



STUDIES IN CONTEMPORARY ANTISEMITISM SERIES

# Mapping the New Left Antisemitism

The Fathom Essays

Edited by Alan Johnson



London Centre  
for the Study of  
Contemporary  
Antisemitism



‘Antisemitism has often presented itself as a satisfactory explanation for what is wrong with the world, and repeatedly offered tragic recipes for how to improve that world. Do our moral and political ideals today reproduce past prejudice and projection? We cannot know without reflection, and it is difficult to imagine a better stimulus to reflection than the essays gathered in this informative, wide-ranging, and important volume’.

**David Nirenberg**, *author of Anti-Judaism: The Western Tradition*

‘This is an indispensable volume on an unignorable subject’.

**Anthony Julius**, *author of Trials of the Diaspora: The History of Anti-Semitism in England*

‘Written by many of this generation’s leading scholars, *Mapping the New Left Antisemitism: The Fathom Essays* is a valuable compilation of learned, deeply insightful analyses of contemporary anti-Jewish hostility prevalent in significant strains of western political thought. An eye-opening, much-needed collection, it offers critically important reflections on a phenomenon too often overlooked or denied: the pernicious links between “anti-Zionism” and antisemitism within the political left’.

**Alvin Rosenfeld**, *Professor of English and Jewish Studies and Irving M. Glazer Chair, Jewish Studies Director, Center for the Study of Contemporary Antisemitism, Indiana University at Bloomington, USA*

‘*Fathom* has played an invaluable role challenging some dangerous myths concerning Jews and Zionism that have corrupted parts of the left. This wide-ranging collection will compel anyone concerned with a future left to worry about intellectually and historically simplistic formulas’.

**Mitchell Cohen**, *Professor of Political Science at Baruch College of the City University of New York and the CUNY Graduate Center. 1991–2009 co-editor of Dissent, one of the United States’ leading intellectual quarterlies, now an Editor Emeritus*

‘*Mapping the New Left Antisemitism* is essential reading for anyone interested in one of the most destructive ideologies of the 21st century. It includes essays by some of the most pertinent scholars on antisemitism from the political left and makes the case for the urgency of combating antisemitism in its most modern forms’.

**Gunther Jikeli**, *Erna B. Rosenfeld Professor in Jewish Studies and Associate Director at the Institute for the Study of Contemporary Antisemitism, Indiana University Bloomington, USA*

‘This collection of essays on contemporary left antisemitism showcases the best qualities of Alan Johnson’s *Fathom*, which focuses relentlessly on the heart of the problem of how people relate to Israel. People who consider themselves to be well-informed and anti-racist are too often confused about the facts and prone to stumbling into antisemitic ways of thinking. Johnson is attentive to the temptation to use an invented notion of Jews or Zionism to make sense of a frightening world. He educates about the situation and provides a platform (through *Fathom*) for smart people writing from diverse viewpoints’.

**Rosa Freedman**, *inaugural Professor of Law, Conflict and Global Development at the University of Reading, and a Research Fellow at The London Centre for the Study of Contemporary Antisemitism, UK*

‘In 10 years *Fathom* has already published half a century’s worth of critically important essays and reviews’.

**Michael Walzer**, *Professor (Emeritus) of Social Science at the Institute for Advanced Study in Princeton, NJ; author of Just and Unjust Wars (1977), among other books; former co-editor of Dissent magazine for twenty years*

# MAPPING THE NEW LEFT ANTISEMITISM

*Mapping the New Left Antisemitism: The Fathom Essays* provides a comprehensive guide to contemporary Left antisemitism.

The rise of a new and largely left-wing form of antisemitism in the era of the Jewish state and the distinction between it and legitimate criticism of Israel are now roiling progressive politics in the West and causing alarming spikes in antisemitic incitement and incidents. *Fathom* journal has examined these questions relentlessly in the first decade of its existence, earning a reputation for careful textual analysis and cogent advocacy. In this book, the *Fathom* essays are contextualised by three new contributions: Lesley Klaff provides a map of contemporary antisemitic forms of antizionism, Dave Rich writes on the oft-neglected lived experience of the Jewish victims of contemporary antisemitism and David Hirsh assesses the intellectual history of the left from which both *Fathom* and his own London Centre for the Study of Contemporary Antisemitism, as well as this book series, have emerged. Topics covered by the contributors include antisemitic antizionism and its underappreciated Soviet roots; the impact of analogies with the Nazis; the rise of antisemitism on the European continent, exploring the hybrid forms emerging from a cross-fertilisation between new left, Christian and Islamist antisemitism; the impact of antizionist activism on higher education; and the bitter debates over the adoption of the oft-misrepresented International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) definition of antisemitism.

This work will be of considerable appeal to scholars and activists with an interest in antisemitism, Jewish studies and the politics of Israel.

**Alan Johnson** is the founder and editor of *Fathom* journal. A professor of democratic theory and practice, he has served on the editorial boards of *Socialist Organiser*, *Historical Materialism* and the US socialist journals *New Politics* and *Dissent*. His writings on the left, and on antisemitism, include ‘Aurum de Stercore: anti-totalitarianism in the thought of Primo Levi’, in *Thinking Towards Humanity. Themes From Norman Geras*, edited by Stephen De Wijze and Eve Garrard (2012), and the report *Institutionally Antisemitic: Contemporary Left Antisemitism and the Crisis in the British Labour Party* (2019).

## **Studies in Contemporary Antisemitism**

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Published in conjunction with the London Centre for the Study of Contemporary Antisemitism, *Studies in Contemporary Antisemitism* is a timely, multidisciplinary book series, drawing primarily, but not exclusively, on the social sciences and the humanities. The series encourages academically rigorous and critical publications across several disciplines and that are explicit in understanding and opposing the presence and ascendancy of contemporary antisemitism in both its theoretical and empirical manifestations. The series provides a unique opportunity to offer an intellectual home for a diversity of works that, taken together, crystallize around the study of contemporary antisemitism. The series consists of research monographs, edited collections and short form titles.

