

HISTORIOGRAPHICAL REVIEW

PARANOIA AND PARTISANSHIP: GENOCIDE STUDIES, HOLOCAUST HISTORIOGRAPHY, AND THE ‘APOCALYPTIC CONJUNCTURE’*

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ABSTRACT. *Recent literature on the Holocaust and (other) genocides reveals that on the whole differences in approach persist. For many historians, as for the public, the Holocaust is the prototypical genocide, such that mass violence must resemble the Holocaust to constitute genocide. Whereas ‘normal’ ethnic/national conflict is commonly believed to involve ‘real’ issues like land, resources, and political power, no such conflict is discernible in the Holocaust of European Jewry, whose victims were passive and agentless objects of the ‘hallucinatory’ ideology of the perpetrators. But is this distinction sustainable on closer inspection? This review suggests that genocide is mistakenly identified as a massive hate crime based entirely on ‘race’. In fact, it has a political logic: irrational or at least exaggerated fears about subversion and national or ‘ethnic’ security. Prejudices do not cause violence: they are mobilized in conditions of emergency. Recent research tends in this direction by emphasizing paranoia rather than racism in the anti-Jewish policies of the Nazis but does not transcend the customary distinction between the ‘delusional’ grounds for the former and ‘real’ ethnic conflict. This separation of categories feeds into the anxieties in some contributors to this literature about potential genocides in the present by forecasting apocalyptic scenarios unless drastic military action is taken against specified enemies. Scholarship is better served by deflating rather than inflating such anxieties.*

Any historiographical review that surveys the scholarly literature on genocide, including the Holocaust, needs to take account of its entanglement with contemporary history and current affairs. Historians of the twentieth century have been observers, eyewitnesses, and sometimes victims and perpetrators of genocidal events, so it is no surprise that their work can seek to draw the perceived lessons of history for present-day application. Illuminating this broader context is important for making the books reviewed here more meaningful, not least for the now voluminous memory literature, which examines interpretations and

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experiential legacies of past, often genocidal events.¹ So what is this broader context? In the last two decades, the fields of Holocaust studies and genocide studies – too disparate to be called ‘disciplines’ – became institutionalized and mainstream, particularly the former. The timing was not coincidental. The second millennium did not end as happily as some had predicted. For all the triumphalism that greeted the tearing open of the ‘iron curtain’ in 1989/90, with accompanying neo-Hegelian proclamations of history’s ‘end’, the ethnic violence, violent population expulsions (‘ethnic cleansing’), and genocide in the Balkans, Caucasus, and Africa were stark reminders that recidivist tendencies persisted into the so-called *posthistoire*.² Any remaining confidence that modernity had shed nationalist and illiberal reversion was then shaken by an ostensible new threat, Islamism, which stimulated a renewed discussion about totalitarian political religions.³

The spectre of the 1930s and 1940s haunts academic and political discussion of current geopolitics, especially in the US, Europe, and the Middle East, the one sphere informing the other in an escalating discourse of crisis and apocalypse. Many columnists and historians decry a potential ‘second Holocaust’ at the hands of a nuclear Iran, and disagree only about whether we have reached the ominous stage of 1938 or the fatal one of 1941; meanwhile, Arab intellectuals and politicians routinely accuse the United States and Israel of Nazi-like imperialism.⁴ Even Samuel Huntington’s postulated ‘clash of civilizations’ is not sufficiently alarmist to capture the fear of group destruction – a genocidal anxiety, so to speak – experienced by academic belligerents in the ‘war on terror’.⁵ What makes these sentiments relevant for genocide studies and Holocaust studies is not simply that professional historians share and express them publicly; it is that their core assumptions feed into these same genocidal anxieties. For many scholars, the Holocaust is the prototypical genocide, such that mass violence must resemble the Holocaust to constitute genocide. Whereas ‘normal’ ethnic/national conflict is commonly thought to pertain to ‘real’ issues, like land, resources, political power, and national security, no such conflict is said to be discernible in the Holocaust of European Jewry, whose victims were passive and agentless objects of the perpetrators’ ‘hallucinatory’ ideology.⁶

¹ Jeffrey K. Olick, *The politics of regret: on collective memory and historical remembrance* (New York, NY, 2007).

² Richard Bessel and Claudia Haake, eds., *Removing people: forced removal in the modern world* (Oxford, 2009); Benjamin Lieberman, *Terrible fate: ethnic cleansing and the making of modern Europe* (Chicago, IL, 2006); Stefan Wolff, *Ethnic conflict: a global perspective* (Oxford, 2006).

³ E.g. Paul Berman, *Terror and liberalism* (New York, NY, 2003); Michael Burleigh, *Earthly powers: religion and politics in Europe from the Enlightenment to the Great War* (London, 2005).

⁴ Benny Morris, ‘This Holocaust will be different’, *Jerusalem Post*, 18 Jan. 2007; Charles Krauthammer, ‘The Holocaust declaration’, *Washington Post*, 11 Apr. 2008.

⁵ Samuel Huntington, *The clash of civilizations and the remaking of world order* (New York, NY, 1996).

⁶ E.g. Daniel J. Goldhagen, *Hitler’s willing executioners: ordinary Germans and the Holocaust* (New York, NY, 1996); Leo Kuper, *Genocide: its political use in the twentieth century* (Harmondsworth, 1981), pp. 91–4; Saul Friedländer, ‘The historical significance of the Holocaust’, *Jerusalem Quarterly*, 1 (1976), pp. 36–59;

So it is for genocide, as well. Thus one early authority defined genocide as ‘the mass killing of substantial numbers of human beings, when not in the course of military action against the military forces of an avowed enemy, under conditions of the essential and defenselessness and helplessness of the victims’.⁷ The most recent articulation of this distinction by Jacques Semelin separates destruction for the sake of subjugation, which is political and partial, from destruction as total eradication, like the Holocaust, which is driven by delusional, paranoid, and non-political considerations of ethnic purity.⁸ The former characterizes civil wars, the latter genocide. By disembedding genocide from the ubiquitous military contexts in which mass violence against civilians takes place – a nexus highlighted in the work of Martin Shaw – this threshold effectively makes them massive hate crimes.⁹ In this regard, the standard reference in the literature is to Helen Fein’s notion that victims of genocide are placed beyond the ‘universe of obligation’.¹⁰ This is what Sir Martin Gilbert meant when he wrote that the Nazis killed Jews not ‘because they were soldiers or partisans, or constituted a threat to German rule, but because they had been characterized as beneath the dignity of human beings’.¹¹ The basic message of this common sense, liberal ‘Holocaust paradigm’ is that genocides occur when people are hated for who they are (a question of identity) rather than for what they do (a question of politics). To prevent genocide, we are told, it is necessary to teach tolerance – ‘they must stop hating (us)’ being the motto of Holocaust-based anti-racism pedagogy.

This simplistic understanding of mass violence is widespread. Consider the reasoning of the United Nations team that investigated the recent civil war in Darfur in Sudan. It concluded that the central government’s policy of ‘attacking, killing and forcibly displacing members of some tribes does not evince a specific intent to annihilate, in whole or in part, a group distinguished on racial, ethnic, national or religious grounds’, and therefore that it was informed by the purposes of counter-insurgency warfare rather than ‘genocidal intent’.¹² On this reading, counter-insurgency cannot be genocidal because its goals are real and explicable rather than ‘racial, ethnic, national or religious’ – therefore irrational. The reason why some people argued that the Sudanese government was committing

Uriel Tal, ‘On the study of the Holocaust and genocide’, *Yad Vashem Studies*, 8 (1979), pp. 24–46. For a symptomatic indication of this widespread belief, see Eric Ehrenreich’s review of Donald Bloxham, *The Final Solution: a genocide* (Oxford, 2009), in *American Historical Review*, 15 (Oct. 2010), pp. 1244–5.

