Nazism and Neo-Nazism in Film and Media

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Published by Amsterdam University Press

Lee, Jason.
Nazism and Neo-Nazism in Film and Media.
Amsterdam University Press, 2018.
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3. Nazism, Neo-Nazism, and Comedy

In the run up to the American presidential election in 2016 a whole raft of comedians mocked Donald Trump, but this did not damage his power base. Any transgression via satire and comedy could be used to reassert the status quo. Trump was no long considered a joke when he started to implement his policies. This chapter considers comedy, Nazism and neo-Nazism in film and media, with reference to theorists on transgression, such as Chris Jenks and Julia Kristeva, and novels and televisions shows that gained media attention. Taste is key to any discussion of comedy. Surf Nazis Must Die (Peter George, 1987) is a prime example where all forms of taste are contested, both in terms of content and aesthetics. With laughable production values, ludicrous dialogue, and an insane plot, the film is wrong on many levels but still works. Set in a post-apocalyptic world, this is a comedy revenge story of black empowerment. Leroy's mama (Gail Neely) goes after the gang of neo-Nazis who have murdered her son. The film succeeds in indicating how absurd Nazi-related belief systems are, with the neo-Nazis doing Hitler salutes on surf boards.

Another excellent example is Look Who’s Back, a comedy film directed by David Wnendt in 2015, based on the bestselling satirical novel of the same name by Timur Vermes. This could be criticized for being purely about controversy and entertainment. This implies there is something wrong with both of these categories, suggesting there always needs to be an educational value. Often the educational value of any work of art is in the interpretation. Vermes obviously felt a need to spell out that his novel was a work of fiction, given at the beginning he states that certain people have not met Hitler (played by Oliver Masucci in the film). This is part of the joke that feeds into the idea that there are actually various versions of Hitler. The underlying more serious point is that we all have Hitler within us, as does every nation. We just may not know it yet.

In Look Who’s Back Hitler returns from the dead. In some sense we have all met Hitler, or we believe we have. This encounter with the various forms of Hitler or the Nazis takes different forms, whether it is; the comedy Hitler of American Mel Brooks; the British entertainer Freddy Starr; the partying Nazi of Britain’s Prince Harry; the cool Hitler of David Bowie; or the depressed and lost Hitler of Bruno Ganz in Downfall (Oliver Hirschbiegel, 2004). Or even as a young man in Liverpool, as in Beryl Bainbridge’s 1978 novel Young Adolf. We can all suggest ways on how to ‘improve’ Hitler, explicitly for comedy impact, if nothing else. Another paradox is that if we
were to portray a Hitler, or to reenact an exact Hitler, returning from the dead as a saint, we would have to contend with the controversies around sainthood. For example, Mother Teresa and Pope John Paul II have both been accused of fascist activities, as has Pope Francis. Once again, we do need to be careful how we use the terms ‘fascist’ and ‘neo-Nazi’.

From a novelist’s perspective, the prose of Look Who’s Back in the early stages could easily be attacked in terms of its style. For example, Hitler narrates, ‘seeing as I did not drink’, which is an obvious well-known fact, and ‘I turned my head’, the latter phrase being unnecessary. But the narrator here is Hitler himself. Being critical of Hitler for being bad at prose, or criticizing Vermes for not being particularly prosaic, or praising Vermes for making this deliberately bad to simulate Hitler’s incompetence or awkwardness, would be inaccurate. This is, therefore, an excellent novelistic device to indicate Hitler’s and our discombobulation. This may also be a problem with translation, from German into English. Plus, with the dictator suddenly appearing in the twenty-first century, after being dead for over 60 years, his language and point-of-view narration and sense of being is bound to appear strange.

Hitler sets this us up in his introduction with the point that this might be comic, as it was in the trenches, but there are paradoxes given the tragedy underlying Hitler’s original impact. What is highlighted is that people will do anything to get ratings for a television show and are not in the slightest bit interested in truth. This in itself is not funny, original, or news, but what is interestingly controversial is how the overt racism becomes a spine within the novel. It is up to the reader to judge whether the author challenges this racism. Could the author be accused of attempting to gain cheap racist laughs, for example? This is debatable and might conceivably be judged to be verisimilitude, with racism still ubiquitous and increasing, especially concerning immigration and Islam. The Turks come under attack in this sense, especially in the laundry scene in both book and film. The Turks recognize him and ‘cleanse’ him, getting him ready for his performance on television. This implies that the leader of any state is always dependent on the underclass, even if it is a despised class that must be destroyed. Hitler’s main motivation was not simply to destroy all Jews, but to bring down civilization. This could be described as a class war but even that is not going far enough. At every stage, given this is Hitler narrating, the author can hide behind the narrator.