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### **Mapping the New Left Antisemitism**

The Fathom Essays

*Edited by Alan Johnson*

# MAPPING THE NEW LEFT ANTISEMITISM

The Fathom Essays

*Edited by Alan Johnson*

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*Dedicated with love to Debbie and our children  
Ellie and Michael.*





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and Palestinian. I would like to express my gratitude for the granting of permission to reproduce essays from *Fathom* that first appeared elsewhere: to *Dissent* for the essay by Michael Walzer, to the Alliance for Workers' Liberty for Sean Matgamna's essay and to Indiana University Press for the extract from my own essay 'Denial: Norman Finkelstein and the New Antisemitism'. Thanks for the helpful comments to three anonymous readers and for the encouragement and guidance to Craig Fowlie and Elizabeth Hart at Routledge. I owe a considerable debt to my family for their love, encouragement and unfailing support – to Debbie, Ellie and Michael.

# PREFACE: THE CRITIQUE OF THE CRITIQUE

## Projects

### *Fathom*

This volume is a testament to the *Fathom* project; to its energy, its clarity and its impact. *Fathom* is an online forum for reality-based discourse about Israel and its conflicts with its neighbours; and for thinking about the antisemitism that associates itself with discourse about Israel.

In January 2001, the Israeli–Palestinian peace process collapsed, at least *that* process did, and for *that* period. The following September, antizionism, for which it is axiomatic that such a peace process could never succeed, reasserted itself in the global left and liberal imagination as the common-sense view at the Durban World Conference against Racism. A week later, planes slammed into the World Trade Center in New York, into the Pentagon and one was prevented by a heroic struggle from slamming into the White House. The Durban programme for ‘Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions’ (BDS) against Israel was taken up by academics in London, who agitated for the exclusion of Israelis from university campuses. The academic unions in Britain did not adopt a boycott of Israeli universities, but they did allow the boycotters to create a culture in which, by 2009, there were no Jews left in their decision-making structures who were willing and able to argue against antizionism, or the antisemitism that came with it, and which inspired it.

*Fathom* was created in 2012, in the wake of the University and College Union (UCU) defeat of the activists who were challenging its antisemitic culture and norms; and at a time when antisemitism was spreading from the academic union into the key activist layers of the labour movement and the

left. By 2015, the Labour Party had elected Jeremy Corbyn as leader, a man steeped in a lifetime of antizionist politics who not only called Hamas and Hezbollah his ‘friends’ but claimed that Hamas were ‘bringing about long-term peace and social justice and political justice in the whole region’ (see Hirsh 2018:43).

*Fathom* was well established by then and it was in a position to offer an intellectual and political lead to those who wanted to understand the Labour antisemitism storm, and to those who found themselves inside it. *Fathom* offered a space for the resistance to Labour antisemitism to think and to debate, to learn and to teach.

Alan Johnson’s own 30,000-word 2019 *Fathom* report, *Institutionally Antisemitic: Contemporary Left Antisemitism and the Crisis in the British Labour Party*, went through 130 examples of Labour antisemitism, giving evidence that they happened, and offering clear explanations of why they were antisemitic (Johnson 2019). It was cited in the damning report of the UK’s Equality and Human Rights Commission into antisemitism in the Labour Party (EHRC 2020). The EHRC report also made it clear that one of the key manifestations of the ‘unlawful harassment of Jews’ in Corbyn’s Labour Party was the assumption of bad faith made against those who reported antisemitism. This was the assumption that people were only pretending to think there was antisemitism, but were in reality ‘faking’ it or ‘smearing’ Corbyn and his faction in pursuance of an unstated underlying motive. The EHRC was re-describing the phenomenon that I had called ‘The Livingstone Formulation’ in the language of UK Equality law (Hirsh 2016). The EHRC drew on the evidence and the understanding that had been developed, nurtured and published by Alan Johnson in the *Fathom* project and by me through the Engage project.<sup>1</sup>

### ***Studies in Contemporary Antisemitism and the London Centre for the Study of Contemporary Antisemitism***

This *Fathom* collection is one of the first books in a new book series, edited by myself and Rosa Freedman. *Studies in Contemporary Antisemitism* is a collaboration between Routledge and the London Centre for the Study of Contemporary Antisemitism (LCSCA) and is one element of an ambitious programme to establish a suite of platforms to publish academic research and debate on contemporary antisemitism. We are also nurturing the *Journal of Contemporary Antisemitism (JCA)* as a high-quality, peer-reviewed, academic platform for publishing research. We are producing policy papers, journalism, blogs, social media and videos, which play important roles in disseminating academic research more widely. We are growing our network of antisemitism scholarship as an international community of research, of reading and writing, and of peer review. Around that academic core, we are developing wider networks of debate, learning and activism.

Both *Fathom* and the London Centre are responses to late 20th-century developments on the left that have contributed to a resurgence of left antisemitism.

### **Transformations: The Rise of a ‘We Are All Hezbollah Now!’ Left**

The left-wing anti-Stalinist tradition in which both Alan and I were formed politically took as its target those unjust social structures of power that excluded the majority of people from the full benefits of the Enlightenment. We thought that our project was to *complete* the Enlightenment for all of humanity, rather than to allow it to remain something that worked best for the privileged. So we were aghast as our students were increasingly taught that far from being the solution, the Enlightenment was the problem. A left and intellectual tradition, which was quite different to our own, taught that the injustices of ancient societies were simply reconstituted by the Enlightenment, but on a more totalising and oppressive basis. This tradition taught that ostensibly liberating ideas and practices, like reason, science, equality, democracy, autonomy and rights, all placed in sneer quotes, in fact constituted the heart of a modernity of unimaginably efficient, rationalised and powerful enslavement, which replaced the piecemeal, personalised and explicit oppression of old. In this view, the Enlightenment was the fall into darkness, not the path towards the light; and it was a fall which, more and more, is now being treated in practice as irreversible. The aspiration to create a new and better world was giving way to an incoherent, furious and negative politics of ‘resistance’.