⁷ Israel W. Charny, ‘Toward a generic definition of genocide’, in George Andreopolous, ed., *The conceptual and historical dimensions of genocide* (Philadelphia, PA, 1994), p. 75.

⁸ Jacques Semelin, *Purify and destroy: the political uses of massacre and genocide* (New York, NY, 2007), pp. 37–42, 332–42.

⁹ Martin Shaw, *War and genocide: organized killing in modern society* (Cambridge, 2003); idem, *What is genocide?* (Cambridge, 2007).

¹⁰ Helen Fein, *Accounting for genocide* (New York, NY, 1979), p. 4.

¹¹ Martin Gilbert, ‘Twentieth-century genocides’, in Jay Winter, ed., *America and the Armenian Genocide* (Cambridge, 2004), p. 25.

¹² Report of the International Commission of Inquiry on Darfur to the United Nations Secretary-General, Geneva, 25 Jan. 2005, p. 132.

genocide, however, was not that it was driven by a racist ideology, but that it was attacking civilians collectively and pre-emptively because some of their number might have engaged in rebellious activity. That is not recognized as genocide by the UN and many scholars. The core assumption of the Holocaust and genocide studies fields lead to a misrecognition of genocides by equating them with hate crimes.

What does this have to do with the genocidal anxieties of historians with which we began? Those in thrall to such anxieties will tend to ascribe the hate they fear to ideology alone – a circular argument at best, a partisan one at worst – rather than explain the complex interactions that radicalize ethnic or national animus in a genocidal direction. It is not my intention to belittle these anxieties and the unconscious structure of feeling that underpins them.¹³ They express real fear. But the challenge is to produce a historiography that uncovers what Max Weber called ‘uncomfortable facts and the stark reality of life’ rather than one so blinded by its own commitments that it collapses time and space to urge specious analogies between contemporary events and Nazi Germany.¹⁴ The books under review allow us to consider both genocidal anxieties and the nature of genocide. A number of questions suggest themselves. Can the etiology of (other) genocides be applied to the Holocaust? Further, is the ideology of revolutionary and utopian racial hatred – the analytical tool that genocide studies borrowed from scholars of the Holocaust – as useful as it was in the 1980s and 1990s? If the revolutionary pursuit of racial utopia is not the ‘independent variable’, do more recent publications in genocide studies offer better explanatory tools? Is the methodological traffic therefore flowing in the opposite direction, as the Holocaust starts to resemble other genocides? Alternatively, is a convergence between these fields developing with the unflinching recognition of similarities and differences in *longue durée* and big-picture analyses of global society?

I

It is useful to proceed backwards and to begin with Idith Zertal’s *Israel’s Holocaust and the politics of nationhood*, because it provides such an acute analysis of the apocalyptic sensibility, not only in Israel but in the west more generally.¹⁵ Sober and consciously revisionist, *Israel’s Holocaust* joins recent books, many written by Israelis like herself, which have highlighted the mythic aspects of Zionism and memory of the Holocaust.¹⁶ Zertal argues that the Israeli state has exploited and

¹³ See, for example, Omer Bartov’s invocation of the ‘Hitlerite quality to the new anti-Semitism’ in contemporary world politics: Bartov, ‘He meant what he said: Did Hitlerism die with Hitler?’, *The New Republic*, 2 Feb. 2004, p. 33.

¹⁴ Max Weber, ‘The “objectivity” of knowledge in social science and social policy’, in Max Weber, *The essential Weber: a reader*, ed. Sam Whimster (London, 2004), p. 364.

¹⁵ Idith Zertal, *Israel’s Holocaust and the politics of nationhood* (Cambridge, 2005).

¹⁶ Nachman Ben-Yehuda, *The Masada myth: collective memory and mythmaking in modern Israel* (Madison, WI, 1995); Yael Zerubavel, *Recovered roots: collective memory and the making of Israeli national tradition*

manipulated Holocaust memories to serve its partisan ends at the expense of Holocaust survivors and non-Zionist Jewish experience. Writing in the aftermath of the Rabin assassination in 1996, she is interested in, among other things, how the religious right mobilized Holocaust imagery against the then prime minister, Yitzhak Rabin, and for the continuing occupation of Palestinian land. The story she tells is far more complex than one of outright, cynical instrumentalization, though she alleges that as well.

For Zertal, the Eichmann trial is significant as the first stage in the construction of a syndrome that has debilitated Israel ever since: the conflation of Nazis and Arabs so that local geopolitics becomes a potential rerun of the Holocaust. It is here that the 'second Holocaust' discourse begins. It was constructed in two ways: by Ben Gurion's many references to Egypt as a refuge of ex-Nazis, and by the relentless focus of Eichmann's prosecutor on the mufti of Jerusalem, Haj Amin al-Hussaini, and his alleged plotting with the Nazis to exterminate Jewry in Europe and the Middle East. Significantly, the mufti still features in Zionist literature as a co-perpetrator of the Holocaust, converting him from an indigenous, anti-colonialist to an Arab-Muslim-Nazi, the ancestor of Hamas, Hizbollah, Iran, and other 'Islamofascist' enemies of Israel.¹⁷ The resolve that never again would Jews be hapless victims was strengthened by the state's intensified emphasis on security and first crystallized and applied in the Six Days War in June 1967.¹⁸ The bellicose rhetoric of Egypt's President Nasser was seized upon by the Israeli leadership to launch a pre-emptive strike and to convince the population of the peril. Zertal notes that subsequent pre-emptive strikes such as Menachem Begin's invasion of Lebanon in 1982 to attack the supposedly Nazi-like PLO have been justified in these terms.¹⁹ She calls this habit of mind a 'catastrophic messianism', in which the victories of the Israeli nation over the Arabs are the redeeming agent not only for the Holocaust, but for the entirety of diasporic existence since the destruction of the Second Temple, after which Jewish history effectively ceased.

Zertal's basic point about paranoid political culture is well made, particularly given that such a culture invites political irresponsibility by misreading hostility to Israel. Blind to their own subject position as recent settlers in a country with a massive Palestinian Arab majority, many Zionists ascribed (and many still ascribe) the hostility of the locals to the age-old anti-Semitism experienced in Europe (ideology) rather than recognizing that their very presence and intention to form a rapid demographic majority, and their expulsion of most of the Arabs after 1947, was the source of provocation (politics). All too rare were the moments of plain speaking, such as Moshe Dayan's speech in 1956: 'Why should we complain at

(Chicago, IL, 1995); Yosef Grodzinsky, *In the shadow of the Holocaust: the struggle between Jews and Zionists in the aftermath of World War II* (Monroe, ME, 2004); Nur Masalha, *The Bible and Zionism: invented traditions, archaeology and post-colonialism in Israel-Palestine* (London, 2007).

¹⁷ E.g. Joseph Schechtman, *The mufti and the Führer* (New York, NY, 1965); Zvi Elpeleg, *The grand mufti: Hal Amin al-Hussaini, founder of the Palestinian national movement*, trans. David Harvey, ed. Shmuel Himelstein (London, 1993).

