

How to destroy a Jewish community

The Jews of Oporto, Portugal are under siege.



Kadoorie Mekor Haim Synagogue in Oporto, Portugal.

David Nataf writes in the [Jewish News Syndicate](#):

A [video](#) published a few days ago by the Jewish Community of Oporto, Portugal asks, “So, you don’t like traditional Jews, Jewish success and Israel? You don’t like packed synagogues and the Jewish community teaching people about the Holocaust? The state is at your mercy and you wish to destroy it all? Easy. Get someone to produce anonymous letters with false denunciations of corruption. Get some friendly journalists to publish these denunciations. Get your police to investigate

that fictional corruption. Let them invade synagogues and the homes of leaders. Let them seize everything they find. You might be lucky and there'll be something suspicious."

"But if nothing is found, don't worry," it goes on. "Time is on your side. It will take years for the investigation to be completed. No one will bother you. The Jewish world itself will be paralyzed. The words corruption and police cause people to freeze. You are the greatest, the world is at your feet. But have you really won? Or will you face Jewish resilience? You're the corrupter of the state, the corrupter of civilization."

These words are simultaneously frightening and hopeful. They demonstrate how easy it is to destroy a Jewish community, but also how a small organization can turn the tables and demand an investigation of the persecutors.

In early 2022, the Portuguese police raided the Oporto synagogue on Shabbat eve. The warrants said the community's rabbi was suspected of corrupting the register office. This suspicion was based on an anonymous denunciation.

The Portuguese press falsely associated the word "corruption" with the case of a Russian billionaire from whom the Oporto community received only 250 euros and whose Sephardic origins were determined based on family memories and names like Rosa, Leon and Leiva, which were attested by the rabbinate of the relevant community.

This writer's personal experience living in Israel during three wars, witnessing Thailand's revolution and military coup and observing Myanmar's democratic elections under military rule, provided context to this antisemitism. In all those places, my family never experienced the hostility we faced in Oporto. My own daughter was dubbed an "Israeli terrorist" in 2020. In 2021, my house was smeared with red paint, defacing the mezuzah.

Sadly, the larger Jewish community did little in response to these events. Only a few voices like JNS, the European Jewish Association and Israeli President Isaac Herzog stood up against these veiled, Soviet-style antisemitic attacks.

These attacks specifically targeted Portugal's affluent Jews, especially a French billionaire who seems to be the real target of the police operation. One can assume that the accusations against him are also based on anonymous denunciations more proper to the Middle Ages than modern Europe.

The Portuguese media's narrative of Jewish billionaires carrying suitcases full of money perpetuates antisemitic stereotypes. Given this, the silence from human rights organizations is troubling. It seems to encourage those who seek to harm us. This underlines the need for Israel to strengthen its advocacy for Diaspora communities.

In recent years, antisemitism in Oporto has escalated, with acts ranging from stones thrown at the synagogue to the vandalism of the temple gate by the German Anti Faschistishche Aktion group, which links the synagogue to fascism. No one was safe when the media and political establishments launched a full-scale assault on the community.

In an ironic twist, the Oporto community, which makes up only 0.009% of Portugal's population, finds itself accusing politicians and journalists of corruption. It is a tough battle, but it underscores the resilience of the Jewish spirit. The situation in Oporto serves as a warning: Anonymous slander and hidden hands can stir up antisemitism anywhere at any time.