Hannah Arendt thought that at the heart of 20th-century totalitarianism was an especially toxic ingredient: the breaking free of utopian thinking from immediate, practical and material concerns. That is not to say there is anything wrong with thinking about how to make the world better, only that such thought must not lose its connection with reality. The politics of common interest, and its consequent structures in the modern state and civil society, she argued, binds people into communities that share limited and obtainable goals but totalitarian politics gains a hold where those communal bonds are already cut. And to the extent that those bonds persist, totalitarianism cuts them anyway (Arendt 1951/1985). It preys on ‘masses’ of furious, atomised individuals, who have already been spat out of society, who it teaches to obsess only about a far-off and dreamed future of sweet revenge and utopian comfort. The ‘masses’ that totalitarian politics prey on are people who have no immediate next step forward and no comrades, or even friends or family, to take it with. Totalitarian movements seduce their followers into relating to the world only through the single figure of the strongman leader and the fantasies he sows of revenge and utopia.

In 2001, ‘Stop the War’ originated as a campaign against a particular proposed war, the one against the Taliban in Afghanistan after 9/11. But the

campaign persisted, retaining the same name, when it opposed subsequent wars, in the first place, the 2003 invasion of Iraq. It did not oppose all wars, however; it focused on the wars of the ‘imperialist states’. And in the case of Iraq, it even refused support to the free trade unions that emerged there *after* the invasion. When one of the leaders of these unions, Hadi Saleh, a man arrested and put on death row under Saddam, returned to Iraq to build new free trade unions, he was tortured and murdered by Saddamist hold-outs in 2005. One leading British ‘anti-war’ left-winger, Alex Callinicos of the Socialist Workers Party, sneered at those of us who raised Hadi’s case for creating a ‘hullabaloo’ about a ‘collaborator’ (see Muhsin and Johnson 2006).

This left current gave the name ‘imperialism’ to the democratic states of the West and the name ‘anti-imperialism’ to anyone shooting at those states or their allies. *Anybody* fighting against the imperialist aggressors, or their allies, should be supported. The Trotskyist and Stalinist heritage of many of the Stop the War leaders is relevant here. The old division of the world into two warring camps, one reactionary and one progressive, had meant that even if Stalin was ‘betraying the revolution’ and instigating a rule of terror, one should still ‘defend the Soviet Union’ against ‘the imperialists’. The two camps world view has been updated for today: even if the ‘resistance’ to ‘Empire’ includes antisemitic Islamists, and even if its targets include the 21 Jews, including 16 teenagers, who were murdered by a suicide bomber in 2001 while dancing at the Dolphinarium discotheque, one should never support, but always oppose, any Western attack (or act of self-defence) against that resistance. Stop the War’s one-time Vice President Kamal Majid founded The Stalin Society and argued in 2012 that Syria’s Assads were rulers ‘with a long history of resisting imperialism’ who must be supported ‘because their defeat will pave the way for a pro-Western and pro-US regime’ (Bloodworth 2013).<sup>2</sup>

In this radical transformation of the very meaning of ‘left’, many left and democratic values were sidelined: equality for women, sexual liberation, the fight against antizionist forms of antisemitism, the rule of law, democracy, human rights, freedom of speech, working-class self-liberation, science and reason, respect for minorities and national self-determination. The political significance of this cannot be overstated. Once a transformed left decided to raise the value of a particular understanding of ‘anti-imperialism’ – which can seemingly accommodate even the murder of Jews as Jews – to an *absolute*, assigning it more value than any and all of these other left-wing values, the road was opened to the left chanting ‘We are all Hezbollah now!’; to giving *de facto* support to the Serbia of Milosevic, the Iraq of Saddam, the Iran of the ayatollahs and the Russia of Putin; and to the left-wing academic Judith Butler insisting that ‘understanding Hamas, Hezbollah as social movements that are progressive, that are on the Left, that are part of a global Left, is extremely important’ (Butler 2006).

‘Imperialism’, for this transformed left, does not refer to strong states colonising or controlling weaker states and peoples. It refers to a global system of domination that is said to have arisen in Europe, via the Enlightenment, Colonialism and the Industrial Revolution, which now enslaves the world, is the root cause of bad things that happen to human beings, and at the centre of which, for some left-wingers, sits the only Jewish State in the world. The story of how ‘Zionism’, or ‘Global Zionism’, was added into this all-encompassing concept, so that it became either central to, or symbolic of, this single, global machine of domination, is the story of contemporary left antisemitism and this collection.

### **The Critique of the Critique**

Alan and I trace our own critique of this critique to our formation in the heterodox Trotskyist organisation *Socialist Organiser*, later to become *Workers Liberty* in the 1980s when its main leader and theoretician, Sean Matgamna, and others, were persuading the group to move away from the antizionism that had already become standard on the Trotskyist left, to support the ‘two states for two peoples’ position on the conflict and to recognise, and recognise the significance of, left antisemitism. Though this made the group pariahs on the far-left, Matgamna was influential in the political education of a number of people who later contributed significantly to shaping the response of the Jewish community, and of UK society more generally, to antizionism and its boycott, and to the rise of antisemitism in Corbyn’s Labour Party.

In retrospect, perhaps the most important thing we took from our years in the group was the need to combine intellectual work with practical action. The group was concerned with the far-off goal of remaking the world as it might be, as it should be, but it was also, at least in aspiration, anchored to the world as it was, obsessed by the question of how to ‘seize the next link in the chain’ to make progress towards that new world. That meant the steady work of involvement, hopefully fructifying, in existing organisations. *Socialist Organiser* was, for example, part of the ‘Bennite’ democracy movement in the Labour Party in the late 1970s and early 1980s, of the resistance to the far-left’s drive to ban Jewish Student Societies from UK campuses in the mid-1980s, and of the solidarity networks supporting the strikers and their families in the Notts coalfield during the Great Miners Strike of 1984–1985. It was not our role to substitute for those movements, trading in fantasies of revolutionary violence.