If all we can perceive are mediated images then the conclusion must be that we do not own our consciousness – the media does. This moves us away from Bergson’s view on the images constructed by our memory, and his
arguments against realism and idealism, to a fusion with Jean Baudrillard's and Guy Debord's take on the world. Of course, the resurrected Hitler must learn about the world through whatever channels he can, including the television and the Internet. What he discovers is that most channels are not being used for 'propaganda', in his opinion, but for cooking shows. Hitler is correct in his judgement that these are gruesome and in many ways offensive. This is humorous, but it unwittingly ignores the wider point that these television shows are a form of propaganda by the state far subtler than anything Hitler imagined, hence capitalism has had a longer reign. The propaganda of capitalism has worked so well that most people, of the left and the right, find it inconceivable that any other system should exist.

Hitler believes television is the medium of the age, but this is where the novel in terms of the media and neo-Nazism appears already out of date, given everything is on YouTube. When Hitler starts shouting at the television, because he thinks it knows what he is doing, this is for pure comic impact, drawing on the clichés of the loud, bad and mad Führer. No acknowledgement is made of the technology that does already exist, such as Netflix, which actually follows exactly what you watch, and suggests shows to you, starting you at the point in the programme from where you left off, and so on. Hitler's assessment of the point we have reached is still enlightening. Why do these shows always have to repeat what they have told us, at length, as if we are morons, with the memory of a goldfish?

He has further comic insight into the Internet, especially Wikipedia, whose content, he quickly observes, can be made up as you go along – which has its advantages. We do not need a fascist dictator returned from the dead to tell us this, but for someone new to the Internet like this Hitler, this is interesting in terms of its potential for propaganda. In a fascist regime facts no longer matter, as people have continually pointed out with Donald Trump. When Hitler wastes three hours playing the game Minesweeper we all can empathize, as most people are aware of the addiction of games or new technologies. In this sense, it is maintained that it does not take long for someone from the past to adjust to the present, however deluded or mad they are. This is an interesting observation, implying Hitler returns from the dead with a childlike openness to the new, rather than a closed-off mind.

Hitler believes this ‘programme’ they are all talking about is his mission and programme for the German ‘race’, not just a television programme. Despite an ongoing emphasis on the rapid change in technology, Hitler existed less than 70 years before the action in this fiction. The war necessitated advancements in technology, such as the innovations of Alan Turing,
which pioneered the modern computer. It is hard to conclude from this that Vermes is in any way promoting the notion that it was through the Nazis that technological developments were enhanced, although Hitler’s knowledge of the actual war becomes a rather didactic history lesson for those ignorant of the facts. The argument here is that fiction can educate and warn people in a more interesting fashion than dry history books, offering the potential to counteract neo-Nazism.

The actual format of the narrative is not new. In the 1970-1971 UK television series *Catweazle*, an eleventh-century wizard accidentally travels through time to 1969. The technology is much harder to grasp, and believed to be magic, dealt with by the time traveller through incorporating modern language into his own mental framework, with words such as ‘elec-trickery’ and the ‘telling bone’. Magic is paradoxically an essential element to Hitler’s propaganda. He understands that these advancements in technology are due to the hard work of the German people and their amazing industry. They might metaphorically be miracles for Hitler, but they are also another example of the supernatural superiority of the German race.

