Annual Report
1 August 2019–31 July 2020
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Pears Institute for the study of Antisemitism

Professor David Feldman, Director
20 November 2020
# Contents

**Overview of the Year** 3

**Institute Staff** 4

**Research** 5
- Grant Income 5
- Publications 5
- Conference Papers 8
- Pears Institute Workshops and Seminars 9

**Teaching** 10

**Policy Engagement** 11

**Public Engagement** 13
- Pears Institute Public Events 13
- Wider Public Engagement 13

**Pears Institute in the Media** 15
- Opinion Pieces 16
- Broadcast 17
- Interviews 17

**Appendix** 18
- Selected Publications and Activities of Pears Institute Associates 18
Overview of the Year

Much has been accomplished this year, even though teaching, our academic and public events and other initiatives have been curtailed by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Notable achievements include:

• Successful roll-out of the new short course ‘Facing Antisemitism: Politics, Culture, History’ – winner of a Birkbeck Public Engagement Award.

• Publication of two monographs by Institute scholars:
  • Marc Volovici, *German as a Jewish Problem: The Language Politics of Jewish Nationalism*, Stanford University Press.

• Effective academic and public interventions on the ongoing issue of antisemitism in the Labour Party.

• New collaborations with leading heritage organizations including Historic Royal Palaces and the Victoria and Albert Museum.

• Advice and expertise on antisemitism delivered to a range of political and public institutions including the United Nations, Plaid Cymru, the TUC and the Football Association.

• Award from the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD) for a series of workshops exploring the relationship between antisemitism and other racisms.

• Award from Birkbeck’s Research Innovation Fund for a scoping project: ‘Understanding and Explaining Labour’s Antisemitism Crisis’.

• A fully funded three-year PhD scholarship awarded by the Consortium of the Humanities and the Arts South-East England (CHASE), to commence October 2020.

• Developing the five-year strategic plan for 2020-25 and preparing a successful bid for continued Pears Foundation funding.
Institute Staff

Core Team

Professor David Feldman, Director

Dr Brendan McGeever, Lecturer in the Sociology of Racialization and Antisemitism

Dr Jan Davison, Head of Communications and Institute Manager

Mrs Tanesha Westcarr, Event Coordinator

Early Career Fellows

Dr Diana Popescu, Swedish Research Council Early Career Research Fellow (until 31 August 2019)

Dr Marc Volovici, Leverhulme Early Career Fellow (from 1 September 2019); Pears Institute Early Career Research Fellow (until 31 August 2019)

Associates

The Institute has over twenty Associates and Research Fellows whose research interests align with its remit. The activities of select affiliates are included in the Appendix.

Details of all Pears Institute Associates and Research Fellows can be found on the Pears Institute website: www.pearsinstitute.bbk.ac.uk
Research

Grant Income

The German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD) has agreed to fund, over three years, three international workshops under the rubric ‘Entangled and Disentangled Others’ to explore the complex relationships between Holocaust memory, contemporary racism, antisemitism and colonialism. This prestigious initiative, developed in partnership with the University of Cambridge and the Center for Research on Antisemitism, Technical University, Berlin, directly supports the Institute’s objective of connecting the study of antisemitism to the study of racism and racialization.

A successful application for seed funding from Birkbeck’s Research Innovation Fund will launch a new research project in 2020/21 which will examine the Labour Party’s antisemitism crisis. In the first instance, a Research Associate will be appointed to undertake a systematic review of existing quantitative and qualitative source materials relating to the crisis. This project has significant potential for future growth and will feed directly into the development of a major research bid on Labour and antisemitism to be submitted to the Economic and Social Research Council application in the spring of 2021.

Historic Royal Palaces has established links with the Institute to conduct research into the Jewish History of the Tower of London during the medieval period. This initiative has secured funding from Rothschild Foundation Hanadiv Europe for a twelve-month Postdoctoral Fellowship based at the Tower of London. Dr Rory MacLellan took up the post in January 2020. His research will be carried out in association with the Pears Institute. Dr MacLellan will compile a catalogue of relevant archival evidence relating to the Jewish community of the Tower of London and the City of London for the medieval period and produce a full dataset of all known members of the Jewish community either in sanctuary or held prisoner in the Tower in the Middle Ages.

Publications

Brendan McGeever’s monograph Antisemitism and the Russian Revolution, which offers the first book-length analysis of the Bolshevik response to antisemitism, was published in September 2019 by Cambridge University Press, to critical acclaim.

In this highly original and deeply researched study, McGeever reconstructs the efforts of the Bolshevik leadership to confront antisemitism in the Red Army during the Civil War (1918–21), but rigorously and dispassionately exposes the ideological and practical limitations of their efforts.