By the early 2000s, we were both increasingly worried by the left-wing movements around us becoming unmoored from the material world and floating off where they fancied. And the scholarly thinking around us no longer seemed to challenge existing inequalities or injustices in any practical way, though it did corrupt ways of thinking about them, co-opting them



into crude, Manichean frameworks, of which ‘Empire’ versus ‘Resistance’ was only one of the crudest. The scholars seemed not to care, or even to notice; they were not connected to any practical sense in which it *mattered*, other than to their own success in constructing rhetorical criticism. We saw a left that was increasingly no longer satisfied with addressing the oppressive structures of social relations, as we had been; they wanted to smash everything: truth, reason, civil society, state, freedom, law, community, nation, democracy and friendship. These were all denounced as the fake productions of those who benefit from ‘the system’, facades to hide reality and to fool the majority into consenting to their own subordination.

One of our common mentors, Robert Fine, who also had a *Socialist Organiser* pedigree, worked hard in the realm of social theory to hold on to both the radicalism and the anti-totalitarianism of the tradition. He argued that we should never let go of the critique of existing conditions, with their injustices, inequalities and violence, but he said that we must also keep a tight hold, with our other hand, of the critique of the critique. By ‘critique of the critique’, he meant a *critical* engagement with those ideas and movements that are oppositional with respect to existing conditions. Perhaps Robert Fine’s key observation, the alarm that his work sounds, is that the significance of left authoritarianism and totalitarianism, their deep roots and lasting legacies have *not* been sufficiently registered inside contemporary radical thinking and politics. Those who champion the radical critique have not always understood their own responsibilities to attend to the critique of the critique (Fine 2001). And we have come to believe that failing is one important reason for the contemporary resurgence of the left antisemitism that is addressed in this collection.

I remember Alan Johnson saying that it was becoming impossible to operate in an intellectual and political environment that was increasingly unmoored from truth, reason and the civilisational gains of the democratic and industrial revolutions. His argument was that we needed to build our own journals and institutions. The unusual thing about Alan was that he did not just say it, but he also did it. In 2005, he built *Democratiya*, a journal of rational, Enlightenment-based thought and politics; visions anchored to the world, and he created it out of nothing, with no money, and he published 16 issues. (*Democratiya* was incorporated into *Dissent* magazine in 2010 and is archived at the *Dissent* website.) At just about the same moment, I came face to face with the common-sense notion that Israel was a unique and symbolic evil on the planet and that we should address it by excluding Israeli scholars from our campuses, our journals and our conferences. The antisemitism, oozing out from every crack of the academic boycott campaign, came to find me. At the time, I was just about beginning to feel I belonged in a university sociology department, but I learnt that I was not at all at home. I was transformed by this antisemitic thinking from a sociologist into a *Zionist*

sociologist, meaning a dishonest, racist and corrupt sociologist. It was clear to me how my exclusion was antisemitic, but that clarity was rare. I, with others, who not entirely accidentally also shared some political heritage with us, set about building the *Engage* network and website, to organise resistance, in practical, political and intellectual terms, to the antisemitism that had been recycled by 20th-century Stalinism and re-disseminated, after the collapse of the peace process, at the Durban *World Conference against Racism* in 2001.

In an inspired moment in 2011, the British Israel Communications Research Centre (BICOM) employed Alan Johnson to reboot its work of promoting awareness and knowledge about Israel in the UK. And in another inspired moment, Alan built *Fathom*; another project to construct our own journals and institutions within which we could take forward serious political education and debate, this time about Israel. In Britain, and not only in Britain, thinking about Israel is significantly connected to antisemitism, so *Fathom* was necessarily concerned with that too. *Fathom* was necessary because rational and reality-based discussion on these topics was increasingly being locked out of the mainstream academic and political discussion in Britain.

*Fathom* has kept on going for over a decade, due largely to Alan's will to make that happen, combined with his talent and his experience in knowing how to make it happen; and his political and intellectual judgement about how it should best navigate the boundaries of the discourse that it needs to cover.

I experienced writing in *Fathom* as a liberation from the gaslighting that passes for peer review inside the institutions of the antisemitic hostile environment that is today's academia. In *Fathom*, you could write what you felt needed to be written, and I think that some of my best writings on antisemitism were published there. Alan Johnson's knowledgeable, decisive and sensitive editing helped too. And *Fathom* was also hugely more nimble than the dinosaur academic journals, where it can take two years to publish an article. And it is all open access, not hidden away behind the exclusive dusty paywalls of the ivory tower.

The scholarly study of contemporary antisemitism, as well as the study of any question that is impacted by antisemitic thinking, is becoming more and more difficult to do within the current university system, some parts of which have even been complicit with left antisemitism. We are significantly excluded from processes of research funding, publishing and the allocation of academic jobs and resources. In politics, and culture more widely, radical democratic thinking on antisemitism has difficulty finding its space in the publications and on the platforms where one might expect to find it. The London Centre aims to build institutions, networks and funding streams to substitute for those that we are locked out of in the universities. This is

not because we want to replicate them and to complete our separation from them but because we want to fight our way back into the mainstream and to transform its culture and its unwritten rules of exclusion. Ours is a hugely ambitious project, to challenge the intellectual underpinnings of antisemitism in public life. It is to change some of the things that have come to appear as common sense. *Fathom*, as an institution, has been doing this work with great effect; not specifically in the universities but in wider civil society and in political life too, as this collection showcases.

