideology" and Starmer himself ("peddler of hate and division") of causing the division and hatred they attribute to the "far-right". Labour's decision to be on the side of Israel's enemies, the commenters claimed, has done more than anything else to divide and fracture the country; e.g., "If ever there was a government perpetuating division within our land it is Labour". Starmer is called a "divisive, anti-British traitor", a "coward who has stirred up hatred against decent people" by calling them "far right" and "racist".

52 A major source of divisiveness is the perceived preferential treatment afforded to Muslims, via the concept of "Islamophobia" and its associated definition and policy (mentioned 47 times), and the prohibitions against criticizing Islam as political ideology, on pain of accusations of racism. It is felt that different standards are applied in dealing with different ethnic/religious groups, that "Labour are encouraging sectarian politics in the UK", have a "skewed pro Muslim stance", are "extremely biased towards the Islamic community", and "appear to want [Islam] to be protected differently to any other religion, [while] antisemitism is the evil which is being tolerated". Policies against "Islamophobia" are said to amount to a "Blasphemy Law by the back door", giving Muslims protections that are denied to other ethnic groups. They "will create second class citizens in the UK, everyone who does not adhere to Islam will be subservient to the special privileges afforded to Muslims, it will be a crime to criticise Islam", and this will be "sharia law by stealth, and utterly unacceptable in a free society."

53 Racism (92 hits for *racis**) comes up in two distinct contexts. One is the equation of antisemitism with racism, mentioned earlier, and includes contexts like: "the true racists are the radical Muslims who are causing more and more unrest in our once peaceful country", together with accusations of racism aimed at the BBC

("institutionally antisemitic racists"), Labour (harboring "systemic racism") and the "racist Palestinian marches". The other context refers to the predicted accusations of racism leveled against anyone who dares criticize Islam:

> Our tolerance will destroy us, but speak out and you will be labelled as racist/ [E]very time a native person raised the issues with integration, fingers were pointed and racism was used to control the narrative…/ All the platitudes and sympathies will roll out now. But to speak out against those who rape and molest our young girls, kill children dancing and despise our culture can result in imprisonment. Let us not be labelled 'racist'.[3]

54 The double standards and perceived unequal treatment depending on race/religion/ethnicity are summed up in the expression "two-tier" (25 hits), as in "two tier policing, justice and governance" (whereby "Muslims & illegals are treated wholly differently to the detriment of GB society"), and Keir Starmer's nickname, Two-Tier Keir (TTK/2TK), used 17 times.

55 While most of the comments are critical reactions to "progressive" discourse, there is also a moving outpouring of solidarity with British Jews in the thread, expressed in many ways. As a mere indication, the expression "stand with", as in "I stand with the Jews/Israel/our Jewish brothers and sisters" occurs 26 times. Expressions of love and support abound:

> My heart goes out to your people/ I love our Jewish friends who have contributed so much to this country and am heartbroken at this/ The nation weeps for those killed and injured this morning/ We are ALL with you. Tens of millions of right–thinking Brits support you 100% and will always support you. Know that when you are in the street, university or synagogue/ We the Gentile majority support you; we value you, your loyalty, your achievements and your outstanding contributions to Britain; please don't leave/ Am Yisrael Chai.

Conclusion

56 Because the official response to the Yom Kippur attack painted a picture of a harmonious Britain of love and solidarity that refuses to be "divided" by an isolated "extremist" act committed by a "vile individual", the comment thread dwelled at length on these themes, seeing them as manipulative attempts by the state to manage and control the population, defuse public anger and deflect blame – part of a well-rehearsed script for influencing public opinion. There was strong "frame resistance" to these intended framing effects. The "one multicultural diverse community" that chooses "not to look back in anger", as well as the typical terrorist profile of the official narrative, were mercilessly parodied. The reluctance to name Islamism and its alliance with the "progressive" Left as the sources of Jew hatred, as well as the attempt to deflect blame (by invoking imaginary threats – the "mythical far right", "Islamophobia") were seen as transparent attempts to shape public opinion in ways that exonerate those responsible. There was also vigorous, fact–based counter–argumentation to the "genocide" framing of Israel's war in Gaza, and a rejection of the view that opposition to Israel, as displayed on the "pro–Palestine" marches, is not antisemitic.

57 I have only examined one *Telegraph* comment thread, out of over 50 alternative threads to the articles and editorials published by the newspaper in the ten days after the Yom Kippur attack (based on a search with "Manchester" and "synagogue" as search terms,

and some additions that Nexis had skipped). *The Guardian* does not often allow comments under its articles, especially not on topics related to immigration, race, Islam and gender, and there is no comment thread to look at under any of the four opinion articles, two editorials and 39 news articles I collected for the same interval. It is impossible to say, based on similar evidence, what a *Guardian* reading public would have said about the same issues.

58 I have only been able to illustrate how, on a tragic day, confronted with murderous Jew hatred and with evasive, obfuscating responses from left-liberal "progressives", the *Telegraph* community of readers showed a face of Britain that abhors antisemitism, can see clearly through its many disguises, and are not taken in by the state's attempt to control the narrative. From the discourse analyst's point of view, the thread is an excellent illustration of "frame resistance". It shows an audience who are arguing back, rejecting the arguments they are presented with and the conclusions they are invited to draw, as based on falsehoods and unacceptable values, and replacing them with alternative arguments of their own.

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NOTES

1. The term “frame resistance” is borrowed from Lecheler and de Vreese (2018), where it is used only once, in passing on page 44, and not given the significance which I think it deserves.
2. I have used Antconc (Anthony 2026) for concordances.
3. These references are to the Pakistani “grooming/ rape gangs” and the Southport tragedy of 29 July 2024 (a mass stabbing of children at a dance class by a young man of Rwandan origin). The Rape Gang Inquiry Report, an independent inquiry chaired by Rupert Lowe MP, was released on 16 June 2026, and can be accessed at http://bit.ly/4uE5odw.

ABSTRACTS

This paper looks at readers’ reactions to the Manchester synagogue attack of 2 October 2025 in the comment thread to the first *Daily Telegraph* article published on that day. What do these reactions show about a section of public opinion in Britain regarding Israel, “Palestine” and Islam, and about social cohesion in Britain, two years after the most brutal attack on the Jews since the Holocaust? What familiar “progressive” ways of framing Britain are seen to jar with sections of public opinion and thus fail in their persuasive effects? The analysis shows a public on whom the intended framing effects of relentless anti-Israel propaganda no longer hold any sway. It shows how, unlike the British establishment, the *Telegraph* reading public identifies the sources of Jew hatred with precision: Islamism and the “unholy alliance” between the radical left and radical Islam. This public ironically anticipates and parodies every strategy said to belong to the standard official “script” or “playbook” for responding to Islamist attacks, making transparent the government’s manipulative attempt to “control the narrative”, deflect blame and defuse legitimate anger.

INDEX

Keywords: antisemitism, comment thread, frame resistance, framing effects, Islamism, Manchester synagogue attack

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