

JEWISH SELF-HATRED: MYTH OR REALITY?

Antony Lerman contextualises the time-worn accusation.

The verbal bitterness between Jews over the Israel – Palestine conflict is intense. If words alone could kill, there would be significant fatalities. Some might say this is asymmetrical warfare. The conventional pro-Israel forces deploy accusations of Jewish self-hatred and Anti-Semitism; the guerrillas who strongly criticise Israel deploy claims of apartheid and human rights violations. Anti-Semitism, apartheid and human rights violations are recognisable phenomena and it's entirely possible, though increasingly difficult in the Israeli context, to have rational and evidence-based discussions as to whether claims about them are justified. Jewish self-hatred, however, is altogether different. It damns an individual or a group as psychopathological. And in recent years the

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concept has become remarkably popular as a way of explaining what drives the growing number of Jewish voices and organisations expressing various forms of severe criticism of Israel. But does 'Jewish self-hatred' exist?

Those who level the charge obviously have no doubts. So much so that it's deployed as the 'killer fact': to be called a self-hating Jew explains everything. No more need be said. Self-hatred means being a traitor to your race, an Uncle Tom, siding with the enemy, willing the destruction of your own people. In *Jewish Self-Hatred: Anti-Semitism and the Hidden Language of the Jews*, Sander L. Gilman says it's 'a term interchangeable with "Jewish

anti-Judaism" or "Jewish anti-Semitism".'

Recently you could have taken a course in the history of Jewish self-hatred at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. The playwright David Mamet deploys the concept in his book, *The Wicked Son: Anti-Semitism, Self-Hatred and the Jews* (2006), a fierce denunciation of 'apostate Jews' and 'race traitors'. And then there's the outrageously gross 'S.H.I.T.' — Self-Hating, Israel Threatening — 'list', a website purportedly 'exposing' more than 8,000 self-hating Jews, given credence in the Israeli daily *Ha'aretz* in July 2007 in an article which argues that Muslims would benefit from a good dose of the kind of public self-hate so common among Jews. Rabbi Sir Jonathan Sacks refers to it uncritically in his most recent book, *The Home We Build Together* (an attack on multiculturalism): '[Self-hatred] is something Jews know about: we can fairly claim to have invented it (Arthur Koestler once memorably said, "Self-hatred is the Jew's patriotism"). It occurred in mainland Europe in the later nineteenth and early twentieth century [*sic*], as Jews internalised the negative image others had of them. It represents the breakdown of an identity, and nothing good can come of it.'

Is the application of the concept of 'Jewish self-hatred' an objective judgement on a way of thinking, a legitimate diagnosis of a personality disorder? Or is it merely political rhetoric that has got out of hand and says more about the people using it than the people it's targeted at? I would argue that the latter is true: the concept of 'Jewish self-hatred' is entirely bogus and it serves no other purpose than to marginalise and demonise political opponents.

As a formal psychological category, the term 'self-hatred' was first used by Sigmund Freud in 'Mourning and Melancholia' (1916 – 17). But according to Professor Gilman, the term 'self-hating Jew' comes from a disagreement over the validity of the Jewish Reform movement between neo-Orthodox Jews of the Breslau seminary in Germany and Reform Jews in

the nineteenth century. Some neo-Orthodox Jews viewed Reform Jews as 'inauthentic Jews' because they felt that the Reformers identified more closely with German Protestantism and German nationalism than with Judaism.

The key point is that the term 'Jewish self-hatred' arose from the specific circumstances of Jews in Germany and came increasingly into use at the beginning of the twentieth century. And you could say — following Gilman's explanation of its first use — that it was one of the radical or extreme reactions to the partial failure or partial success of emancipation, to the results of the attempts by Jews to assimilate into German society.