S.A. Smith, University of Oxford
A vital contribution to the history of the Russian Revolution, of socialism more generally, and of antisemitism as a modern political force.
Laura Engelstein, Yale University, Connecticut

In July 2020, Marc Volovici’s monograph *German as a Jewish Problem: The Language Politics of Jewish Nationalism*, was published by Stanford University Press. This book tells the Jewish history of the German language – which holds an ambivalent and controversial place in the modern history of European Jews – focusing on Jewish national movements in Central and Eastern Europe and Palestine/Israel.

David Feldman, Brendan McGeever and Ben Gidley jointly wrote an article entitled ‘Labour and Antisemitism: A Crisis Misunderstood’ for the peer-reviewed academic journal *Political Quarterly* (published online with Open Access, 10 May 2020). The article generated significant interest. The Observatory of International Research ranked it number one among trending political science papers (out of 1,812) for the first seven days after publication and fourth over thirty days, placing it in the top 5% of all research scored by Altmetric. The piece elicited a range of responses from academics, activists and others: most were complimentary while a minority were more critical. The response to the essay was such that the *Political Quarterly* requested a follow-up piece which engaged with this commentary. This was published as ‘a long read’ on its website (29 May 2020). The article has been widely disseminated; its broader reach is detailed below.

Other academic papers published this year include Brendan McGeever’s essay entitled ‘Red Antisemitism: Anti-Jewish Violence and Revolutionary Politics in Ukraine, 1919’ published in *Quest: Issues in Contemporary Jewish History* (Summer 2019) and Marc Volovici’s paper entitled ‘Early Zionism and the German Language’ in *Germans and Jews in Eastern Europe: Aspects of a Historical Entanglement* published in German and English on the web portal of the Bavarian State Library (May 2020). Diana Popescu, who was Swedish Research Council Early Career Fellow with the Institute until the end of August 2019, has had essays published on her research exploring how the visiting public responds to Holocaust exhibitions and memorial sites, including a paper entitled ‘The Potency of Design in Holocaust Exhibitions. A Case Study of The Imperial War Museum’s Holocaust Exhibition (2000)’, *Museum and Society Journal* (July 2020).
**Director: David Feldman**

*Essays*


**Lecturer: Brendan McGeever**

*Books*


*Essays*


**Research Fellow: Diana Popescu**

*Essays*


**Research Fellow: Marc Volovici**

*Books*

- *German as a Jewish Problem: The Language Politics of Jewish Nationalism* (Stanford University Press, 2020).

*Essays*

Conference Papers

The topics of contemporary antisemitism and antisemitism and the left have been the focus of many papers and lectures given this academic year in the UK, Europe and the USA. David Feldman was invited to speak at the *Round table on Combatting Anti-Semitism in Contemporary Europe*, organized by the Luxembourg Centre for Contemporary and Digital History (C²DH) in collaboration with the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance. Brendan McGeever has addressed these issues in talks at Swarthmore College, Pennsylvania, the University of Delaware and YIVO Institute for Jewish Research in New York.

**Director: David Feldman**

- ‘Antisemitism on the Left or Left Antisemitism?’, Round table on Antisemitism on the Left, Here and Now, Parkes Institute webinar, University of Southampton, June 2020 (invited speaker).

- ‘Round table on Combatting Anti-Semitism in Contemporary Europe’, conference on Holocaust History and Memory organized by The Luxembourg Centre for Contemporary and Digital History (C²DH) in collaboration with the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance, February 2020 (invited speaker).

- ‘Antisemitism, Jews and History’, one-day seminar on Jewish Stories and the National Heritage organized by the Jewish Country Houses project in partnership with the National Trust, Polesden Lacey, Surrey, December 2019 (invited keynote speaker).


- ‘Jews, Empire and Zionism during the First World War’, Provincializing the Mandate, Empire and Palestine from West to East, conference organized by the Israeli Academic Research Forum on the British Mandate in Palestine, University of Oxford, September 2019 (invited speaker).

**Lecturer: Brendan McGeever**


Research


• ‘The Bolsheviks and Antisemitism in the Russian Revolution’, Parkes Institute, University of Southampton, research seminar, October 2019 (invited speaker).

• ‘The Sociology of Racism’, Department of Sociology 50th Anniversary Conference, University of Glasgow, September 2019 (invited speaker).

Research Fellow: Marc Volovici

• “A Voice from the Grave”: The Eichmann Trial and the Audibility of the German Language in the Israeli Public Sphere’, Association for Jewish Studies Annual Conference, San Diego, December 2019.