¹⁸ Zertal, *Israel's Holocaust*, p. 105.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 126.

their fierce hatred of us? For eight years they have been dwelling in refugee camps in Gaza, and before their very eyes we are turning the land and the villages where they and their forefathers dwelt into our home.' He claimed in conclusion that

in order for their hope of annihilating us to die away, it is incumbent on us – morning and night – to be armed and ready ... *Millions of Jews, who were exterminated because they had no country, are watching us from the ashes of Jewish history and exhorting us to settle and build up a land for our people.*²⁰

Here security and the messianic striving to settle and thus to redeem the land are bound together into a single temporal posture.

If one danger of this discourse was the irresponsible Nazification of the external enemy, Zertal argues that another is its application to other Jews. Menachem Begin and the revisionists were the first to direct the discourse inwards when they regarded the UN's partition plans for Palestine as akin to liquidation, and attacked Jews who agreed to it. Later, there would be similar talk about inadequate 'Auschwitz borders' – Abba Eban's view on Israel's borders until the 1967 war – a line of argument that demonized Rabin for agreeing to withdraw from the West Bank, and encouraged Benjamin Netanyahu's affiliation of Hitler, the mufti and Yassir Arafat.²¹

Zertal is well aware that she is stirring up a hornets' nest. She broke yet another taboo in translating Hannah Arendt's *The origins of totalitarianism* into Hebrew. Reviled and unread in Israel for decades because of her book on the Eichmann trial, Arendt has been slowly rehabilitated there thanks to scholars like Zertal and the intellectual historian Steven Aschheim.²² The provocation has not gone unnoticed. In his critical review of *Israel's Holocaust*, Derek Penslar noted: 'Historians sympathetic to Zionism operate within a hermeneutic of empathy; Zertal's is the hermeneutic of suspicion.'²³ If this Schmittian dichotomy between friend and enemy exhausts the positional options for the historian, his or her professional obligation is surely to write in a non-partisan way about all ethno-national formations. Given Penslar's options, it is all too predictable that those who subscribe to the hermeneutic of empathy charge their enemies with disloyalty, indeed treason. Thus Elhanan Yakira, the Schulman Professor of Philosophy at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem, wrote disparagingly of Zertal as the 'high priestess' of an Arendt 'cult' that was destined to fail as surely as Arendt. Arendt, he continued, 'was constantly settling her accounts with her Judaism, especially with Zionism and the State of Israel', and now it was time for 'our reckoning with her'. Such aspersions on her self-identification have been

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 180. Italics in the original.

²¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 174–91.

²² Steven E. Aschheim, ed., *Hannah Arendt in Jerusalem* (Berkeley, CA, 2001).

²³ Derek Penslar review of Idith Zertal, *Israel's Holocaust*, in *American Historical Review*, 111 (2006), p. 596.

cast before, but what is noteworthy is Yakira's conflation of the academic and the ethno-political.²⁴

The reaction to Zertal's work is thus as revealing and significant as the work itself. If entreaties by insiders to surmount the identity of suffering, with its Holocaust preoccupation, fall on deaf ears among its targeted audience, this is because current events can be interpreted within a rendering of Jewish history that offers plausible and comforting Biblical quotations, metaphors, and explanations (e.g. 'a light unto the nations'; 'a nation that dwells alone') for those feeling terrorized by the past and present.²⁵ We should not be surprised by this resistance. The Holocaust was not that long ago. It is hardly surprising that the recent past haunts many Jews and informs Israeli politics. Already forty years ago, Amos Elon had observed the 'latent hysteria in Israeli life that stems directly from' the Holocaust.²⁶ The challenge for scholars, however, is not to repeat the rhetorical strategies of Ben Gurion in historical scholarship.

II

Unfortunately, this very failing is evident in two important books on Nazi propaganda by the American historian, Jeffrey Herf. In the first, *The Jewish enemy*, he is interested in the outright falsehoods of Nazi ideology, his tone betraying a scarcely warranted concern that someone might take Goebbels's propaganda at face value. At times, his refutations of Goebbels read like an official complaint by an anti-racial vilification group.²⁷ He is interested in how propaganda worked to emplot events, but focuses solely on sources that mention Jews, which he concedes constituted a small minority of Nazi propaganda. Of the more than 2,100 daily editions of the *Völkische Beobachter* during the war, only eighty-four of its headline stories were inspired by anti-Semitism. The rest were denunciations of conventional enemies.²⁸ Herf avers that his focus is justified because anti-Semitism was the core of the regime's programme. How so? Because the Nazis posited 'international Jewry' as a unified political subject – indeed as a belligerent via its puppets, the British, Americans, and

²⁴ Cf. Richard J. Bernstein, *Hannah Arendt and the Jewish question* (Cambridge, MA, 1996), and Suzanne Vromen, 'Hannah Arendt's Jewish identity: neither parvenu nor pariah', *European Journal of Political Theory*, 3 (2004), pp. 177–90. The tension in Zionist historiography between serving the nation and serving the discipline of history is discussed in David Myers, 'History as ideology: the case of Ben-Zion Dinur: Zionist historian', *Modern Judaism*, 8 (1988), pp. 167–93; Baruch Kimmerling, 'Academic history caught in the cross-fire: the case of Israeli-Jewish historiography', *History and Memory*, 7 (1995), pp. 41–65; and Michael A. Meyer, 'Two persistent tensions within *Wissenschaft des Judentums*', *Modern Judaism*, 24 (May 2004), pp. 105–19.

²⁵ Esther Benbassa, *Suffering as identity: the Jewish paradigm* (London, 2010).

²⁶ Amos Elon, *The Israelis: founders and sons* (London, 1971), p. 198.

²⁷ Jeffrey Herf, *The Jewish enemy: Nazi propaganda during World War Two and the Holocaust* (Cambridge, MA, 2005), pp. 35–6, 81–2, 88, 95–6, 102.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 26.

Soviets – and then coded the war as an existential contest between Germans and all Jews.²⁹

Herf's focus on the anti-Semitic dimension of Nazi propaganda is of course justified. 'Judeo-Bolshevism' was at the core of the German genocidal anxiety.³⁰ The murder of innocents became militarily justifiable because the Nazis argued that if Germans did not prevail, then 'international Jewry' would destroy them. Herf is arguing, then, that the Nazis perpetrated genocide against European Jewry pre-emptively – and as 'retaliation' for Allies' attacks – to forestall a feared genocide against themselves. To explain the self-perception of the Nazis that they were attacking Jews in self-defence, Herf invokes the concept of political paranoia. Paranoia explains why the Nazis radicalized their anti-Jewish measures after 1939. Only in wartime does 'radical antisemitism' become 'the explanatory framework for world history'.³¹ Until 1939, the Nazis had merely persecuted Jews and were thus far not dissimilar to discriminatory regimes elsewhere in the world. The war altered the stakes of Germany's confrontation with its neighbours, with the Jews now being cast as responsible for Germany's woes.

This is not a new proposition. Since Ernst Gombrich in the late 1960s, other scholars attuned to social psychology have invoked the paranoia concept.³² Saul Friedländer referred to the 'paranoid discourse' of the Nazis in the first volume of his *Nazi Germany and the Jews*, and Dominick LaCapra observed 'the paranoid discourse in anti-Semitism, which can make use of any facts, however contradictory, to reinforce its scapegoating procedures'.³³ But only Herf has made it the leitmotif of a lengthy monograph. The burden of the book is his reading of the speeches, newspapers, broadcasts, and press directives in which Nazi anti-Semitism was translated into propaganda; in other words, how the disparate events of the war were framed to ascribe to 'the Jews' genocidal intentions towards Germany.