By the 1900s the formal emancipation of German Jews was complete and they had achieved a very high degree of assimilation. But the more they demonstrated their desire to be the same as everyone else, the more they were acutely reminded of their otherness. The more they distanced themselves from their Jewish identity the further away seemed the prize of complete acceptance. Coping with this double bind was not easy. One response — intended to help overcome those barriers — was to lay the blame, in whole or in part, at the feet of Jews themselves, to see weaknesses and faults in Judaism, Jewish culture, Jewish mannerisms, Jewish ways of behaving and so on — to cultivate the notion of group inferiority. On the one hand, this was an intensification of the lively, and valued, self-criticism among German Jews that had been developing for some time. On the other hand, the fact that it was sometimes couched in Anti-Semitic terms suggested that Jews were internalising the negative images society imposed on them, stemming from the increase in public Anti-Semitism, and seeking to appease their persecutors in order to finally gain acceptance.

At the same time, Jews (and non-Jews) had concerns about the mental and physical health of Jews. There was vigorous debate about the special tendency of Jews to have particular diseases or engage in asocial behaviour, and in particular to experience problems of mental health. (This was a preoccupation in German and Austrian society as a whole.) Some accepted the 'Jewish disease' argument and saw it manifest itself in 'Jewish Anti-Semitism', in 'Jewish self-hatred' — a psychic disorder, a psychopathology reflecting, in Paul Reitter's words, an 'inner torment'. (Expressions of group inferiority were not confined to Jews. The historian Shulamit Volkov reminds us that 'among Germans at the time [they] were both numerous and "amazingly vehement"'.)

Most use of the 'Jewish self-hatred' charge was made by Jewish writers, intellectuals, Zionist politicians (who were very often also writers) and religious figures. And traffic went both ways. Assimilationists and anti-Zionists accused Zionists of being self-haters, for promoting the idea of the strong Jew using rhetoric close to that of the Anti-Semites; Zionists accused their opponents of being self-haters, for promoting the image of the

Jew that would perpetuate his inferior position in the modern world. And certain German and Austrian Jews have been regarded as the supreme examples of Jewish self-hatred: Heinrich Heine (1797–1856, the leading German romantic poet, essayist and journalist), Otto Weininger (1880 – 1903, the influential Austrian philosopher who killed himself at 23), Karl Kraus (1874 – 1936, the Austrian writer, journalist, editor and satirist) and Sigmund Freud (1856 – 1939).

Use of the term 'Jewish self-hatred' was very prevalent during the years immediately preceding the First World War, when German Jews continued to experience the dilemmas of wishing to become completely assimilated into German society. Theodor Lessing's book *Der jüdische Selbsthass* (*Jewish Self-Hate*) appeared in 1933 and supposedly charts Lessing's journey from Jewish self-hater to Zionist.

But the dilemma that led to the phenomenon of Jewish self-hatred came to an end with the Holocaust, so there seemed little reason for it to remain current. In most post-Holocaust centres of Jewish life, especially the United States, assimilation, though striven for, was a less anxious process, and Jews were not alone in their quest to integrate. And after the establishment of the state of Israel, losing your identity in order to become part of the national story was no longer the only option for a Jew who felt uncomfortable in the host country. Zionism seemed to represent the ultimate resolution of this identity problem: in Israel the Jew was the national story.

But the concept did not disappear from the lexicon. As the centre of Jewish life shifted from a devastated Europe denuded of Jews to the United States, where there were far fewer barriers to assimilation, so too the concept of Jewish self-hatred migrated to the New World, was reborn and took on additional meanings.

Hugely influential in this rebirth was Kurt Lewin, until 1932 professor of psychology at the University of Berlin. He emigrated from Germany in 1933 after Hitler had come to power. In 1941 he wrote an essay, 'Self-hatred among Jews', published in an American Jewish Committee-sponsored journal, which was much cited and frequently quoted. Lewin was the leading exponent of the study of group dynamics in the United States and a highly regarded social psychologist. He reinterpreted the problem as one mostly affecting the group rather than the individual. Not surprisingly, given the threat to Jews at the time, and his view of the failure of German Jewish leaders to give public support to Jewish institutions, he argued that criticism of the group weakens and endangers it, and those responsible for that criticism are unable to adjust to the group's problems. The result is 'neurosis' — manifesting itself as self-hatred.