The comedy is contemporary and comments on political positions and psychological states. Hitler’s view on Angela Merkel as a mother figure, or at least his reading of the media’s view being this, is one that many Germans when the book was first published and film released might acknowledge. Hitler here is the voice of the people. In reality, rather than being a steady presence, however, there is criticism and concern from German academics over her fickleness, as evidenced by her policies on nuclear power and immigration. This weakness could actually be a strength, given her ability to be flexible and make fast decisions. Hitler himself, in this novel at least, claims this is the primary duty of the Führer. You do not need the support of the Volk. All you need is the ability to make decisions. This logic has filtered into many industries, and is promoted as a sign of strength in a leader, despite the possibility of it leading to long-term, disastrous consequences. There are number of politicians of the contemporary period, such as George Osborne, the UK’s Chancellor of the Exchequer from 2010 to 2016, who stuck to their decisions, no matter what, for the sake of ideology. From this perspective, we can view Merkel’s position as being much more rational. Hitler in *Look Who’s Back* is condemned for being mad, because people think he believes he is Hitler, but he actually is Hitler. Whether Hitler was mad or not is another question. In this fiction he is psychotic in his continued hatred for the Jews and anyone non-Aryan and in his obsessive mission. Whether a pathological hatred of the other is madness is arguable, as definitions of madness are cultural.
The sensitivities over Nazism and Hitler are played out in the novel, when even the wearing of a uniform is in question, as if it is remarkable that you can get away with wearing a ‘real’ Nazi uniform. Hitler re-appears in the place he always was, suggesting he has never gone away. Whether Germany has taken decisions to bury its past, ignore its past, resist or change its past, or accept its past, all roads lead back to Hitler. Germany now leads Europe, so where would they have been without him? Given all the post-war support Germany received, one can make a perverse argument that Hitler’s self-destruction led to their predominance within Europe, especially its economic leadership. In terms of the multiplicity of Hitler, he is in everyone.

Hitler in this fiction feels successful, given the number of Jews in Germany is now so low. Israel is positioned in the middle of the Arabs, which according to Hitler is great as it keeps them occupied. Having Hitler point out the absurdities of history and geo-politics is obviously contentious and dangerous, but it does emphasize the absurdity of many global situations. In this sense, while many who meet Hitler think he is a mad man, akin to those who think they are Napoleon or Cleopatra, his take on the current situation in Germany is enlightening. Who exactly is the mad one in this context? Rather than Hitler being mad, is it more accurate to pinpoint the insanity as being a group psychosis of the politicians and even wider madness of the general population of Europe who accept what they are told?

The English comedian Sacha Baron Cohen has frequently been criticized for mocking various nationalities, or even regions, such as the north of England. In the television show in *Look Who’s Back* Hitler gets a part on stage following on from a man who mocks certain ethnicities and nationalities for cheap laughs. Full of irony, Hitler lambasts the man for using all sorts of clichés about foreigners, claiming these are serious issues which should not be debased for comic reasons. Translating humour is difficult. Baron Cohen’s various incarnations, from the UK television show character Ali G, to Borat Sagdiyev in the Oscar-nominated feature film *Borat: Cultural Learnings of America for Make Benefit Glorious Nation of Kazakhstan* (Larry Charles, 2006), to gay Austrian journalist Brüno Gehard, to Admiral General Aladeen, and Nobby Butcher, do not necessarily mock the region they are from, but those who encounter them, who are unaware he is in disguise.

The double-BAFTA-winning *Da Ali G Show* (2000 to 2004) is a pre-eminent example of this, which might be lost in translation. Ali G, using the mask of an Asian wide boy from Staines, actually mocks everyone around him, including politicians, who do not understand his real identity. Those in authority and part of the establishment are duped into believing they are becoming more authentic conversing with a person they assume is authentic,
and the voice of the youth culture, when he is actually inauthentic. Part of
the joke is that they take him seriously, even his most outrageous views.
The controversial side to Ali G is that he can make homophobic comments
that are framed as jokes, but people who are homophobic may actually see
these remarks as supporting their homophobia.

Vermes’ Hitler is in some sense the opposite. He is the real Hitler, mis-
taken for a fake, but he is so good at his performance that he really does
unsettle people. For the programme makers in this fictional world he has
re-invented comedy that is cutting edge and is not just about mocking other
people. The amazing thing about this creation is that people might believe
in him, not merely in his veracity through his authentic performances, but
in his actual mission. And this is the nexus of the novel. He gains followers
from different sectors in the community. History appears to have been
forgotten or German guilt overcome, so that the so-called real German belief
can come through. Placed in the context of Donald Trump’s later victory,
this should have been considered to be a prophetic warning. What this new
Hitler does is offer authenticity, just as Trump claimed to do.