As Herf faithfully summarizes this anti-Semitic propaganda, narrating it without many guiding topic sentences, readers are left to divine the workings of Nazi paranoia themselves. It is readily apparent that the Nazis reasoned inferentially, at least in their propaganda, although Herf is inclined to think they did not reason at all. For example, in trying to understand the apparent paradox of American concern about the German violation of Czech sovereignty, Goebbels wrote: 'There must be an anonymous power that is standing behind everything ... It is the same power that confronted us National Socialists at the time of the battles (*die Kampfzeit*) in Weimar Germany ... The Jews are guilty!'³⁴

²⁹ Cf. Norman Cohn, *Warrant for genocide: the myth of the Jewish world-conspiracy and the Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, 3rd edn (Chico, CA, 1981), pp. 12–13.

³⁰ Cf. Aristotle A. Kallis, *Nazi propaganda and the Second World War* (Houndmills, 2005), p. 74.

³¹ Herf, *Jewish enemy*, p. viii.

³² E. H. Gombrich, *Myth and reality in German war-time broadcasts* (London, 1970).

³³ Saul Friedländer, *Nazi Germany and the Jews*, 1: *The years of persecution* (New York, NY, 1997), p. 99; Dominick LaCapra, *History and memory after Auschwitz* (Ithaca, NY, 1998), p. 52.

³⁴ Herf, *Jewish enemy*, pp. 54–5.

Because Jews were not an autonomous belligerent but were present in the populations of all enemy countries, Goebbels had to convince Germans that ‘international Jewry’ was pulling the levers behind the scenes. He and his colleagues, Herf shows, went to great lengths to prove this accusation, producing posters depicting the specific Jews in the American and Soviet governments that supposedly ran the show. Their anti-Semitic faith, then, was buttressed with ‘evidence’, however specious. The distinction that Gavin Langmuir makes between xenophobic and chimerical anti-Semitism – the former based on a ‘kernel of truth’, the latter totally divorced from reality – does not reflect how the Nazis constructed their propaganda.³⁵ They appealed to ‘facts’ to put their case about a world Jewish conspiracy to the German public, though it goes without saying that the leap from ‘facts’ to fantasy was enabled by pre-existing, Christian-infused prejudices about Jews.

Herf is only interested in exploring the second part of this mechanism, because he posits anti-Semitism as a stable force that exists independently of its invocation by the Germans.³⁶ Readers are invited to share his indignation at the absurd accusations of the Nazis, and are left wondering why Germans believed them. While Herf at times acknowledges that Goebbels did not invent all his ‘facts’, they were refracted through paranoid, anti-Semitic lenses.³⁷ For example, Herf derides the Nazis’ anti-imperial and anti-British rhetoric but does not ask how German elites might have experienced the evisceration of their military power and strategic reach in the 1920s and 1930s. The consignment to seemingly permanent second- or third-rate status entailed the inability to forge one’s own destiny, indeed being at the mercy of avaricious neighbours. The sudden loss of great power status was experienced as unbearable. The Nazis’ often-expressed fear of destruction – which repeated rightwing political rhetoric from the 1920s – did not have to mean mass murder, as Herf suggests when he derides Nazi rhetoric. The language of genocide was routinely invoked to name the fear of permanent subordination. This fear, which was not entirely baseless in the interwar period, was widespread in the German population. Promising to reverse German powerlessness was a source of Nazi popularity.³⁸ To this extent, the book’s understandable impatience with Nazi claims about Jews denies the reader access to their mind – which weakens understanding of this phenomenon. A systematic application of the political paranoia concept requires a broader recourse to political psychology.

Similarly one-dimensional is Herf’s treatment of the Nazis’ belief in the unified political agent, ‘international Jewry’, because he is again content to ridicule paranoia rather than explain its existence. Indeed, one would have to account for the widespread belief in the existence and power of ‘international Jewry’ among

³⁵ Gavin Langmuir, ‘Toward a definition of anti-Semitism’, in *Toward a definition of anti-Semitism* (Berkeley, CA, 1990), pp. 311–52; cf. Till van Rahden, ‘Beyond ambivalence: variations of Catholic anti-Semitism in turn-of-the-century Baltimore’, *American Jewish History*, 82 (2004/5), pp. 7–42.

³⁶ Herf, *Jewish enemy*, p. 48.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 82.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 66, 71, 78.

Europeans, Americans, and many others at the time. The problem is evident in Herf's handling of Chaim Weizmann's alleged 'declaration of war' on behalf of world Jewry in 1939. Now any historian writing about this subject is advised to proceed with caution and recall that it was the flashpoint of the German *Historikerstreit* of the mid-1980s, when Saul Friedländer abruptly left a Berlin dinner party after Ernst Nolte suggested to him that Weizmann's declaration made 'world Jewry' a belligerent in the war and rendered the Nazi reaction, however disproportionate, somehow legitimate. Here we touch on the thorny issue of Jewish agency, which Herf depicts in the conventional manner, that is by stressing the total absence of Jewish political autonomy and the omnipotence of Nazi fantasy. Can this question be posed in different terms?

Nolte was incorrect to ascribe belligerent status to Jews and reality to the Judeo-Bolshevik myth. By an exaggerated act of *Verstehen*, he virtually participated in the Nazi fantasy rather than challenging it, and thereby seemed to attribute some blame to Jews for the genocide that they suffered.³⁹ Let us address the subject by unpacking Herf's analysis of the episode. This is what he writes:

In the tense days preceding the German attack on Poland, Chaim Weizmann, president of the World Zionist Organization and a British citizen, asserted that Jews stood on the side of Britain and of democracy and against Nazi Germany. In view of the Nazi regime's anti-Semitic policies, it was an obvious thing for any Jewish leader to say, though Weizmann was in no position to speak for Jews in general. Yet that was how the Nazi propagandists viewed his statement.⁴⁰

This treatment of the issue moralizes rather than explains; both Weizmann and the Nazi propagandists got it wrong, we are told. The philosopher Berel Lang presents a more historical analysis when he writes that Weizmann's 'reference to "the Jews" conveyed the sense of a corporate decision or will like the stereotyped myths of Jewish power and conspiracy'. Rather than express surprise that the Nazis took it seriously, Lang thinks it is hardly surprising. 'How else to interpret this open declaration of war by Weizmann? And why *not* see it as another now public step in a progression that began earlier with others that were less overt but pointed in the same direction?'⁴¹ So while it may be true, as Richard J. Evans wrote in his account of the Irving-Lipstadt libel trial, that 'The idea that Weizmann was in any way a leader of world Jewry in 1939 belongs solely to the fantasy world of anti-Semitic conspiracy theory', Weizmann did, in his letter to Neville Chamberlain, invoke 'the Jews' in his organization's support of Great Britain even though the World Zionist Organization and Jewish agency

³⁹ Ernst Nolte, 'Between myth and revisionism? The "Third Reich" in the perspective of the 1980s', in H. W. Koch, ed., *Aspects of the 'Third Reich'* (London, 1985), pp. 17–38.

⁴⁰ Herf, *Jewish enemy*, p. 61.