A similar theory — 'Negro self-hatred' — had developed in relation to black Americans, also promoted by social psychologists like Lewin who had become highly influential in American society

in the 1940s. With both theories being fuelled by conclusions drawn from investigations into growing anti-Semitism and anti-black racism, a 'convergence zone', as Susan Glenn described it in *Jewish Social Studies* (2006), was created 'in which the figure of the "self-hating Jew" and the "negrophobic negro" were imagined [. . .] by Frantz Fanon as "brothers in misery"'.

The concept of Jewish self-hatred gained wide theoretical currency in the 1940s, and as Glenn writes: 'During and after the war, individuals and groups across the intellectual, social, cultural, religious and political spectrum deployed the term variously, inconsistently, and with conflicting social and political agendas.' The 1940s and 1950s were 'the age of self-hatred'. In effect, a bitter war broke out over questions of Jewish identity. It was a kind of 'Jewish Cold War': 'a contentious public debate [intra-Jewish war] revolving around the question of Jewish group loyalty, Jewish group "survival", and Jewish nationalism'.

Broadly speaking, this 'war' was a response to the success of assimilation. Those Jews who saw assimilation resulting in estrangement from Judaism and distaste for one's Jewish identity diagnosed the problem as Jewish self-hatred. The cure was 'positive Jewishness', or 'living Judaism', as the influential Rabbi Milton Steinberg referred to it in *A Partisan Guide to the Jewish Problem* (1945). Critics of this movement accused it of promoting 'narrow-minded ethnic chauvinism and ideological intolerance'.

These debates over Jewish self-hatred continued to the end of the 1970s but eventually died down, losing their force and urgency. But the concept reemerged with new polemical force in the 1980s in debates over Israel, debates which eventually spread to virtually every other western Jewish community.

In the United States, Glenn says, giving financial and moral support to Israel came to constitute 'the existential definition of American Jewishness'. Which meant that the opposite was also true: criticism of Israel came to constitute the existential definition of 'Jewish self-hatred'. So writers like Philip Roth were vilified as self-haters for not wanting to put pro-Israelism at the centre of their lives and left-wing Jews like the controversial journalist I. F. Stone were similarly derided for their 'weakness' for universalism.

The sharpness of the US exchanges was not mirrored in Britain, and even though Jewish criticism of Israel grew particularly from the 1982 Lebanon war on, the term 'Jewish self-hater' was rarely used. It is only relatively recently that Britain has caught up with the United States and Israel in this regard. The self-hatred accusation, now commonly applied, has moved beyond writers to embrace whole classes of people whose one common denominator is their alleged hatred of Israel or their willingness to connive in its delegitimation out of a misguided sense of guilt for what Jews have done to the Palestinians.

Both of these accusations come together in the

contempt with which the Israeli promoters of the 1993 Oslo Accords are now held, principally by right-wing Jews and Israelis. Examples are legion. The Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs, a major promoter of such views, published an article by Kenneth Levin of the Harvard Medical School, which seeks to explain how Israelis duped themselves about Oslo: 'the phenomenon of segments of the community embracing the indictments of the besiegers and seeking relief through self-criticism and self-reform recurs constantly in the history of the Jewish Diaspora. [. . .] some have seen it

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as a specifically Jewish pathology, a unique Jewish self-hatred.'

Steven Plaut, professor of business administration at Haifa University, asks: 'Who [. . .] could have dreamed that the fulfilment and realisation of Zionism would be accompanied by the emergence of the most malignant manifestations of Israeli self-hatred and Jewish anti-Semitism?' In online journal *Nativ*, Shlomo Sharan, professor emeritus in psychology at Tel Aviv University, argues that the "'new" self-hatred [. . .] preaches that living in Israel is immoral because Jewry stole the land from the Arabs'.

It would appear from these and many other writers that self-hating Jews, whether in Israel or the Jewish Diaspora, are not just responsible for taking Israel down the wrong path at Oslo but threaten the very existence of the Jewish people. Netta Kohn Dor-Shav, a US-born clinical psychologist now at Bar Ilan University in Israel, warns: 'It is fair to say that the plague of Jewish self-hatred is more dangerous for the survival of the Jewish people than any outside threat.' In a paper for the Ariel Center for Policy Research, titled 'The Ultimate Enemy — Jews Against Jews', she says: 'This self-hatred fuels a vicious cycle that can lead to disaster and dissolution of the Jewish people and the Jewish State.'