From 2009, during the period the book was written, there was a rise in
neo-Nazism in Germany and across Europe. Because of the legacy of Nazism,
the notion of closing borders and turning back refugees is far more conten-
tious for Germany than most other countries. In 2017 Trump demonized the
whole of Europe as being the zone of terrorism, where all acts of violence
occurred. He falsely claimed European media did not report terrorist at-
tacks, using this falsity to support his ban on people travelling to America
from seven Muslim countries and refugees from Syria. Of course, the high
number of people killed in America by white separatists is significant, but
Trump’s aim was to promote a climate of fear to justify building up the
American military. In Germany immigration was also a central issue, but
immigrants are not totally banned.

These sensitivities have an impact on the way the media operates. On 9 April 2016 Netflix began streaming the television adaptation of the
novel Look Who’s Back, but not in Germany or World War II territories or
Germany’s allies, including Austria, Japan, Slovakia, the Czech Republic,
the Netherlands, Belgium, Luxembourg and Taiwan. An Italian version
featuring Mussolini was developed. This had a wider implication in Italy,
where Silvio Berlusconi has held a wide variety of senior political positions,
including Prime Minister, for a total of nine years and been a member of the
lower house for nineteen years. Unlike Merkel, his influence in Europe has
not been felt to be benign and he is surrounded in controversy. Berlusconi
is the nexus where politics and media unite, given he has the controlling
shareholder of Mediaset, and was ranked by *Forbes* in 2009 as the twelfth most powerful man in the world.

All of this is far more transgressive in Germany. In other countries there has been a satirical genre mocking the Nazis and Hitler. In America, there was Mel Brooks’ *The Producers* (1967). In the UK, there have been a variety of comedy programmes, such as *Monty Python’s Flying Circus*, where in one sketch, broadcast 4 January 1970, Mr. Hilter (sic) is staying in a bed and breakfast in England. Here it is the insanity of the English that is emphasized, with one couple arriving and the husband proceeding to describe their journey in excruciating detail. This is an accurate portrayal of how English people behave. The joke gets more intense when they are introduced to the other guests, including Mr. Hilter’s table. The Germans are studying a map to fathom the logistics behind an invasion. The English man then proceeds to berate them for not travelling in the direction he suggests across England. This English male habit of always needing to be right, and always controlling the route, is what is fascist here and comic. Hilter is dressed in a Nazi uniform, as are his comrades, but there are no swastikas, and they are just trying to get on with their business. The whole absurdity of a bed and breakfast, where people are forced to be public whilst paying money for a private holiday, is also highlighted. As with *Look Who’s Back*, the fascism and the insanity is obviously not that of Hitler or Mr Hilter but the contemporary society. In this instance, it is John Cleese who is playing Mr. Hilter/Hitler, to good effect.

The now classic *Fawlty Towers* episode ‘Don’t Mention the War!’ (season 1, episode 6, aired on 24 October 1975) is another relevant sketch. Cleese already had a reputation for his comic long legs, and his Ministry of Silly Walks character (from *Monty Python’s Flying Circus*) often used ridiculous Nazi goose-steps. As hotel manager Basil Fawlty he confronts a German family in his restaurant, all the while insisting to employee Polly (Connie Booth), ‘Don’t mention the war’. The more you ignore something the more it resurfaces, as a famous Austrian and contemporary of Hitler, Sigmund Freud, discovered. In a dazed and confused condition (having hit his head), Basil Fawlty takes the food order of the guests and reads it back to them, using the names of the Nazi hierarchy in the place of the dishes. One of the female guests bursts into tears while Fawlty launches into a full-blown Hitler imitation, with his finger under his nose and the crazy walk. The misunderstanding over ‘who started it’ – either the war or the argument in the dining room – turns into a ‘we won the war’ statement after Fawlty is stopped from telling a joke about a bomber headed for Berlin. Fawlty excuses his behaviour by claiming that he is just trying to cheer the crying
woman up. This is confirmation to him that the Germans have no sense of humour. In 1978 the show was sold to 45 stations in seventeen countries and was the BBC’s best-selling overseas program for that year.

