How David Miller's description of Jewish students contributed to the systematic othering of British students.

I will use David Miller's disbarment from the University of Bristol as my central case study, to argue that his reference to Jewish students as *pawns* of the State of Israel on 'British Campuses' reinforced the controlling image of Jewish people as a homogenised collective, contributing to the systematic othering of British Jews.

Miller was disbarred from the university because of the harmful rhetoric he perpetuated on a zoom call regarding an online campaign for free speech. When discussing Jewish students who attend the University of Bristol, he claimed that 'there is a real question of abuse here, of Jewish students on British campuses being used as political pawns.' He can be characterised as antisemitic according to the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance's definition of antisemitism, which the University of Bristol adopted in 2019. The definition states, 'manifestations might include the targeting of the State of Israel, conceived as Jewish [collectivity]',[1] which is something he achieved on his zoom call. In this context, Miller is dehumanising Jewish students, viewing them as *pawns*, objects that are part of a game rather than individual people. The OED defines the word 'pawn' as 'any of one of the 16 pieces of smallest size, value and capability in a game of chess' (OED, sv.

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[1] 'What is antisemitism?', *International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance'*
<https://holocaustremembrance.com> [accessed 04.02.2022]

'Pawn' 1.) Describing students as *pawns* suggests that Jewish students are controlled by a player or in this case a higher power; reinforcing Miller's idea that Jewish students are part of a wider group with no capability to act on their own accord in the real world.

To understand the severity of this comparison we must return to the term 'Jewish Collectivity'[2] which draws attention to the antisemitic trope of viewing Jewish people as a group rather than individuals, in this case Miller views students as *pawns* in a game. I believe he fixates on Jewish students as a homogenised collective because of the controlling image of Jewish people that he appears to be attached to, that being that Jewish people are intrizically connected to a country and its ideologies rather than the country that they associate with their own nationality.

I will use Patricia Hill Collins' theoretical framework on 'controlling images'[3] to consider the 'suberalternising mechanisms'[4] that the controlling image (generically known as the stereotypical image) of Jewish people maintains. Patricia Hill Collins argues that controlling images 'Within … culture, racist and sexist ideologies permeate the social structure to such a degree that they become hegemonic, namely, seen as natural, normal and inevitable.'[5] While Collins is referring to her example of how controlling images of black

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[2] Ibid.

[3] Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment* (New York: Routledge, 2009)

[4] Ibid.

[5] Ibid. P.5.

women operate in the US (and later black men), her phrasing can be applied to any instance of when controlling images function in the world. Collins explores the idea that 'ideologies'[6] that are routed in racism and sexism are embedded in our society, creating a space for controlling images to operate in. The 'ideologies'[7] that Miller fixates on relate to the loyalty of Jewish people. He uses an 'embedded'[8] opinion that Jewish people have more of an alliance with the State of Israel than their own country and associates a religious identity with nationality. The idea that controlling images are seen as 'natural, normal and inevitable'[9] is also essential to consider when looking at my case study because it frames Jewish students as having an animalistic instinct to pledge allegiance to a country they may have no affiliation with.

To understand how these controlling images force Jewish people to remain othered in society, one must understand how they have become part of society's fabric or 'natural',[10] as Hill Collins suggests. One of the most notorious controlling images that have been used to isolate Jewish people throughout history is that Jewish people are money-motivated and want to control the world. Modern-day iterations of this image have linked the desire for control with Zionism or the State of Israel. Norman Cohn provides an example

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[6] Ibid. P.5.

[7] Ibid. P.5.

[8] Ibid. P.5.

[9] Ibid. P.5.

[10] Ibid.

of how these controlling images have operated on extreme levels to subalternate and even

'exterminate'[11] in cases such as the holocaust Jewish people. He states that 'Exterminatory

antisemitism appears where Jews are imagined as a collective embodiment of evil, a

conspiratorial body dedicated to the task of ruining and then dominating the rest of

mankind.'[12] 'Ruining and then dominating the rest of mankind'[13] is the critical fabric of every

iteration of controlling images of Jewish people. These images revolve around inciting fear

when Jewish people are grouped together while suggesting that this group have no personal

control. This perpetuated view that Jewish people lack agency is extremely interesting

because of the contradictory way it is used, and this idea is prevalent in the language and

rhetoric of David Miller.

    As previously discussed, Miller called all Jewish students *pawns*, a term that exists in

two contexts, either as chess pieces or as part of a pawnshop, linking to the phrase *to pawn.*

Before exploring how the term *pawn* operates to other Jewish students, I will examine the

implications of the term *pawn* in scholarship. The term is used in social policy scholarship to

refer to a group of people who 'don't respond to incentives or dicentives.'[14] This idea can be

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[11] Norman Cohn, 'The myth of the Jewish world conspiracy**:** A case study in collective

psychopathology', *Commentary,* 41 (1966), 35-42 (p.35).

[12] Ibid.

[13] Ibid.

[14] Julian Le Grand, 'Knights, Knaves or Pawns? Human Behaviour and Social Policy*', Journal of Social

Policy,* 26 (1997), 149-169 (p.158).

applied to controlling images of Jewish people. if we return to the concept that Jewish

people are seen to be controlled by an innate desire to rule the world. Then, from a social

policy perspective this is a desire fuelled by no incentives meaning Jewish people are just

'pawns' who will act in a way that some form of higher power, Jewish desire, or the State of

Israel will dictate them to. I believe that this idea of a complicit unison is apparent in the

way Miller refers to Jewish students.

In addition, the term *pawn* raises connotations of controlling images of Jewish

people in a more historically significant way. Cohn argues that Jewish people are socially

isolated because 'it has happened again and again that Jews, because of their peculiar

history, have been pioneers in trade and money-lending'.[15] He argues that the history of the

antisemitic trope of Jewish people as money-hungry of even more specifically, money-

hungry stingy people is because of the history of Jewish people's occupations. Jewish people

have been seen throughout history, literature, and films, as people who run pawnshops or

are money lenders, these people tend to be characterised as 'creepy' or 'evil'. These traits

are heightened by a physical appearance that plays into the stereotypes of Jewish people

such as big noses. Jewish people typically throughout history assumed the roles of money-

lenders in England, this was the case when Jewish people mass-migrated in the late 1200's.

Jewish people assumed the role of money-lenders because the Catholic Church declared

that usury (lending money with interest) was illegal for Christians. These declarations were

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[15] Norman Cohn, 'The myth of the Jewish world conspiracy: A case study in collective

psychopathology', *Commentary,* 41 (1966), 35-42 (p.35).

constantly changing, but this arguably laid the groundwork for specific controlling images about money hungry Jewish people. Circling back to Hill Collins ideas, this is because the historical occupations of Jewish people has led to controlling images associated with the religion to become ingrained in society. It is clear then, that the term *pawn* is multi-faceted but has been used to isolate Jewish people throughout history.

Overall, by grouping Jewish students together and viewing them as a homogenized collective, David Miller has othered Jewish students at the University of Bristol. He has done this through describing students as *pawns*, a term that has stripped Jewish students of individual agency. This term further enforces money-hungry controlling images of Jewish people, creating an unsafe space on campus for Jewish students to express their religious identity.