The strength of feeling about the 'self-hatred' accusation burst into the open on both sides of the Atlantic early in 2007. In the United States, the *New York Times* brought to public attention growing controversy about a pamphlet by Professor Alvin Rosenfeld, Director of the Institute for Jewish Culture and the Arts at Indiana University, titled 'Progressive Jewish Thought and the New Anti-Semitism', published in December 2006 by the American Jewish Committee (publisher of

Kurt Lewin's 1942 Jewish self-hatred paper), one of America's leading Jewish defence and advocacy groups, which has become increasingly vociferous in its defence of Israel over the last decade. In Rosenfeld's own words, the essay takes 'a hard look at Jewish authors whose statements go well beyond what most reasonable people would see as legitimate criticism of Israel and who call into question the very essence of the Jewish state and its right to continued existence.' Rosenfeld made no explicit accusation of self-hatred against his 'progressive' Jewish targets. But many people believed that was exactly what his text implied. In the words of Michael Lerner, editor of the progressive magazine *Tikkun*: 'The atmosphere is hysterical, verging on McCarthyism. You can't raise questions about Israel without being told you're an anti-Semite or a self-hating and disloyal Jew.' And many others thought Rosenfeld had skewered the right offenders. They approved of his criticism of people like Tony Kushner, the playwright, Jacqueline Rose, professor of English literature at Queen Mary College, and Richard Cohen, the Washington Post columnist, and concluded that he was just calling these people 'self-hating Jews' in more subtle ways.

In Britain, a network of a hundred or so progressive Jews critical of Israel's policies for abusing human rights launched Independent Jewish Voices (IJV) in February 2007. They signed a declaration of principles, published in *The Times*, the *Guardian* and the *Jewish Chronicle*, asserting their right to speak out and arguing that established Jewish organisations fail to represent the diversity of views among the Jewish population, especially on Israel, and inviting others to sign. This provoked a storm of vitriolic criticism from many Jews, but the number of signatories reached 400 by the end of the week of the launch.

The reaction IJV provoked was extraordinary: 'snide to poisonous to the verbally vicious' was how *Independent* columnist Yasmin Alibhai Brown described it. Leading the pack, and possibly speaking for many, was *Daily Mail* columnist Melanie Phillips who called the signatories 'Jews for genocide' in her online diary on 8 February, and 'the British arm of the pincer of self-destruction' in the *Jewish Chronicle* on 16 February. And in an obvious reference to Jewish self-haters through the ages she wrote: 'One of the most painful aspects of all of the Jewish tragedy is that, throughout the unending history of Jewish persecution — from the medieval Christian converts to Marx and beyond — Jews have figured, for a variety of reasons, as prominent accomplices of those who wished to destroy the Jewish people. These signatories are firmly in that lamentable tradition.'

These extraordinary, and ever more personal, claims are not confined to a right-wing fringe. Professor Robert Wistrich, who now heads the Sassoon International Centre for the Study of Anti-semitism at the Hebrew University, speaks of Jewish self-hatred as 'a pathological phenomenon'

and Jewish self-haters as being 'driven by hate and anger against their own people'. Interviewed for his institution's website, Wistrich excoriates 'Israeli and Jewish intellectuals who think Israel is to blame for all the problems in the Middle East and even in the world in general. [. . .] They rant on about the Jewish lobby, the Christian lobby, the foreign policy of the United States. Those are often worse than Arab anti-Zionists. In fact I prefer an open-minded Arab intellectual, even if he or she is anti-Israel, to the Chomskys, the Finkelsteins and Ilan Pappes of this world for whom I have no respect at all. They are much more dogmatic, sarcastic, narcissistic and self-righteous than most Arabs I know.' Edward Alexander, professor emeritus in English at Washington University, helps expose these apparently perfidious Jews in a book of essays he co-edited with Paul Bogdanor, *The Jewish Divide Over Israel: Accusers and Defenders*. Interviewed about the book he said: 'The rhapsodising over Islamic suicide bombers that one finds in such Jewish haters of Israel as Canada's Michael Neumann or England's Jacqueline Rose, breaks new ground in the long history of Jewish self-hatred'. Writing about IJV in *The Jewish Chronicle*, Liberal Rabbi Sidney Brichto called them 'enemies of the Jewish people' who 'must be condemned'. 'The time for debates between Jews over Israel is over: Wicked enemies and worse than Arabs: can self-hating Jews sink any lower?'