Pears Institute Workshops and Seminars

Considerable time was invested in the autumn of 2019 planning the workshop Teaching Racism and Antisemitism in UK Universities Today, scheduled for April 2020 which was subsequently postponed due to the pandemic. This workshop is conceived as a key contribution to the Institute’s strategic objective of reframing the understanding of antisemitism and reconnecting the study of antisemitism and the study of racialization.

The response from those invited to speak or to attend was overwhelmingly positive, both from scholars engaged in teaching on racism, racialization and/or antisemitism and others active in discipline-wide organizations. A number of subject organizations are currently undertaking reviews on the presence of race and racism as it arises within the curriculum, within the constitution of their disciplines and within universities more broadly, while the political debate on antisemitism has also brought this issue to the fore.

Events in 2020, and the challenges posed by the Black Lives Matter movement, make the subject of the workshop even more urgent. The Institute plans to take it forward in 2021.

The Institute’s programme of research seminars ran for the first half of the academic year.


• ‘From Realistic Conflict to Relative Deprivation: Rethinking the Psychology of Antisemitism’, Anthony D. Kauders, Keele University, November 2019.

Teaching

The short non-accredited course ‘Facing Antisemitism: Politics, Culture, History’ was rolled out successfully in September 2020. The course draws from the humanities and social sciences to explore the sources, development and contemporary forms of antisemitism and is designed to better equip students to understand and recognize antisemitism. Birkbeck offers the course in two iterations: as an evening course taught over three weeks for the public, and as a study day for institutions.

The evening course attracted twenty students including existing Birkbeck students, activists, religious leaders and staff from the TUC. The Labour Party commissioned four study days to support over 100 senior officials and staff, drawn from its National Executive Committee, the National Constitutional Committee and central office, who are responsible for formulating and implementing Labour Party national policy on antisemitism. Feedback on the course has been excellent.

The readings were stimulating and the group discussions very energising. The historical context was so important in terms of framing the issue. Learning about antisemitism on the left was an eye opener. The three tutors were very knowledgeable and clearly committed to the subject area.

Very well taught – good explanations given on complex ideas. Aims and themes of work clearly explained at the outset. Left me with lots of ideas to consider.

Attendees from the Labour Party had praise for both its content and pace: 100% agreed that ‘The unit has helped me think critically’; 97% that ‘The unit has given me a good understanding of the subject’; 88% that ‘The unit has enabled me to meet its stated objectives’ and 84% that ‘I have learnt skills that I could apply elsewhere’.

The TUC has developed its own educational materials on antisemitism which it will offer to members. These materials are informed by the course and have been constructed with input from the Pears Institute.

The course was scheduled to run in the spring/summer of 2020 with further study days for the Labour Party, as well as for two other organizations, and as an evening course for the public. These sessions will be rescheduled in due course.

The ‘Facing Antisemitism’ course was winner of the ‘Transforming Culture and Public Life’ category in Birkbeck’s Public Engagement Awards.

Brendan McGeever taught the ‘Racism and Antisemitism’ BA module in the autumn term. This module is now compulsory for all BA students in Psychosocial Studies. Feedback was outstanding, with 100% scores for teaching.

I really enjoyed the module. Brendan created a healthy environment to bring the students together to speak openly about racism and antisemitism. For an African student living in a European country... these issues are not so simple. I was able to learn about the Jews’ history and their struggle as well as the opportunity to bring slavery into the classroom as a “forgotten” memory in the academia sphere. I feel this module should continue to help the ones with different points of view on racism and antisemitism.
Policy Engagement

The Institute’s expertise has been sought by a diverse range of organizations this academic year.

The office of the United Nations Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief approached the Institute in September 2020 requesting further advice on possible negative consequences following from the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance working definition of antisemitism.

The Antisemitism Policy Trust asked the Institute to review and comment on a document intended for the police, MPs and others entitled ‘Jewish Conspiracies Debunked’, which seeks to explain and refute the ‘top ten anti-Jewish myths’.

The Institute’s counsel has also been sought by organizations confronted by disciplinary cases concerning alleged antisemitism. Plaid Cymru asked for a report on whether selected historic tweets and blogs posted by a prominent member of the party were antisemitic. The Football Association (FA) commissioned David Feldman to provide an expert report and give evidence before an independent Regulatory Commission, held on 17 July 2020, on whether a specific comment made by Port Vale FC player Tom Pope on Twitter was antisemitic and therefore in breach of FA Rule E3(2). The Tweet related to a popular antisemitic conspiracy theory. The Commission found Tom Pope to be guilty of an ‘aggravated’ breach of the FA’s regulation on abusive speech (Rule E3(2)). In its written reasons for finding against Pope (The FA v Tom Pope, 17 July) the FA cites David Feldman’s evidence. The consequences for Pope were substantial, leading to a suspension and fine and a requirement to attend an education programme.