Many other comedians have utilized Hitler in a variety of comedy sketches. For example, there is the Armstrong and Miller Show sketch (in season 3, episode 5) about Hitler, where classified information concerning the Nazis is phoned through from Germany to London. A man who has been constructing bawdy songs in a bar to boost troop morale is then handed the ‘facts’: ‘Hitler has only got one ball, Goering has two, but small; Himmler, has something similar, but poor old Goebbels has no ball at all.’ His previous songs, such as, ‘Goering’s piss is filled with diseases, that’s why he has to piss with tweezers,’ have been conjecture, but now they have the ‘facts’. With this it is apparently game over for the Germans. ‘Gentleman, I think we have won ourselves a war’. The Nazis then sing, ‘Churchill has a large cock’, but then question whether this is meant as a compliment or not, at first thinking this is an insult.

Just as Shakespeare used a disability based on an alleged fact to construct Richard III’s character, disability is equated with not just moral weakness but evil. The obsession with Hitler’s balls has not dissipated. Hitler’s medical records appeared for auction in Bavaria in 2010, but were swiftly confiscated by the Bavarian government. It took until 2015 before Professor Peter Fleischmann of the University of Erlangen-Nuremberg became the first person to analyse them. What he discovered was that Hitler suffered from right-side cryptorchidism, that is, an undescended right testicle. The medical report dated to 1923, following Hitler’s failed Beer Hall Putsch. This seemed to contradict the report and evidence given in 1943 by Hitler’s childhood doctor, when he was interrogated by the Americans and informed them that Hitler’s genitals were normal. The obsession with Hitler’s balls is overtly comic in itself, and underlying it is the notion that a ‘monster’, like Richard III, should have some form of disability.

Comedy can function specifically as a form of nostalgia, asserting that the past was always better than the present, a key theme of many right-wing movements, such as UKIP. The British television sitcom ‘Allo ‘Allo! (1982-1992) epitomizes the use of nostalgia. Staring Gorden Kaye and set in a café in German-occupied France, it primarily uses farce, fake accents and sexual innuendo for its comedy. There is an overarching narrative to the whole programme concerning stolen art (The Fallen Madonna with the Big Boobies), but the following tagline neatly sums up the whole series. ‘Meet René, the most wanted man in Occupied France. Women want his body. The Resistance want his brain. And the Nazis want his sausage.’ Sex
dominates everything. In season 1, episode 8, when René’s wife catches him with another woman, he explains that he is teaching her martial arts to stop her being ravished by the Germans. The Nazis are made to look ludicrously old fashioned and pedantic.

By 2009, *Downfall* (2004), referred to in *Look Who’s Back*, had become one of the top 25 films parodied on YouTube. These parodies included Hitler ranting because a pizza was late, because Oasis had split up, and due to a parking problem in Tel Aviv. There is always a question over the purpose of comedy in this context. For Daniel Gross the problem with most contemporary Nazi comedies is that they are humorous, but nothing more. Charlie Chaplin made *The Great Dictator* in 1940, but writing in his autobiography in 1964 he claimed if he had known of the concentration camps he could not have made the film. There are deep questions concerning using this topic for comedy but these various forms of Hitler mock both Hitler and his ideology, functioning as satire and often serving a political purpose. Rather than hit out at the YouTube parodies, the producers of *Downfall* went on to make the film version of *Look Who’s Back* where Hitler indeed becomes a YouTube star. The climax is when it is realized that Hitler is not a ‘real’ comedian but the ‘real’ Hitler. When a TV producer wants to murder him, Hitler comments that it is impossible to get rid of him, as he is part of everyone. This is not mere sophistry or postmodernism but fact. Hitler is not merely a character stemming from the imagination.

Germany defines itself in opposition to Hitler, given every time ‘Hitler dies on a movie screen, every time he’s reduced to a pathetic and bumbling fool, society reasserts its loathing for Nazism’. It is the parodies on YouTube of *Downfall* that have been seen by millions of viewers, not the film. For Gross, when these comedies work they enable audiences to understand the past and reinterpret the present, which helps them see injustice, but on the other hand they can just ‘allow’ viewers to look away. This tends to come back to the purpose of art, briefly discussed in the opening of this chapter. Nazis are sometimes innately humorous, especially Hitler with his weird moustache, tightly wound persona, and rages, an element John Cleese in particular has played with. It does seem wrong that we should laugh at all in the context of 6 million Jews being killed by the Nazis, but is this laughter enabling us to look away?