The accusation of Jewish self-hatred is not always as explicit as in the writings of those I have quoted so far. One of the features of the Rosenfeld AJC paper and the extreme reaction to the launch of IJV is the way Jewish self-hatred is implied in the use of a certain psychologising discourse or through carefully constructed sentences, which can only mean one thing, but provide deniability because an explicit statement is avoided. Rosenfeld proves himself a past master at this. In an article for the *New Republic* he indignantly denied that he ever called anyone a self-hating Jew or a Jewish anti-Semite. But when he writes in his original paper that: 'Anti-Zionism is the form much of today's antisemitism takes', and then in an extended attack on Jacqueline Rose says she 'typifies one of the most distressing features of the new antisemitism — namely, the participation of Jews alongside it, especially in its anti-Zionist expression', he is a cat's whisker away from calling her a Jewish anti-Semite. If antisemitism today is mostly anti-Zionism and Rose is an anti-Zionist, 'alongside it' or not, then according to this perverse logic Rose is anti-Semitic. (Perverse too is the claim that Rose 'rhapsodises over Islamic suicide bombers', since she writes categorically in her new book *The Last Resistance* of her hatred for the phenomenon.) And in an interview for the Religion Report on Australian Broadcasting Company National Radio, Rosenfeld gives the game away by referring to the UK dissenters as people 'who have problems with their own Jewish identity, and somehow feel that by dissenting radically from the state of Israel, they

affirm something precious about themselves. But I'm not a psychoanalyst, I can't really deal fully with any authority with the pathologies involved here.' As head of an academic Jewish studies centre and a veteran scholar, it is almost impossible to believe that Rosenfeld uses 'pathologies' without being fully aware that the word refers to self-hatred.

Another widely used form of innuendo implying self-hatred is casting aspersions on the Jewishness of critics of Israel. The charge is that such Jews are estranged from their Jewishness, are outside of the Jewish community, express themselves as Jews for the sole purpose of vilifying Israel, do not love their people and by criticising Israel have renounced a core component of their identity. Melanie Phillips is direct: The history of the Jewish people has always been punctuated by Jews with a troubled relationship with their own ethnic identity who have gone along with or even become the prime instigators — see Marx or Freud, for example — of diabolical calumnies against their own people'. Emanuele Ottolenghi, Director of the AJC's Brussels-based Transatlantic Institute, tells us: 'The Jewish intellectuals' [. . .] crusade against Israel is less about justice for the Palestinians than about coming to terms with their own tortured Jewish identity'. He speaks of 'their effective alienation from Jewish life, Jewish values and Jewish communities'. Similar sentiments were expressed by key figures associated with the *Engage* website (set up by a group of mostly left of centre Jewish academics to combat the proposed academic boycott of Israel and unmask people alleged to downplay the strength of current anti-Semitism) in an open letter to the organisers of Jews for Justice for Palestinians (JfjP), excoriating them for appearing to justify Hezbollah's anti-Semitic statements — vehemently denied by JfjP. Shalom Lappin, professor of computational linguistics at UCL, Eve Garrard, a senior lecturer at Keele University, and Norman Geras, professor emeritus in politics at the University of Manchester, wrote: 'We are confident that when the history of this period is written and the widespread loss of political reason that characterises our age is finally recognised, your group will be properly consigned to a footnote in the long and dishonourable tradition of Jewish sycophancy and collaboration with hostility that has polluted the margins of European Jewry over the generations' — an unmistakable reference to self-hating Jews.