⁴¹ Berel Lang, 'The Jewish "declaration of war" against the Nazis', *Antioch Review*, 64 (2006), p. 370. Emphasis in original.

only spoke for a tiny minority of Jews and could not be considered a sovereign agent.⁴²

To understand the conceptual limitations of *The Jewish enemy* requires considering the proposition that geopolitics in the first half of the twentieth century was conducted on the assumption that ‘world Jewry’ (or ‘international Jewry’) existed as a political subject and that differences of opinion lay in varying assessments of its power. By 1939, Weizmann’s sort of invocation had been common for at least a century. When, in 1840, the English philanthropist and Jewish community leader Moses Montefiore led an international delegation to the ruler of Syria, Mehemet Ali, to protest the imprisonment of some Damascan Jews for alleged ritual murder, he noted that it represented ‘the Israelites of the whole world’.⁴³ The ‘Damascus affair’ had just seen the unprecedented emergence of national and transnational Jewish public spheres in the wake of the scandalous accusations. Rather than engage only in the traditional tactic of *shtadlanut* – intercession by Jewish notables on behalf of oppressed Jews – Jews campaigned openly across Europe, with sympathetic Gentile support, for the release of the captives.⁴⁴ The exhilarating construction of collective Jewish agency for an ‘overtly Jewish cause’, notes the Israeli diplomatic historian Aharon Klieman, meant that ‘it became possible for the first time in centuries to speak once again of “world Jewry” as a political reality rather than a purely ethnic, religious or geographical abstraction’.⁴⁵

The material dimension of this achievement during the nineteenth century was the co-operation of Jews across the Ottoman Empire with British commercial interests, which fed into British interest in Jewish welfare there. The Jews were for the British what Roman Catholic Arab Christians were for the French, or Orthodox and Armenian Christians for the Russians. For his services to the empire, Montefiore became a British ‘imperial hero’.⁴⁶ The humanitarian activism of Jewish organizations on behalf of oppressed Eastern European Jewry, especially but not only in Romania, was a feature of European diplomacy from the Congress of Berlin in 1878 until the Treaty of Versailles. Although Jewish organizations often worked against one another – Zionists favouring migration to Palestine while non-Zionists urged equal rights in their current countries – ‘Jewish diplomacy’ was widely acknowledged.⁴⁷

⁴² Richard J. Evans, *David Irving, Hitler and Holocaust denial: electronic edition*, www.hdot.org/en/trial/defense/evans/540b.

⁴³ Jonathan Frankel, *The Damascus affair: ‘ritual murder’, politics, and the Jews in 1840* (Cambridge, 1997), p. 433.

⁴⁴ David Vital, *A people apart: the Jews in Europe, 1789–1939* (Oxford, 1999), pp. 2, 233–48; Aharon Klieman, ‘*Shtadlanut* as statecraft by the stateless’, *Israel Journal of Foreign Affairs*, 2 (2008), p. 109.

⁴⁵ Klieman, ‘*Shtadlanut* as statecraft by the stateless’, p. 109.

⁴⁶ Abigail Green, ‘The British Empire and the Jews: an imperialism of human rights?’, *Past and Present*, 199 (2008), pp. 175–205; Abigail Green, *Moses Montefiore: Jewish liberator, imperial hero* (Cambridge, MA, 2010).

⁴⁷ Mark Levene, *War, Jews and the new Europe: the diplomacy of Lucien Wolf, 1914–1919* (Oxford, 1992); Carole Fink, *Defending the rights of others: the great powers, the Jews, and international minority protection, 1878–1938* (New York, NY, 2004), ch. 1.

British elites, no less than others, were fascinated by this diplomacy. They thought that ‘international Jewish power’ could deliver them Russian and American support against Germany, whom they feared enjoyed Russian- and American-Jewish sympathy, during the crucial years of the First World War. Even philo-Semites like Arthur Balfour thought Jews ‘undoubtedly constitute a most formidable power whose manifestations are not by any means always attractive’.⁴⁸ Weizmann confirmed the prejudices of interlocutors in the British Foreign Office to assure them of Russian Jewish favour:

If you give us a declaration in favour of Zionism, the declaration will make the Jews of the world understand that you are really friendly and the friendship of the Jews of the world is not a thing to be blown upon, it is a thing that matters a great deal, even for a mighty empire like the British.⁴⁹

The British patronage of the Zionist movement yielded it official status as a diplomatic entity, the Jewish agency, and official standing in the Mandate for Palestine. Palestine was now the internationally guaranteed prospective home for all Jews, from Sydney to Warsaw, not only Jewish residents of Palestine. There was no input from Palestinian Arabs in these negotiations, although they constituted about 90 per cent of the population.⁵⁰ It seems ahistorical of Herf to suggest that Weizmann had no right to speak for world Jewry when this arrogation – indeed the claim that it possessed great influence – was instrumental in the British government’s Balfour Declaration in 1917.⁵¹

It is immaterial that Zionists were in no position to deliver on their promise of Jewish support in the USA and Russia, when they played on this fascination by exaggerating the significance of Jewish influence in those countries. Everyone played the game of the international Jewish simulacra. Weizmann admitted as much when he said in 1927 that:

We Jews got the Balfour Declaration quite unexpectedly; or, in other words, we are the greatest war profiteers ... The Balfour Declaration of 1917 was built on air, and a foundation had to be laid for it through years of exacting work ... The Jews, [the British government] knew, were against us; we stood alone on a little island, a tiny group of Jews with a foreign past. This period has passed now. Now we have an address, a name and, above all, great moral credit. Now we can build and now we can make demands, now is the time.⁵²

⁴⁸ David Vital, *Zionism: the crucial phase* (Oxford, 1987), p. 302. Balfour thought, however, that ‘the balance of wrong-doing’ was ‘greatly on the Christian side’.

⁴⁹ Cited in Mark Levene, ‘The Balfour Declaration: a case of mistaken identity’, *English Historical Review*, 107 (1992), p. 73.

⁵⁰ John J. McTague, Jr, ‘Zionist–British negotiations over the draft Mandate for Palestine, 1920’, *Jewish Social Studies*, 42 (1980), pp. 281–92.

⁵¹ Fink, *Defending*, pp. 88–9; Sharman Kadish, *Bolsheviks and British Jews: the Anglo-Jewish community, Britain and the Russian revolution* (London, 1992), pp. 137–44.

⁵² Chaim Weizmann, ‘Reminiscences: address at a banquet at Czernowitz, Dec. 12th, 1927’, in Paul Goodman, ed., *Chaim Weizmann: a tribute on his seventieth birthday* (London, 1945), p. 199.

The realization in public law of a corporate, global Jewish entity guaranteed access to British elites; indeed, Zionists were part of this elite. Thus Weizmann and the Jewish agency were granted (sympathetic) audiences with a special cabinet sub-committee after they vehemently opposed the Passfield White Paper in 1930, which gestured to Palestinian Arab grievances. Palestinian Arab leaders were not accorded such hospitality in London. Weizmann contacted MacDonald's wife and then son to put his case, curtly reminding the British leadership that there is 'one thing that Jews will never forgive, and that is being fooled'.⁵³ He threatened to resign and Conservatives and influential Labour figures alike mobilized public opinion against the government.⁵⁴ In the event, the prime minister Ramsay MacDonald and Lord Passfield were sufficiently concerned about the reaction of American Jewry, which they believed exerted a significant economic power which could harm the English economy, that they reversed course and acceded to the Zionists' demands in the well-known 'black letter' of 1931. This kind of mobilization had been successful previously. When the first high commissioner of Palestine, Herbert Samuel, not exactly hostile to Zionists, suggested that Jews abjure the goal of statehood in favour of the Mandate's plan for a non-sovereign homeland, he too was met with 'utter outrage' by Zionists who insisted that the British enable Jewish immigration to achieve a majority forthwith. Weizmann even contemplated having Samuel removed.⁵⁵ Historians who decry the apparent belief that the Jewish agency exerted an 'overwhelming influence' on the British government still concede that 'Zionist influence was inflated by certain Zionist leaders' vanity about the exercise of such influence and by the need for their political strategy'.⁵⁶ That is the point. High politics on this terrain was a game of smoke and mirrors.