David Hirsh

## Notes

- 1 The Engage network was set up in 2005 in response to the passing of some motions at the Association of University Teachers (AUT) Council to boycott Israeli universities. The initiative included the Engage website, edited by David Hirsh, which was a space for news and discussion, and for bringing together facts and arguments that people might want to use to argue against such boycott proposals and against the antisemitism that was associated with them. Available: <https://engageonline.wordpress.com/> (accessed 5 April 2023).
- 2 The ‘two camps’ world view of the transformed left was given candid expression by the Stop the War leader John Rees when he wrote that ‘Socialists should unconditionally stand with the oppressed against the oppressor, even if the people who run the oppressed country are undemocratic and persecute minorities, like Saddam Hussein’ (1994:55). His colleague, the Marxist writer John Molyneux, drew out the logic of this world view to the Israel–Palestine conflict with especial clarity: ‘We on the left should not, I suggest, “condemn” Palestinian suicide bombers’ (2004).

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## **PART 1**

# Introduction and Contexts



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# 1

## INTRODUCTION TO *MAPPING LEFT ANTISEMITISM*

The Fathom Essays

*Alan Johnson*

### Introducing the Journal

*Fathom* was launched in 2012. In our founding statement, the editors expressed the ambition that our new journal about Israel would offer readers tough-minded and expert intellectual analysis, fusing the rigour and intellectual credibility of the old-school journal with the tremendous potential of new publishing technologies and social networks, and would marry a principled and values-based approach to ends to a real-world and prudential approach to means.

Whether those hopes have been met will be for others to judge. What we can say for certain is that in our first decade we have published around 1,000 articles, interviews, reports and reviews; our readers now count in the millions, hail from over 150 nations and include many opinion-formers and decision-makers in universities, foreign ministries, editorial offices, party headquarters and think tanks around the world. Our writers are experts; academics, yes, but also policy analysts, civil society activists and politicians; Israelis and Palestinians; left-wing, right-wing and everything in between; secular and religious.

Two linked concerns have dominated *Fathom's* pages in our first decade.

### Two States for Two Peoples

In 2012, we made this promise: '*Fathom* will be a partisan and artisan of the two-state solution, helping to put some intellectual substance back into the project of mutual recognition and peaceful coexistence between Israelis and Palestinians.' I am not sure we could have tried any harder. With BICOM,



we helped to convene a series of private, track-two dialogues between current and former Israeli and Palestinian officials, academics and activists, designed to generate new ideas to breathe new life into the peace process, writing up the experience as *New Thinking on the Israeli-Palestinian Peace Process: Towards a Hybrid Approach*. We also worked with Ned Lazarus, a vastly experienced grassroots peacebuilder, to produce the major report, *A Future for Israeli-Palestinian Peacebuilding*, something the editors considered central to a revival of the paradigm of mutual recognition that will surely underpin any solution. And in 2021, we collected over 50 *Fathom* essays and interviews to create the eBook *Rescuing Israeli-Palestinian Peace: The Fathom Essays*. At 464 pages, we believe it is one of the most comprehensive collections of expert thinking about the history, present and most importantly the future of the ‘two states for two peoples’ framework for peace.

### Contemporary Left Antisemitism and Israel

In our inaugural issue, writing in response to a rising wave of antisemitism, David Hirsh raised a question – ‘What kinds of hostility to Israel may be understood as, or may lead to, or may be caused by antisemitism?’ – and this has become the journal’s second central concern: the rise of antisemitic anti-Zionism, or contemporary left antisemitism.

We have been insistent that *criticism* of Israeli policy, even sharp criticism, was not to be confused with antisemitism, and we have published much of that criticism ourselves, from Israelis and Palestinians. We focused our attention instead on that darker kind of discourse about Israel that could not be contained by the category of ‘criticism’. We characterised this discourse as ‘antisemitic anti-Zionism’ or left antisemitism. It was, we said, demonising and dehumanising, resurrecting antisemitic tropes in new ‘progressive’ guises, and was bleeding from the sectarian fringe to the mainstream, infecting parts of politics, the academy and civil society. We defined left antisemitism in the following terms in *Fathom*:

[This] strand of distinctively *left-wing* hostility to Jews . . . has never been the dominant strand of opinion on the left, and it is not so today; not by a long chalk. But it has always existed, it is growing today, and it must be part of any account of the breakdown in the relationship between Jews and the left. It was called the ‘socialism of fools’ in the 19th century. It became an ‘anti-imperialism of idiots’ in the 20th century. And it takes the form of a wild, demented, unhinged form of ‘anti-Zionism’ – not mere ‘criticism of Israeli policy’ – that demonises Israel in the 21st century. Antisemitic anti-Zionism bends the meaning of Israel and Zionism out of shape until both become fit receptacles for the tropes, images and ideas of

classical antisemitism. In short, *that which the demonological Jew once was, demonological Israel now is*: uniquely malevolent, full of blood lust, all-controlling, the hidden hand, tricky, always acting in bad faith, the obstacle to a better, purer, more spiritual world, uniquely deserving of punishment, and so on. This antisemitic anti-Zionism has three components: a programme, a discourse, and a movement. First, a *political programme*: not two states for two peoples, but the abolition of the Jewish homeland; not Palestine alongside Israel, but Palestine instead of Israel. Second, a demonising intellectual discourse about Israel . . . Third, antisemitic anti-Zionism is a presence within the global social movement . . . to exclude one state – and only one state – from the economic, cultural and educational life of humanity: the little Jewish one.