Freud maintained that laughter was fear appeased; we laugh when someone slips on a banana skin, but it is out of relief that they have not cracked their skull open. The very act of laughter in these circumstances can be a form of transgression, which inevitability reinforces boundaries. In this context, mocking Hitler may actually reassert the status quo, and is not
transgressive or subversively political at all. Transgression then is not the same as total disorder. A border may be crossed, but ultimately it reasserts order, and it is concerned with the limits. Within this mythology, Hitler is a figure who can be mocked in all sorts of ways, to reassert the social order. What is actually being mocked is not Hitler or Nazism or the Jews. What is being mocked is the notion of the absolute ‘other’, that which is also in the German people, and is actually the same as the German people.

To admit this is difficult, however. As Julia Kristeva has explained, it has taken one of the history’s most famous Jewish inventions, psychoanalysis, to help us detect the foreignness in ourselves. Furthermore, as with concepts of pure evil, to split this off, to place this elsewhere, is to place this nowhere, but lends it omniscient power. Kristeva coined ‘the abject’ by an analogy with ‘subject’ (sujet) and ‘object’ (objet), from the same Latin root (jectum, from iacere, meaning ‘to throw’). The abject is that which is ‘thrown away’, or ‘cast aside’ from conscious perception, neither a perceiving subject nor a perceived object, and it is a third state: the shadow of images of the sublime.

When discussing Nazism and the media it is appropriate to explain what evil may consist of. Despite utilizing the interior monologue of the novel as a voice-over, the film version of Look Who’s Back has as its primary focus the character Sawatzki (Fabian Busch). This character, whose name is close to swastika, is the first person connected to the media to discover Hitler (Oliver Masucci). Sacked from his television job as a freelance documentary maker, at home with his mother, he is going through footage connected to a documentary he is making about soccer in an apparently rundown area of Berlin. During this review of his footage he spots Hitler talking to the children playing football, and so the real story begins. These might be difficult times in Germany, with many people unemployed, including those connected with the media. It is through Hitler that Sawatzki, at least, gets his job back. He is like the ‘little man’, who appears in many comedies, from those of Harold Lloyd to Charlie Chaplin, to Woody Allen and Simon Pegg. The thesis is if such a loser can succeed then anyone can, plus it is funny seeing him fail, and sometimes overcome the odds.

In the film, Hitler and Sawatzki tour the country to meet the people, with Hitler doing a number of outrageous stunts, such as shooting a pet dog who will not leave him alone and kicking the lights in of Sawatzki’s mother’s car. Back on the road Hitler has the dead dog with him, using it as a type of ventriloquist doll to macabre comic effect. They also come across football fans who appear to love him, many wanting ‘selfies’ taken with him. On the tour as a whole many people speak to Hitler and say that Germany has ‘gone to the dogs’, and that they need someone like him, a strong leader. Hitler
then is controlling the people as he controls the mouth of the dead dog. The film has Hitler as more of a Borat figure, given it is in some ways harder to show his inner life, and he does speak with more people, ascertaining their views while campaigning.

The novel reveals more of the inner life of Hitler, and shows he does have a human side. Around Christmas time he states he does regret not having a family and he thinks of others he knew in his command that had families, and how important it is to have a representative of the people in your inner circle. At the same time, Hitler admits there are sacrifices that need to be made, and this festival period is a good time for him to read and plan out buildings. The clear point is made in the novel that it does not matter what this comic Hitler says anyway, because people will report what they like. Whether this is a condemnation of the press and the media is unclear. In an interview with Bild the journalist condemns him, and edits his responses, but this only draws more attention to him. The publication in this instance has a mission to bring reconciliation between the Germans and the Jews. The television show Hitler works for is only worried about ratings. Despite how offensive his comments might be perceived to be, overall most of those working with the television channel are pleased, given this draws more attention to him, and works as free publicity. In this sense, the more offensive he is the better.

