Twitter Thread by Daniel Randall

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I tend to stay out of IHRA debates, as its working definition of antisemitism has been turned into a shibboleth by both “sides” — claimed as essential protection against antisemitism by some advocates, and a nefarious plot to defend Israel by detractors; in fact it’s neither.

I think the WD has good intentions, and it’s a useful contribution to a discussion that can help broaden and deepen understanding of antisemitism. It’s not the document I’d write personally, but I think it has value. I supported the Labour Party endorsing it.

What I’m against is using something explicitly intended to be “non-legally binding” as a “statutory” document to police speech. Potential negative consequences of endorsement of the WD stem far more from attempts to do that than anything actually written in the WD itself, IMO.

I think that’s what’s now happening in academia. Gavin Williamson is using a drive for endorsement of the WD as part of a wider government-led offensive against free and critical speech, especially in academia. Context matters. That offensive should be resisted.

On the infamous “racist endeavour” example, it’s not true that the WD prevents calling Israel, or its policies, racist, isn’t true. Read it. It says claiming “a” [not “the”] state of Israel is a racist endeavour” *could*, “taking into account the overall context”, be antisemitic.

Some of the IHRA‘s critics seem motivated by the view that criticism of Israel necessarily *can’t be* antisemitic (because it’s criticism of a state, because “not all Jews are Zionists”, etc. etc.), which radically misunderstands contemporary antisemitism.

Personally I think that arguing that Israeli-Jewish nationhood specifically has some racist essence that other national communities don’t have, and which exists in abstraction from any concrete racist policy the actually-existing state of Israel might pursue, is antisemitic.

But I’m not in favour of people being institutionally censored for expressing that view. I’m in favour of them being criticised and opposed, and I’m in favour of their arguments being contested. But I don’t think expressing such a view should be made a “disciplinary” matter.

In general I’m against “zero tolerance” approaches to antisemitism, or any bigotry, either in political movements or academic communities, for largely the reasons set out in this article. “Zero tolerance” is basically inoperable. https://t.co/yQtzkoFcut

The essence of this issue for me is the miring of a discussion that should be about political ideology, and assessments of history, on procedural, bureaucratic, and “legislative” terrain. To meaningfully discuss, and contest, matters of ideology requires genuine free speech.