(Johnson 2015)

The very existence of left antisemitism remains widely denied on parts of the left. For example, the influential French Maoist philosopher Alan Badiou angrily dismissed the notion of left antisemitism as an ‘oxymoron’, threatening to punch in the face anyone who used the term to him. We saw a willed historical amnesia at work in this kind of response. After all, it was as long ago as the late 19th century that the German Marxist August Bebel, with the encouragement of Friedrich Engels, railed against antisemitism on the left, which he called the ‘socialism of fools’. In 1984, Steve Cohen’s *That’s Funny You Don’t Look Anti-Semitic: An Anti-racist Analysis of Left Anti-Semitism* confronted the left with a century’s worth of examples of left antisemitism. Mining the writings of socialist icon after socialist icon, Cohen excavated a long, shameful and ever-evolving international left-wing *tradition* that had to be seen plain and confronted. He showed that parts of the British left – in this example, the Independent Labour Party – were warning in the 1890s that ‘whenever there is trouble in Europe, whenever rumours of war circulate, and men’s minds are distraught with fear of change and calamity, you may be sure that a hook-nosed Rothschild is at his games, somewhere near the region of the disturbances’ (Cohen 1984:20). We knew that if you jumped forward a century to the mid-1980s you could find parts of the UK far-left trying, to their undying shame, to ban Jewish student societies. And we knew that in the 21st century left antisemitism was on the rise everywhere, not least inside the British Labour Party (Johnson 2019). Hence, the need for the essays collected in this volume.

### Introducing the Collection

*Mapping Left Antisemitism: the Fathom Essays* collects 27 articles and interviews published in *Fathom* between 2013 and 2021 as well as four previously unpublished pieces.

*Part 1 introduces the collection and sets the context for the chapters that follow.*

**Lesley Klaff**, editor of *The Journal of Contemporary Antisemitism*, maps contemporary left discourse, arguing that while left antisemitism has a long history it is most likely to be expressed today as anti-Israel hostility centring on a collection of labels and discourses that construct Israel as an illegitimate state and Zionism as a racist ideology. These labels and discourses – Israel is a ‘Nazi-like’, ‘Apartheid’, ‘Settler-Colonial’ and ‘Pink-Washing’ State, while Jews are ‘White’, ‘Privileged’ and ‘non-indigenous’ – function as continuations or variations of the tropes of classical antisemitism, and are used today to demonise and delegitimise Israel and Zionism. To the degree that those tropes are becoming normalised in progressive American and European circles, the oldest hatred is finding a home there in the form of anti-Zionist antisemitism.

**Dave Rich**, the Director of Policy at the Community Security Trust (CST), the UK’s antisemitism monitoring organisation, focuses on an aspect of contemporary antisemitism that is often neglected in academia, the lived experience of its Jewish victims. Both of these chapters have not been published previously.

**Alan Johnson** then introduces the terms of the bitter division on the left over the existence, character and appropriate political response to left antisemitism in his essay, ‘The Jews and the Left: Time for a Rethink’, which has been the most read essay at the *Fathom* site over the journal’s first decade.

*Part 2 maps contemporary left antisemitism, and explores its manifold forms and its contested relationship to ‘anti-Zionism’ and to criticism of Israeli policies.*

**Sean Matgamna**, a socialist who has been an articulate critic of left antisemitism since the 1980s, argues that it is first and foremost a denial, extended to no other state, of Israel’s right to exist and, as a result, a comprehensive and unique hostility to pro-Israel Jews, that is to most Jews alive, branding them as ‘Zionists’ and seeing that description as akin to ‘racism’ or ‘imperialism’.

**Michael Walzer** reviews three historical varieties of Jewish anti-Zionism – Orthodox, Reform and diaspora universalist – before examining the paradox that while the most common leftist version of anti-Zionism claims to derive from an opposition to nationalism and the nation state, the left has *supported* the right to national self-determination the world over, reserving its opposition to the nation state to one people, the Jews, and to one state, Israel. Criticism of the policies of the governments of Israel, several of which he sets out, should not, he insists, involve opposition to the existence of the state. While Walzer acknowledges that there are versions of anti-Zionism on the right and the left that involve antisemitic tropes, he believes the main problem with contemporary left-wing anti-Zionism in the United States and Europe is anti-Zionism itself: it is bad politics.

**Norman Geras** argues that Israel has been made an *alibi* for a new climate of antisemitism on the left. Israel, so parts of the left argue, is a delinquent state and, for many of those who regard it so, a non-legitimate one, its existence is somehow improper. These themes pitch those who sponsor them out of a genuine, and into a spurious, type of universalism: one where the Jews are special amongst other groups in being obliged to settle for forms of political freedom in which their identity may not be asserted collectively; Jews must be satisfied, instead, merely with the rights available to them as individuals, without the freedom to associate with others of their own kind. He shows that, often, the so-called ‘criticism’ relies, just as Marx did in Part II of *On the Jewish Question*, on anti-Jewish stereotypes.

**Alan Johnson** critiques the claims of the radical left-wing US writer Norman Finkelstein that there is a ‘Holocaust Industry’ and that all talk of left antisemitism is part of it; in his words, a ‘calculated hoax – dare it be said, plot?’ Drawing on stinging criticism of Finkelstein by the Italian intellectual historian Enzo Traverso, Johnson argues that Finkelstein’s denialism and victim-blaming, and his conspiracist dismissal of the new antisemitism as a fraud, straight off the production line of the ‘Holocaust Industry’, are themselves important components of the new left antisemitism.

**Marlene Gallner** excavates the voice of Jean Améry, best known in the anglophone world as a Holocaust survivor and author of the Auschwitz memoir *At The Mind’s Limits*. In the 1960s, he was also the outspoken left-wing critic of left-wing antisemitism in West Germany and it is this Améry that Gallner’s essay makes available to us as a moral and intellectual resource today.

**Matthew Bolton**, co-author with Frederick Harry Pitts of *Corbynism: A Critical Approach*, critiques the ‘Bad News’ model of media analysis developed by Philo and Berry and the Glasgow Media Group, as it has been applied by them to left antisemitism in the British Labour Party. The methodology of the Bad News model is held to be reductive and quasi-conspiracist, the analysis to reduce the messy complexity of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict to a Manichean struggle. The authors, Bolton argues, have failed to register that the antisemitism which spread in the UK Labour Party after 2015 was a significant reality deriving from a specific world view, bordering on conspiracy theory, that has come to dominate parts of the left.