The game continued into the 1930s. Zionists consistently invoked 'the fundamental rights of the Jewish people' and threatened boycotts against Great Britain by 'Zionists all over the world' whenever it announced policy changes favourable, or rather less unfavourable, to the Palestinian Arabs.⁵⁷ There was consistency in the Zionist reference to its global presence. David Ben Gurion insisted that the British conceive of Jews and Arabs as global entities to convince them that the latter had more than enough land while the largely homeless Jews only wanted, and desperately needed, a tiny portion of the Middle East.⁵⁸ It was this argument that led another British high commissioner, John Chancellor, to note

⁵³ Chaim Weizmann, *Trial and error* (New York, NY, 1949), pp. 321–5.

⁵⁴ Paul Keleman, 'Zionism and the British Labour party, 1917–1939', *Social History*, 21 (1996), pp. 71–87.

⁵⁵ Bernard Wasserstein, 'Herbert Samuel and the Palestine problem', *English Historical Review*, 91 (1976), pp. 768–9.

⁵⁶ Gabriel Sheffer, 'British colonial policy-making towards Palestine (1929–1939)', *Middle East Studies*, 14 (1978), pp. 307–22.

⁵⁷ Yehodaya Haim, 'Zionist policies and attitudes towards the Arabs on the eve of the Arab Revolt, 1936', *Middle East Studies*, 14 (1978), pp. 212–14.

⁵⁸ Michael J. Cohen, 'Secret diplomacy and rebellion in Palestine, 1936–1939', *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 8 (1977), p. 381.

that ‘world Jewry possessed rights that the Arabs themselves did not possess in Palestine’.⁵⁹ He was right. That is what Weizmann and Ben Gurion wanted. To understand why the Nazis pressed hard on the paranoid accusation that ‘world Jewry’ planned to destroy Germany, it is necessary to understand that ‘world Jewry’ was integral to the geopolitical vocabulary of international society, despite its insubstantiality.

III

The Jewish enemy is littered with references to the mufti’s hostility to this state of affairs, which Herf interprets as a manifestation of his radical anti-Semitism. Herf’s sequel, *Nazi propaganda for the Arab world*, deepens this connection, arguing that Arab intellectuals opposed Zionists and Jews generally because they were influenced by Nazi anti-Semitism rather than defending their homeland against foreign take-over.⁶⁰ This is an old idea and remains a popular view. The Israeli historian Ephraim Karsh speaks for many when he writes that ‘the belief that Muslim opposition to Israel is motivated by anti-Zionism, rather than anti-Semitism, has been a staple of anti-Israel propaganda’.⁶¹ And the recently published *Reference guide to the Nazis and Arabs during the Holocaust* draws on Herf’s work to document ‘accurately and credibly ... the conspiracy between the Third Reich and the Arab leadership during the Holocaust era’.⁶²

While this is not the place to revisit the mufti’s liaisons with Nazi Germany in detail, it is worth noting that Middle East specialists have debunked the thesis that Arab and Muslim intellectuals were generally drawn to fascism. Whatever the sources of al-Husaini’s hostility to Zionism and Jews, the singular focus on him and his supporters by Herf and others occludes the fact that they were a minority among Arab and Islamist intellectuals. As Israel Gershoni and James Jankowski show in *Confronting fascism in Egypt: dictatorship versus democracy in the 1930s*, Egyptian public opinion considered Nazism to be an even worse form of European imperialism than the British or French varieties. The Muslim Brothers objected to Nazi racism and the consensus was that Nazism represented a grave threat to the region.⁶³ A younger generation of German scholars shows that the attraction to fascism in Iraq, Lebanon, and Syria was a contested strand in a broader debate. What is more, as Peter Wien demonstrates for Iraq in the 1930s and early 1940s, the interest in Germany’s rapid modernization and military prowess was

⁵⁹ Kenneth W. Stein, *The land question in Palestine, 1917–1939* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1984), p. 130.

⁶⁰ Jeffrey Herf, *Nazi propaganda for the Arab world* (New Haven, CT, 2009); Jeffrey Herf, ‘Hitlers Dschihad: NS-Rundfunkpropaganda für Nordafrika und den Nahen Osten’, *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte*, 58 (2010), pp. 259–86.

⁶¹ Efraim Karsh, ‘The long trail of Islamic anti-Semitism’, *Israel Affairs*, 12 (2006), p. 1.

⁶² Shelomo Alfassa, *Reference guide to the Nazis and Arabs during the Holocaust* (New York, NY, 2006), pp. 9, 44.

⁶³ Israel Gershoni and James Jankowski, *Confronting fascism in Egypt: dictatorship versus democracy in the 1930s* (Stanford, CA, 2010). Herf cites an early version of their book in a footnote but does not integrate it into his argument: Herf, *Nazi propaganda*, p. 275 n. 85.

derivative of Ottoman discourses, while Germany was only one model of a revisionist power among others, with alternative objects of admiration including Turkey and Japan. These authors reveal that the interest in Germany was genuine and not just strategic, transcending ‘the enemy of my enemy [i.e. Britain and France] is my friend’ line common in older Arab historiography, although they stress that it is important not to conflate the part with the whole.⁶⁴ Nuance, differentiation, and complexity are features of this growing historiography by experts in Arab history (who, unlike Herf, use Arab sources), one absent in books like *Nazi Palestine*, which brand Arabs, and Palestinians in particular, as pro-Nazi genocidal fanatics.⁶⁵

The evidentiary basis of Herf’s second book is the Nazi radio propaganda broadcasts to the Arab world, which were intercepted and translated by American intelligence and now sit in the US National Archives in Maryland. His interpretation of those broadcasts has been scrutinized in a master’s thesis by Thomas Kehoe, the only other study I know of based on those documents.⁶⁶ Kehoe outlines how Herf’s concern with the present Middle East colours his reading of the relationship between Nazi Germany and the Arab nationalist movement during the Second World War, leading to a cherry-picking of quotations to demonstrate the continuity between Nazis and Islamic anti-Semitism. This is to misunderstand Nazi propaganda, says Kehoe. The propagandists did not believe that a purely German message would work for an Arab audience, because the shared assumptions about nation and state within Germany did not obtain for Germans and Arabs. Consequently, all Nazi propaganda for the Arabs was based on a simple ‘two-fold message’: the Arabs should rise up against the Allies, and the Third Reich would support them when they did. Each broadcast, whether from a German or Arab – a variety of voices was used to avoid the impression of German preaching – espoused the same message, suggesting that the Arabs and Germans were in broad agreement. The main theme of this propaganda was foreign occupation, with the British mentioned by far the most often, then the United States, especially once American troops arrived in North Africa. Jews were third in line. This varying intensity of attention was not surprising in view of the anti-imperial theme. The British were the dominant imperial power. The Americans could be either cast as lackeys of the British or a

⁶⁴ Peter Wien, *Iraqi Arab nationalism: authoritarian, totalitarian and pro-fascist inclination, 1932–1941* (London and New York, NY, 2006); Götz Nordbruch, *Nazism in Syria and Lebanon: the ambivalence of the German option, 1933–1945* (London and New York, NY, 2009); Christopher Schumann, ed., *Nationalism and liberal thought in the Arab east: ideology and practice* (London and New York, NY, 2010); Gerhard Höpp, Peter Wien and René Wildangel, eds., *Blind für die Geschichte? Arabische Begegnungen mit dem Nationalsozialismus* (Berlin, 2004).