When a concept is used so indiscriminately, it must either be faulty in itself or widely misused. Historian Shulamit Volkov is blunt about this: 'Accusations of self-hatred have a long tradition of being applied by one Jew to another, often as part of some political dispute. Present-day Israelis encounter the term all too often in public discourse, where it is used indistinctly and often demagogically, mainly to avoid coping with criticism from within.'

Many of those who are perfectly happy excoriating Jewish critics of Israel by sitting in

judgement on their Jewishness would almost certainly object very strongly to Orthodox rabbis in Israel doing the same thing when they claim the right to determine who is a Jew. This exercise in excommunication is absurd as it relies both on mass psychologising and the apparent intimate knowledge of the private lives and thoughts of thousands of individuals who sign critical adverts, join bodies like JfjP and become signatories to IJV. Focusing on the Jewish collectivity in this way is rather inappropriate. Shulamit Volkov writes that it is 'a kind of group therapy' that 'leaves us with nothing but a collection of skeletons, no longer flesh and blood'.

The touchstone for being a 'good Jew' has increasingly become passion for Israel. But it seems that there is a right and a wrong passion. Essentially, caring about Israel can only mean approving of its policies. Disapproval is synonymous with self-hatred.

To these contradictions and inconsistencies must be added a glaring ignorance of how the self-hatred charge has been applied in the past. For the accusers, Zionism represents the polar opposite of self-hatred. But when Herzl, angered by anti-Zionists, painted the weak ghetto Jew, in his 1897 essay 'Mauschel', as the bad Jew who speaks with a Yiddish accent, a 'scamp', 'a distortion of the human character, unspeakably mean and repellent', interested only in 'mean profit', he was using anti-Semitic attributes — and some accused him of self-hatred. The writer Karl Kraus, himself Jewish (and also branded as a self-hating Jew), attacked Herzl for 'creating another antisemitic movement'. Far from being the antithesis of Jewish self-hatred, some argue that Zionism was actually a display of it.

Even what might be called the cornerstone of evidence for the existence of Jewish self-hatred, the writings of Heine, Weininger, Kraus and Freud, is crumbling. The work of academics such as Steven Beller (on Weininger), Paul Reitter (on Kraus), Jacqueline Rose (on Freud) and Allan Janik (on the entire phenomenon) shows how the Jewish self-hatred label is a crude mischaracterisation.

In a contribution to *The Guardian's Comment is Free* blog at the time of the launch of IJV, Jacqueline Rose wrote: 'When confronted with this challenge [of being called a self-hating Jew], I am always inclined to ask: "What kind of Jew do you want me to be?"' Or to put this question another way: 'What is it to be the opposite of 'self-hating'? Is it 'self-loving'? Frederick Raphael already answered this in his review of Gilman's book for the *Jewish Quarterly* magazine in 1986: 'The contempt shown by some English Jews (and Americans like Norman Podhoretz) for blacks who cannot "do what we did" reveals, if nothing else, the danger of self-love as a substitute for self-hatred.' In any event, the tenor of 'self-hatred' accusations shows little sign of endorsing the 'self-loving Jew' as the ideal 'good' Jew. Nevertheless, the question Rose asks is surely the right one because at the heart of the 'Jewish

self-hatred' mantra is the assumption that there is a standard-issue Jew to which you must conform. This implies that there is a Jewish essence.

Recognising the concept of self-hatred involves accepting two sets of normative assumptions, as Mick Finlay argues in 'Pathologising dissent: identity politics, Zionism and the "self-hating Jew"' (*British Journal of Social Psychology*, June 2005): that there is a correct manner and degree to which people should express their Jewish identities in public; and that there is a set of core values and institutions which one should favour. It is also assumed that Jewishness 'is or should be a primary identity' and therefore rejecting it or criticising it is somehow unnatural and wrong. For the psychologists who have endorsed the validity of the concept of 'Jewish self-hatred', this turning away from your supposed primary identity is a form of psychopathology: a mental or behavioural disorder. But why should this be so? In his review of Gilman's book Frederic Raphael wrote: 'The Jew who decides that Judaism is an unappealing religion or that it implies an arbitrary set of rules for living may have perfectly good reasons for rejecting it or criticising it.' Criticising an aspect of one's identity does not automatically imply criticism of that identity per se. The concept is fundamentally weak because it fails to allow that self-criticism can be searching and very deep without becoming self-hatred.