Conclusions – Comedy and Politics

Comedy occurs unintentionally during serious television programmes, and public mockery can have impact. When the BBC decided to allow the head of the British National Party onto their flagship politics television show Question Time in 2009, many questioned the efficacy of allowing this. A strange form of comedy entered the show, which took place under heated circumstances, with employees of the BBC unable to leave the building given the strength of the protest against Griffin outside the building. In 2016 if another figure arose like Griffin it is hard to believe this would be allowed, given the voice of those opposing freedom of speech is so strong. Jack Straw, Sayeeda Warsi, Chris Huhne, and Bonnie Greer, all appeared along with Nick Griffin. Jack Straw, a Jewish Labour politician, had stirred controversy by stating in 2006 that the Muslim veil was oppressive, and later by his comment in 2011 that Pakistani men see white females as ‘easy meat’. In 2015, Straw was exposed by Channel 4’s programme Dispatches, and The Telegraph, as being willing to take cash for ‘offering services’ in parliament.
Similarly, Baroness Warsi, at the time of the *Question Time* debate Shadow Minister for Community Cohesion, broke the ministerial code multiple times, and numerous controversies over expenses have dogged her. In 2013 Chris Huhne, also on the panel, was sentenced to eight months for perverting the course of justice.

Other than Bonnie Greer, everyone on the panel has since fallen from grace, so the moral high ground of the panel needs questioning. Other than some form of schadenfreude, this is not especially comic, but the point of the show was to expose Griffin for who he was and to make a mockery of him. The claim was that he was racist, so the idea was to show him for what he was, and then make him and his party a laughing stock. On *Question Time* Griffin declared his own father served in the RAF, fighting against the Nazis, so by implication he is not a Nazi, and then attacked Straw personally for his father not fighting against Nazis. All of this stemmed from a question around Churchill, and Griffin uses this to claim Churchill was anti-immigration, and indeed the nationalism expressed through the wars was evidence of this. The first black member of the audience to have a voice calls Griffin disgusting and challenges Griffin to admit that people from ethnic minorities bring something to Britain. Griffin then claims he is continually misquoted in the media, so if you perceive him as a monster this would be understandable, if you believe what they say. The host challenges Griffin, asking him to state which quotes about him are inaccurate. ‘Are you a Holocaust denier?’ he asks. His response is that he did not have a conviction for this, and a member of the audience laughs. ‘Why are you smiling?’ Dimbleby asks Griffin, ‘It’s not particularly funny.’ It might be concluded the audience member is laughing at the audacity of Griffin, and his attempt to deflect the question with Griffin just continuing this ‘comedy’. His response is then to state the Holocaust is used and abused in arguments about immigration.

A number of his own quotes are read out to him, such as, ‘I want to see Britain to become 99 per cent genetically white, just as she was eleven years before I was born.’ In July 2014, Griffin stepped down and was replaced by former teacher Adam Walker. A major period of success for the party was 2008, when the BNP held 50 local council seats, won a seat in the London Assembly, and Griffin and Andrew Brons were elected as Members of the European Parliament. In the 2015 election the party stood eight candidates, a reduction of 330 from 2010, receiving less than two thousand votes. They were then a joke party at this stage, and not a serious threat. It was wrongly assumed the threat of the far right has dissipated. Despite Britain’s First popularity through social media, UKIP appeared as the mainstream alternative, Farage flirting with all manner of racist discourse.
Within two years the leader of the main anti-immigrant party in the UK was now the first political figure to meet the newly elected president, Donald Trump. While the media and popular culture mocked figures such as Nick Griffin, right-wing leaders such as Donald Trump were gaining support from movements headed by people such as Nigel Farage. Politicians and the media did not actually take Trump seriously enough, given his unexpected victory. In a spoof infomercial on Saturday Night Live, ‘Racists for Trump’, a woman is ironing, commenting she likes Trump because he is authentic. Only later do we see she is ironing a KKK gown. A young man states his support for Trump is due to the economy, which he indicates will grow under Trump by raising his arm, revealing a Nazi armband. Despite the mockery, this did not prevent Trump taking power on 20 January 2017, and immediately setting a new agenda of global disharmony.

Trump’s spat with Alec Baldwin for his impression of him on Saturday Night Live is an obvious example of how comedy can antagonize. Whilst victimizing Muslims, immigrants, and other people who might be considered ‘others’, including those who are lesbian and gay, and those who are women, Trump has reinstated himself as a victim. The Nazis turned the whole of Germany into a victim, desperate for revenge. Trump himself is never caught on camera laughing. This lack of an ability to laugh at himself reveals how deeply serious he takes his image as do his allies, for whom image is everything. Steve Bannon as Trump’s chief media manipulator in the White House until August 2017 closely choreographs this, a subject we turn to next.