⁶⁵ Klaus-Michael Mallmann and Martin Cüppers, *Nazi Palestine: the plans for the extermination of Jews in Palestine* (New York, NY, 2009). See generally Peter Wien, ‘Coming to terms with the past: German academia and historical relations between the Arab lands and Nazi Germany’, *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 42 (2010), pp. 311–21.

⁶⁶ Thomas J. Kehoe, ‘The rhetoric of disinterest: understanding Nazi radio propaganda in the Middle East and North Africa during World War Two’ (MA thesis, University of Sydney, 2010).

rising power with their own ambitions for Arab lands. Nazis cast Jews as Zionists who were yet another group with ambitions for Arab land or beneficiaries of imperial rule in states where they had long been a minority presence, such as in Syria, Egypt, or Morocco.

Rather than arguing that the Nazis were attempting to impart radical, paranoid anti-Semitism to an Arab audience, Kehoe shows that the Nazis ‘tailored their message anew’ to fit the fears of their Arab audience. According to Nazi propaganda, the Jews, with the help of the British and the Americans, were seeking to upend centuries of Islamic and Arab dominance in the Middle East and North Africa, and replace it with non-Islamic rule. Zionism was therefore another expression of western imperialism. To be sure, the broadcasts complain about ‘international Jewry’. Yet rather than the amorphous threat of Herf’s ‘radical anti-Semitism’, Kehoe shows that the propaganda pointed to actual Allied government initiatives in support of Zionism. For example, here is the mufti speaking on 19 March 1943,

The Allied attitude ... as regards supporting the Jews and granting them privileges over the inhabitants of the country, as well as giving them important posts, is a clear sign that the great Jewish menace does not only threaten Palestine and her neighbouring countries in the Middle East, but also the Arab countries in the West.

In the same broadcast, the mufti goes on to reframe the ‘great Jewish menace’ in terms that spoke to his Arab audience’s anti-imperialism:

It is the duty of all the Arabs in particular and the Moslems in general to take an oath in front of God to destroy Jewish aspirations completely and demolish that imaginary bridge between New York and Jerusalem, thus proving for all times that faith is more powerful than money and devilish and dirty conspiracies plotted by international Jewry.

He finished by praying that Allah should ‘lead the Arabs and the Moslems along the right path and help them stand united in their struggle against the enemies, the Jews and the Allies’, so that the ‘Arabs and the Moslems will then be free and independent in their countries’.⁶⁷ If the rhetoric partly resembles Nazi propaganda in Germany, it points (even in this inflammatory speech) to concrete issues of foreign dominance, inversion of the *dhimmi* status (natural order), and Jewish aspirations for Palestine. ‘International Jewry’ in this context, suggests Kehoe, is less a phantasm of Nazi paranoia than an inflated, often hysterical assessment of the Zionist ambition for a Jewish homeland at the expense of the local Arab population. So while anti-Jewish rhetoric was prominent in this message, it did not introduce a novel anti-Semitism to Arab discourses. The Nazis presented their message in terms that Arab audiences probably already understood.

Attention to the post-First World War context also explains the mufti’s belief that Zionism was the product of British and American imperialism. The British

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 109–11.

Foreign Office wanted to use Zionism as a local asset for proxy imperialism because direct and continuing occupation of Palestine would upset American Wilsonianism. The Foreign Office and Winston Churchill, then secretary of state for war, thought that Zionism was an effective antidote to the perceived Jewish predilection for revolution and Bolshevism. In a February 1920 article in the *Illustrated Sunday Herald*, he argued that the 'Zionist Jew' could tempt Jews from Bolshevism by constructing the Jewish homeland in Palestine for the benefit of both Jews and European civilization.⁶⁸ Weizmann also recommended Zionism to the British as an alternative to Russia as a pole of attraction for Jews.⁶⁹ Arab leaders noticed the co-operation between Zionists, in Palestine and London, and the British state. Up until the mid-1930s, however, their continuing failure to have the terms and application of the Mandate amended in the face of Zionist opposition did not lessen their faith in British justice. The mufti, whom the British had installed in his created office to help govern the locals, was a pliant figure for the first half of his career, from 1917 until the so-called Arab Revolt of 1936.⁷⁰ After McDonald's humiliating 'black letter' of 1931, however, many Palestinian came to believe that the Zionists 'always had their way' with the British, and Arab notable politics became vulnerable to radicals' charges of impotence or worse.⁷¹ A direct result was al-Husaini's appeal to the 1931 Muslim Congress for aid from the Muslim world.⁷²

Herf does not consider the political context of the Mandate when accounting for al-Husaini's political development, again fixating on anti-Semitic ideology. There is no mention, for example, that the parliamentary road to Arab sovereignty was obstructed by the Zionists until 1939.⁷³ By the early 1930s, many Palestinians had come to see that co-operation with the Mandate would lead to being overwhelmed by Jewish settlers – which was the main Zionist aim. Radical parties emerged to challenge the elite politics of the notables like the mufti. He avoided their entreaties at first, rejecting the armed struggle urged by Shaikh Izz ad-Din al-Qassam in 1933. But again accused of weakness and a pro-British orientation, he broke with the Mandate in 1936 when the Arab revolt erupted, and began down the path to an alliance with the Axis powers.⁷⁴ The mufti had concluded that the British and 'world Jewry' were working against Palestinian interests in the alliance entreated by Churchill and Weizmann over a decade earlier. Herf thinks that ideology – radical anti-Semitism – accounts for the Arab

⁶⁸ Winston Churchill, 'Zionism versus Bolshevism: a struggle for the soul of the Jewish people', *Illustrated Sunday Herald*, 8 Feb. 1920; Kadish, *Bolsheviks*, pp. 138–42. See generally Michael Makovsky, *Churchill's promised land: Zionism and statecraft* (New Haven, CT, 2007).

⁶⁹ Kadish, *Bolsheviks*, p. 156.

⁷⁰ Philip Mattar, 'The mufti of Jerusalem and the politics of Palestine', *Middle East Journal*, 42 (1988), pp. 228–40.

⁷¹ W. F. Abboushi, 'The road to rebellion: Arab Palestine in the 1930s', *Journal of Palestine Studies*, 6 (1977), p. 25.

⁷² Elpeleg, *The grand mufti*, p. 26.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, p. 30; Mattar, 'The mufti', p. 232.

⁷⁴ Mattar, 'The mufti', pp. 234–6.

and Muslim rejection of Zionism, but might not (geo)politics be involved after all?⁷⁵

Even though the British and Zionists later clashed about immigration levels to Palestine, the game of positing world Jewry as a politically articulated global entity was winning Palestine for the Zionists. But it could also expose them when their lack of actual power was revealed.⁷⁶ What if an imperial power thought that ‘the Jews’ were not its friend, i.e. a useful tool in its geopolitical calculations, but an enemy, indeed an implacable one? This notion takes us to the losing, fatal side of the equation, that which leads to the ‘Judeo-Bolshevik’ myth, the central actor in Nazi propaganda.