**Kathleen Hayes**, writing in a different register to the other chapters, offers a candid memoir of her 25 years as an activist in the revolutionary left. She mines her own experience with great honesty to examine how ‘unrecognised antisemitism gained a hold over me; the purpose I think it served; and how I came to, at least consciously, recognise and reject it’.

**Susie Linfield** discusses her book *The Lions’ Den: Zionism and the Left from Hannah Arendt to Noam Chomsky*. She argues that some portions of the left have failed to grapple with the complexity, and the facts, of the

Israeli–Palestinian conflict, substituting ideology and wishful thinking for lucid political analysis. All parties to the conflict – including the Palestinians, supposedly the beneficiaries of the left’s ‘solidarity’ – have been grievously injured by the left’s analytical abdication.

*Part 3 traces the little-understood Soviet roots of contemporary left antisemitism.*

**Izabella Tabarovsky** lays bare the story of Soviet Judeophobia and the massive Soviet antisemitic ‘anti-Zionist’ campaigns that entered a particularly active stage and had a global reach after 1967. She suggests the discourse of today’s far-left is often strikingly similar to the messaging of those ugly Soviet campaigns.

**Simon Gallner** tells the story of the left-wing ‘anti-Zionist’ campaign that almost destroyed Poland’s Jewish community. In 1968, in Communist Poland, dozens of Jews committed suicide after they had found themselves publicly vilified and socially isolated, denounced as a ‘fifth column’ by Władysław Gomułka, the first secretary of the Polish United Workers Party. A total of 8,300 members were expelled from the Communist party, nearly all Jewish; 9,000 Jews lost their jobs, some were beaten up and hundreds were thrown out of their apartments.

**Jeffrey Herf** discusses his book *Undeclared Wars With Israel: East Germany and the West German Far Left 1967–1989*. He reviews the antisemitic purges in the Communist states in the 1940s and 1950s; the motivations for, and the forms taken by, communist East Germany’s undeclared war on Israel, and the complicity of the United Nations in that war; and the reasons for the rise of left antisemitism on the West German far-left, and for its turn to terrorism in the shape of the Baader–Meinhof Group and the Revolutionary Cells. He also looks at the routinely ignored experiences of the Jewish people who were the targets of these undeclared wars.

*Part 4 is concerned with one of the most astonishing aspects of the new left antisemitism, its fatal attraction to ‘Holocaust Inversion’ and to spurious historical claims of ‘Nazi-Zionist Collaboration’.*

**Lesley Klaff** explains how the discourse of ‘Holocaust Inversion’ involves an *inversion of reality* (the Israelis are cast as the new Nazis and the Palestinians as the new Jews), and an *inversion of morality* (the Holocaust is presented as a moral lesson for, or even a moral indictment of, ‘the Jews’), as well as recklessly spreading accusations of bad faith against all who would invoke Holocaust memory.

**Jeffrey Herf**, author of *Jewish Enemy: Nazi Propaganda during World War II and the Holocaust*, examines the historical inaccuracies in the former Mayor of London Ken Livingstone’s incendiary claim, largely derived from his reading of the books of Lenni Brenner, that ‘Hitler was a Zionist’.

**Paul Bogdanor**, author of *Kasztner’s Crime*, meticulously rebuts the claims of Brenner and Livingstone. The former Mayor of London asserted that

‘you had, right up until the start of the second world war, real collaboration [between Nazis and Zionists].’ Bogdanor lays bare Livingstone’s ‘mutilations of the historical record and of the very sources he cites’ as well as the politically reactionary character of Livingstone’s version of history, which ‘equates persecutors and rescuers, aggressors and victims, the powerful and the powerless, oppressors and the oppressed’. Bogdanor also identifies a catalogue of factual manipulations and pseudo-scholarship in the works of Lenni Brenner upon which Livingstone’s claims rest.

*Part 5 examines contemporary left antisemitism in Europe and the United States.*

**Kenneth Waltzer** reflects on the sources of the growth of antisemitism in Europe. Economic crisis and populist response are the overarching context of sharpening antagonisms directed against Jews by disparate political forces. Alongside traditional racist right-wing antisemitism, Israel and its supporters have been attacked as the cornerstone of Western imperialism by both the far-left and Islamist forces that mobilise alienated segments of the growing Muslim population, especially marginal youths. Waltzer maps these developments, traces their antisemitic impacts and explores strategies to counter the rising danger.

**Dave Rich** examines the phenomenon of the *quenelle*, an antisemitic gesture associated with the French antisemite Dieudonné M’bala M’bala. He reads the gesture as emblematic of a post-Cold War, post-9/11 form of anti-system politics that seeks to erase traditional political divisions and build a new kind of coalition uniting neo-Fascism, anti-capitalism and revolutionary Islamism against ‘Global Zionism’. The *quenelle* functions, Rich argues, as a cultural meme and political identifier for Dieudonné’s politics and the movement he has spawned.

During the medieval epoch, Christian antisemitism spread the libel that Jews engaged in the ritual murder of non-Jews, supposedly mutilating their bodies and draining their blood to make Passover bread (known as ‘the blood libel’). Countless antisemitic pogroms were inspired by this myth. **David Gurevich** explores the extraordinary rebirth of this blood libel within the Greek Orthodox Christian Church. He presents the case of Saint Philomenos, supposedly ‘ritualistically’ murdered by ‘Zionists’ in 1979 and canonised by the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Jerusalem in 2009. The blood libel is alive today and is taking on new, political, ‘anti-Zionist’ forms. Gurevich shows this libel has been uncritically absorbed by parts of the left and academic publishing.