The self-hatred concept seeks to turn the normal into the abnormal. In the nineteenth and early twentieth century German and Austrian debates you were called a self-hating Jew for criticising aspects of Jewish culture, involvement in progressive movements and literary forms, expressing hostility towards other Jews, espousing anti-Semitic stereotypes and using Anti-semitic rhetoric, demonstrating a low level of public identification, supporting Zionism or opposing it. Yet all of these could be explained in other ways. For example, criticism traded between Jewish sub-groups is quite natural and, argues Finlay, 'similar to those of commentators throughout history who find fault with the morals, manners, superstitions, or language of the poor of their own countries'. Even the use of anti-Semitic rhetoric is no proof of self-hatred. It was common in arguments over Jewish identity in the nineteenth and twentieth century and, as we have already seen, pressed into service for Zionism and for those who opposed it. These behaviours or views are only evidence of self-hate if you accept the essentialist definition of Jewish identity assumed by the accuser.

Finlay shows decisively that the psychologist Kurt Lewin's 'description of self-hatred is clearly a judgement about disloyalty and is a rallying call to American Jews. [He] concluded his paper ['Self-hatred among Jews'] by suggesting that Jews should be asked to sacrifice more for the group.' This argument looks uncannily like the 'conceptual' underpinning of the deluge of self-hatred accusations levelled at critics of Israel today. We have seen that for people like Rosenfeld,

Phillips, Ottolenghi, Sharan, Wistrich and others quoted earlier, Zionism and Israel are core Jewish values, and rejecting them is a pathological act consonant with deliberate estrangement from the group. But there has never been a time when all Jewish denominations and groups have accepted Israel and Zionism as core values. Today, hundreds and thousands of strictly Orthodox Jews, many of whom live in Israel, utterly reject the notion that the modern state of Israel and the political ideology of Zionism have anything to do with Judaism. The venom of the 'self-hatred' accusers is reserved for those labelled 'progressive', 'left-liberal', 'left-wing', for whom Israel and Zionism do not play the role in their Jewish identity which their accusers determine it should do. Some, motivated by the values of social justice which are central to their Jewishness, may well feel that their sense of Jewish identity is affirmed by opposition to the policies of the Israeli government. But to the self-hate accusers there are no legitimate differences of opinion among Jews on key elements of Zionism and Israel.

The concept of the 'self-hating Jew' strengthens a narrow, ethnocentric view of the Jewish people. It exerts a monopoly over patriotism. It promotes a definition of Jewish identity which relies on the notion of an eternal enemy, and how much more dangerous when that enemy is a fifth column within the group. It plays on real fears of anti-Semitism and at the same time exaggerates the problem by claiming that critical Jews are 'infected' by it too. And it posits an essentialist notion of Jewish identity.

Could the widespread and increasingly indiscriminate use of the self-hatred accusation be a sign of desperation on the part of the accusers? Dissenting voices on Israel have certainly strengthened and multiplied in recent years. Twenty years ago in Britain there were one or two rather small groups promoting a left-wing non-Zionist or anti-Zionist approach, who were regarded as hate figures by the Jewish establishment. Today there are more than a dozen critical groups. Some encompass the views of many hundreds, if not thousands; some are not left-wing. How much easier to dismiss their arguments by levelling the charge of Jewish self-hatred than by engaging with them.

It is too much to hope that by revealing just how bankrupt a concept 'Jewish self-hatred' is, discourse among Jews on Israel and Zionism could become more productive, both for Jews themselves and for the sake of achieving justice in the conflict between Israelis and Palestinians. Too much is currently invested in this demonising rhetoric. But if we could edge it closer to the rim of the dustbin of history, we'd be making a start.

Antony Lerman is the director of the Institute for Jewish Policy Research and is writing here in a personal capacity.