Leading UK museums and heritage organizations are increasingly turning to the Institute for advice and guidance as they deal with issues of Jewish history and restitution. Three collaborations began this year.

The Jewish Country Houses – Objects, Networks, People project is led by the University of Oxford with Durham University and the University of Cardiff, in partnership with the National Trust and other heritage organizations. The project focuses on a hitherto unidentified group of country houses in the UK and continental Europe owned, and sometimes built, by Jews and those of Jewish origin. This initiative is the first of its kind to attempt to write these houses and their owners back into British, European and Jewish history. David Feldman has offered support to the project since its inception. In December 2019 he gave the keynote lecture ‘Antisemitism, Jews and History’ at a one-day seminar entitled ‘Jewish Stories and the National Heritage’ attended by heritage professionals and held at the National Trust’s Polesden Lacey property in Surrey.

The main thing that I will take away from the seminar, especially the keynote talk on anti-semitism as heritage from David Feldman at Birkbeck University, is just how relevant this all is today and how the way that we talk about Jewish History is important within today’s society.

Jonathan Wallis, National Trust Curator

The Victoria and Albert Museum approached the Pears Institute to advise and partner it on mounting a workshop for museum curators and others to explore and join up two current issues facing the heritage sector – reparations to Jewish victims of Nazi looting and recognition of the role of colonialism and looting in building museum collections.

The Imperial War Museum (IWM) asked Diana Popescu, Associate Research Fellow at the Institute, to be a member of the Steering and Skills Group to support a major national initiative, the ‘Second World War and Holocaust Partnership Programme’ funded by the National Lottery Heritage Fund. This three-year project, led by the IWM, brings together partner organizations from across the UK: the Highlanders’ Museum, Jewish Museum Manchester, the National Holocaust Centre in Nottingham, the Holocaust Exhibition and Learning Centre in Huddersfield, Aberystwyth University, National Museums Northern Ireland, Cornwall Museums and Tyne and Wear Archives and Museums. The focus of the project is to engage with new audiences to explore stories related to the Second World War and the Holocaust, particularly through co-producing innovative digital and public programming.
Public Engagement

Two notable public lectures were held this year, prior to lockdown.

In January, the eminent social scientist and broadcaster, Professor Tom Shakespeare, London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, discussed the international eugenics movement and the mass murder which it gave rise to under the Nazi regime. In a wide-ranging talk entitled ‘Lives Unworthy of Life? Disability Pride Versus Eugenics’, Professor Shakespeare explored the connections and disconnections between now and then and the politics of disability. The event was held in collaboration with Birkbeck Disabled Staff Network and Birkbeck School of Law.

Professor Mary Fulbrook, University College London, a leading scholar of German history, delivered the Institute’s 2020 Holocaust Memorial Day (HMD) lecture. Her talk entitled ‘A Bystander Society? Passivity and Complicity in Nazi Germany’ addressed the HMD Trust’s chosen theme of ‘Stand Together’. Exploring experiences of Nazi persecution, Professor Fulbrook analysed the conditions under which people were more, or less, likely to show sympathy with victims of persecution, or to become complicit with racist policies and practices. She argued that in seeking to combat collective violence, understanding the conditions for widespread passivity may be as crucial as encouraging individuals to stand up for others in the face of prejudice and oppression. Over 200 people attended the lecture which was held in collaboration with the Institute of Historical Research.

Pears Institute Public Events


Wider Public Engagement

Brendan McGeever has spoken at several public events this year:


• ‘Antisemitism and the Left’, Alliance for Workers Liberty, online, May 2020.
Public Engagement

In September, David Feldman provided the lead article in the book review section of the FT Weekend. Entitled ‘To Live Responsibly, Inside History’, he explored, through three recently published books, the interwoven relationships between antisemitism and the health of democratic societies, between the Left and Zionism, and between Israel and the Jewish people.