**Shalom Lappin** argues US Jews are caught between a white supremacist threat from the far-right and a hostile anti-Zionist challenge from parts of the far-left. For the latter, Israel exemplifies the evils of Western colonialism and racism. Anyone associated with Israel, whether by recognising it as a Jewish homeland or simply by endorsing its right to exist, is at risk of inheriting its

essential criminality. ‘Anti-Zionism’ thus ceases to be a political view, a set of criticisms of Israeli policy, morphing instead into an instrument for encrypting hostility to Jews by embedding reference to them in an ideological proxy term. This is a variant of the coding technique that racists have long used against people of colour. For the first time, argues Lappin, American Jews are no longer outside of the turbulent flow of Jewish history but have been thrust into its midst.

*Part 6 looks at the baleful presence of left antisemitism and ‘anti-Zionism’ within Western universities and publishing houses.*

**Cary Nelson** highlights concerns about the impact of an increasingly politicised and ‘anti-Zionist’ academy on academic publishing about Israel.

**Sarah Annes Brown** examines the astonishing claims made in 2012 by the left-wing academic Oren Ben-Dor, and published by a respectable university press, about what he called ‘pathologies pertaining to Jewish being and thinking’ which is ‘nourished by the desire to be hated’ and which ‘stems, before all else, from sublimated hatred of, and supremacy towards, all “others”’. It is this ‘self-provoked hatred against Jews’, he wrote, that ‘keeps re-igniting’ antisemitism.

**David Hirsh** looks at an example of how teaching can create a hostile environment for Jewish students on campus. In 2020, Bristol University Professor David Miller claimed, ‘Britain is in the grip of an assault on its public sphere by the state of Israel and its advocates’, and he indicted his university’s Jewish student society as ‘an Israel lobby group’ and part of ‘a campaign of censorship and manufactured hysteria’ being ‘directed by the state of Israel’. He received fulsome messages of support from parts of the UK academic left for these claims and their associated world view. Hirsh explores the controversy, noting some worrying features of academic life in the UK: the explicit rejection of the Macpherson principles regarding the handling of claims of racism by minorities when it comes to Jews; the mainstreaming of some old conspiracist modes of thinking about Jews; and the corruption of empirical social science by such modes; the casual redefinition of claims of antisemitism as bad faith efforts to protect Israel by Zionists (Miller even assailed a Jewish-Muslim interfaith soup kitchen as a Zionist plot); and, subsequent to all this, the creation of a hostile environment for Jews on campuses. Hirsh also highlights the role of the lecturers’ trade union, the UCU, which in his view helped to incubate and normalise the culture which made the Miller controversy possible.

*Part 7 assesses the importance of the definition of antisemitism proposed by the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA).*

**Dave Rich** argues that the objections raised against the IHRA by parts of the left rest on mistaken assumptions and popular misrepresentations of what the IHRA definition says and does, unevicenced claims about its impact, and confusions about its legal status and power.

**Bernard Harrison and Lesley Klaff** argue that the most common objection to the IHRA Definition that no criticism aimed at *Israel* can be antisemitic rests on a reductive account of what antisemitism is, treating it only as a form of subjective and intentional ‘racism’, an emotional disposition – ‘hatred of Jews as Jews’ – whereas antisemitism has often taken the form of a delusive pseudo-explanatory political theory based on the fear of Jews, a form of defamation ‘designed to explain why national or world politics are failing to move in ways congenial to the antisemite and his friends’.

*Part 8 examines three examples of contemporary anti-Zionism and anti-semitism functioning in baleful ways within what we might call left theoretical practice, and explores an alternative tradition of left-wing thought that has opposed left antisemitism.*

**Russell A. Berman** critiques what he sees as Judith Butler’s abuse of Hannah Arendt’s controversial book *Eichmann in Jerusalem* to support her own anti-Zionist conclusions. He shows how Arendt’s reservations about a single judicial act are illegitimately inflated in Butler’s diasporist anti-Zionism into a fundamental rejection of the very existence of the Jewish state. He also explores the severe limits of Butler’s neo-diasporism as a viable response to either contemporary antisemitism or the future of the Hebrew-speaking Jewish people that is now concentrated on the banks of the Mediterranean.

Moral philosopher **Eve Garrard** argues that contemporary antisemitism involves, much like its predecessor forms, much more than a cognitive error, providing also deep emotional satisfactions. Antisemites, she claims, often prefer their errors, with all they offer – dramatic fears and hatreds, and the excitement of conspiracy stories – to the unremarkable truth. She examines three satisfactions antisemitism can provide and that are ‘not easy either to overcome or to replace’: the pleasure of hatred, the pleasure of tradition and the pleasure of displaying moral purity.

**Karin Stögner**, co-ordinator of the Research Network on Racism and Antisemitism in the European Sociological Association, explains why the influential theory of ‘intersectionality’ so often fails to include global antisemitism, and suggests a radical new approach to intersectionality that would overcome that deficit.

The collection concludes with a previously unpublished conversation about a very different and better tradition within the left, one that has fought left antisemitism, between *Fathom* editor **Alan Johnson** and **Philip Spencer**, co-author (with the late Robert Fine) of *Antisemitism and the Left*. They explore the roots of left antisemitism in the equivocations of Enlightenment universalism, when antisemitic tropes were rearticulated within a universalist frame of reference, setting up a supposed ‘Jewish Question’ which has persisted in various forms to this day for a significant section of the left. A left-wing tradition of opposition to antisemitism on the left is excavated and critically assessed, taking in Friedrich Engels, Eleanor Marx, Eduard



Bernstein, Rosa Luxemburg, Leon Trotsky, Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno, as well as two exemplary contemporary writers, Moishe Postone and Norman Geras.

Note. While *Fathom* editors use the terms ‘antisemitism’ and ‘antisemite’, other writers prefer ‘anti-Semitism’ and ‘anti-Semite’. We do not seek to ‘rule’ on that ongoing debate and both forms will be found throughout the book.

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