Two opinion pieces, one written by David Feldman for Haaretz (‘The Real Reason Corbyn’s “Anti-racist” Labour Just Can’t Deal With Anti-Semitism’, 27 November 2019) and the other by David Feldman, Brendan McGeever and Ben Gidley for The Guardian (‘Labour Can Expel Antisemites – But That Won’t “Root Out” Antisemitism in Our Culture’, 8 April 2020), together with the longer scholarly essay in Political Quarterly, mentioned above, have aimed to further illuminate contemporary public and political discourse on antisemitism and the left and advance a new way to think about and tackle the issue. The three articles develop the idea that a distinction should be made between ‘antisemites’ and ‘antisemitism’. Whereas ‘antisemites’ constitute a small minority of ideologically committed individuals, ‘antisemitism’ is conceived as a deep ‘reservoir’ of negative stereotypes about Jews that subsists in Western culture. The authors argue that this distinction underlines the significance of education as well as discipline as the Labour Party responds to antisemitism in its ranks. All three pieces have been positively received overall and have reached a wide audience.

The Haaretz article was widely praised for its insight and clarity and endorsed by several journalists with large followings on Twitter including Paul Waugh, political editor of the Huffington Post and presenter of Radio’s 4 The Week in Westminster, Alona Ferber of the New Statesmen, Michael Skapinker, a columnist on the Financial Times and Stephen Pollard, editor of the Jewish Chronicle, whose tweet encapsulates the tenor of many:

This is a brilliant piece about Labour antisemitism which I urge you to read.
It’s one of the few that makes original points and digs beneath the surface issues.
Stephen Pollard, editor, Jewish Chronicle

A vital read if you really want to understand antisemitism on the left, within Labour, and the Party’s failure to address it.
Peter Mason, Labour Councillor for Ealing

The Guardian article was translated and published in the newsletter of the Swedish Committee against Antisemitism, an NGO working to prevent and counter antisemitism and racism through education and information.

The substantive essay in Political Quarterly also attracted interest from a diverse and influential readership.

Just read this article, and would recommend – excellent analysis; really important things to say on how we think about antisemitism and how to address it effectively.
Jemma Levene, Deputy Director, HOPE Not Hate
This article... is excellent food for thought on how to conceptualise antisemitism in the Labour Party and reflecting on the past five years, highly recommend reading it.

Rebecca Filer, National Organiser, Jewish Labour Movement

Importantly, the Political Quarterly article was promulgated widely by others. The writer and broadcaster Matthew Sweet quoted extracts from the piece at length in his essay entitled ‘Anti-Semitism Runs Deep in Britain’ on the liberal website UnHerd.com, which provides a platform for new and bold thinking. In the wake of the article, BBC Radio 3 commissioned Brendan McGeever to present a 15-minute piece on the history of the left and antisemitism on its Free Thinking programme (July 2020).

HOPE Not Hate, one of the largest political action groups in the UK, embraced the ‘reservoir’ idea of antisemitism and cited it as a catalyst for launching the ‘From the HOPE Not Hate Archive’ initiative in July 2020:

This understanding of the phenomenon of antisemitism calls on us all to [...] explore the reservoir from which contemporary iterations [of antisemitism] have emerged. It is with this in mind that we are launching a new series called “From the HOPE not hate Archive”, in which we will delve into our private collection of fascist and anti-fascist material and search out historical objects, publications, pictures, audio and video material that can help us better understand the challenges we face today.

The HOPE Not Hate initiative curates monthly samples from over 100 years of its archives, making them accessible to the public and impacting not only on the debate on antisemitism, but also on anti-fascism.

Opinion pieces


Broadcast

Interviews

Press


Podcasts


Appendix

Selected Publications and Activities of Pears Institute Associates and Research Fellows

Ludivine Broch, University of Westminster – Associate

Talks
• Screening of Chichinette: How I Became an Accidental Spy, panel discussant at the UK Jewish Film Festival, November 2019.

Other professional activity
• Collaborated with Imperial War Museums and its ‘Transforming IWM London’ project to develop a section in the Second World War and Holocaust Galleries exploring the role of the French railways, the SNCF, in the Holocaust.

Bryan Cheyette, University of Reading – Associate

Books

Stephen Frosh, Birkbeck, University of London – Associate

Essays

Talks
Appendix

Ben Gidley, Birkbeck, University of London – Research Associate

Essays


Media


Keith Kahn-Harris, Leo Baeck College – Honorary Research Fellow

Essay


Media


• ‘British Jews’ Fears Have Become a Political Issue – But They Must Be Taken Seriously’, The Guardian, 26 November 2019.

Other professional activity


Louise London, Honorary Research Fellow

Media


Dave Rich, Community Security Trust – Associate Research Fellow

Essays


Appendix

Talks


• ‘The Online “Gamification” of Far-right Terrorism’, Limmud National Festival, December 2019.


Marcel Stoetzler, Bangor University – Associate

Essays


Nikolaus Wachsmann, Birkbeck, University of London – Associate

Media