IV

Astonishingly, only one general monograph has been published on the idea of Judeo-Bolshevism – and that was in 2009.⁷⁷ Its author, André Gerrits, distinguishes different approaches to the subject. A sceptical tradition attributes ‘no kernel of truth’ to the myth, which is based on ‘chimerical hostility’.⁷⁸ An alternative approach, enjoined by Gerrits, recognizes that the myth is based on ‘fiction *and* reality’, for Jews were undeniably prominent in revolutionary and Bolshevik movements before and after the First World War. His socio-historical analysis investigates why some Jews were attracted to revolutionary politics and how surrounding Christian populations depicted this phenomenon. It unpacks how prejudice is generated and functions. The key moment for the myth’s crystallization was the Bolshevik revolution and its interpretation by White Russian anti-Bolsheviks, although the link between Jews and progressive and socialist-Marxist thinking pre-dates the revolution. In the years immediately preceding and following emancipation, the Jews (or formerly Jewish individuals or persons perceived as Jews) found opportunities for *visible* political activism and leadership only on the left. Churchill was one of many in the west convinced that the revolution was a Jewish project responsible for countless atrocities, indeed that the Bolshevik regime was a Jewish tyranny. The myth was most fervently believed in Poland, Hungary, and Romania because of the size of their Jewish populations, the general culture of anti-Semitism, and the ‘real experience of Communism and “Jewish” participation

⁷⁵ That ideology was the independent variable is also implied in Richard Breitman and Norman J. W. Goda, *Hitler’s shadow: Nazi war criminals, U.S. intelligence and the Cold War* (Washington, DC, 2010).

⁷⁶ Vital, *Zionism*, p. 360.

⁷⁷ André Gerrits, *The myth of Jewish communism: a historical interpretation* (Brussels, 2009). Earlier, specialist literature includes Zvi Y. Gitelman, *Jewish nationality and Soviet politics: the Jewish sections of the CPSU, 1917–1930* (Princeton, NJ, 1972); Erich E. Haberer, *Jews and revolution in nineteenth-century Russia* (Cambridge, 1995); Jaff Schatz, ‘Jews and the communist movement in interwar Poland’, in Jonathan Frankel, ed., *Studies in contemporary Jewry*, xx (Oxford, 2004), pp. 13–37. There is of course an extensive literature on the related question of the world Jewish conspiracy.

⁷⁸ This is Herf’s position. André Gerrits, ‘Antisemitism and anti-Communism: the myth of “Judeo-Communism” in eastern Europe’, *East European Jewish Affairs*, 25 (1995), pp. 51–2.

in it'.⁷⁹ These countries suffered Bolshevik invasions, which were interpreted as Russian-Jewish violations. Hungary had a short-lived Bolshevik government with conspicuous Jewish leadership during which the country lost territory and prestige. Russian-Jewish rule, so to speak, was linked to foreign domination and fear of national annihilation.⁸⁰ The anti-Semitic interpretation of this participation is the conviction that Jews essentially aim to subvert Christian nations via secret societies and violence. It was a paranoid and self-referential interpretative circle: all revolutionary politics is Jewish and all Jews are revolutionary.⁸¹

Russian Jews did not start revolutionary movements in the late nineteenth century, although they energetically participated in them in growing numbers. According to Yuri Slezkine, these young Jews rebelled both against the illiberalism of Russian society and the traditionalism of their parents: theirs was a double revolution. Joining leftwing movements based on universal human values offered an identity politics that transcended caste. They were 'the most revolutionary (along with the Latvians) group in the Russian Empire. They were also the best at being revolutionaries'.⁸² If their membership of the Bolshevik party during the civil war was small – under 6 per cent – their superior literacy catapulted them into visible leadership positions. Thus Jews constituted a quarter of the Party's central committee between 1919 and 1921, half of the office for combating counter-revolution, and so forth.⁸³ Many in the Christian Russian population, accustomed to socially subordinate Jews, thought them 'too prominent' in leftist politics, and found them guilty for forming the 'backbone and core' of the Bolshevik movement.⁸⁴ The rhetoric was no different in Hungary where conservatives charged that 'a significant and lively part of Jewry took part actively' in the short-lived Béla Kun regime in 1919. The slippage from 'facts' to myth is evident when they concluded that 'This revolution is a Jewish revolution.' The visibility of Jews in these movements and regimes furnished 'objective proof' for the Judeo-Bolshevik myth for these Hungarians, but the salient factor is their pre-existing prejudices about Jews as cursed and unusually powerful. The myth was prepared discursively during the war when such leaders interpreted the increasing secularization of the Hungarian state as a Jewish 'take-over'. The situation was much the same in Poland.⁸⁵ The German right drew the same kind of conclusions, accusing leftists and Jews for stabbing the army in the back in

⁷⁹ Ibid., p. 63; Makovsky, *Churchill's promised land*, pp. 82–6.

⁸⁰ Gerrits, 'Antisemitism', p. 65; Paul Hanebrink, 'Transnational culture war: Christianity, nation, and the Judeo-Bolshevik myth in Hungary, 1890–1920', *Journal of Modern History*, 80 (2008), p. 76.

⁸¹ Gerrits, 'Antisemitism', p. 55.

⁸² Yuri Slezkine, *The Jewish century* (Princeton, NJ, 2004), p. 154; Cf. Marci Shore, "'If we're proud of Freud ...': the family romance of "Judeo-Bolshevism"", *East European Politics and Societies*, 23 (2009), pp. 298–314.

⁸³ Slezkine, *Jewish century*, pp. 175–7.

⁸⁴ Ibid., p. 181.

⁸⁵ Hanebrink, 'Transnational', p. 75; Joanna Michlic, 'The Soviet occupation of Poland, 1939–1941, and the stereotype of the anti-Polish and pro-Soviet Jew', *Jewish Social Studies*, 13 (2007), pp. 135–76.

1917 and 1918 via domestic labour unrest, for consenting to the debilitating Treaty of Versailles, leading the Bolshevik uprisings and republics in Munich and Berlin, and imposing the Weimar Republic on the hapless German population for the benefit of the Allies. The Jews, they said, had proven themselves to be a disloyal people that could never be permitted to imperil the German nation again.⁸⁶

What does this political dynamic tell us about how paranoia works? All too often, minority groups are held collectively guilty and are punished for the actions of some of its members. The group as a whole is seen as a potential security risk and so it can be interned, deported or otherwise destroyed in toto for reasons of state. Thus the Polish government in early 1946 held the Lemko ethnic group responsible for a Ukrainian nationalist assassination of a Polish military war hero: 18,000 communist troops expelled some 200,000 people from south-east Poland. No distinction was made between those who had been loyal to the communist regime and those who had not been.⁸⁷ That was a government decision, but the logic of pogroms works in the same way. The link between domestic minority and foreign threat seems an enduring feature of genocidal violence. Conventional studies of prejudice that omit the geopolitics of ethnic loyalty and security cannot account for why ethnic differences become dangerously politicized at particular points. Take the case of Jews in Syria in the 1920s and 1930s. The Balfour Declaration and subsequent European rule sparked intense fears that the terms of the former would be fulfilled, indeed that the Islamic world would be destroyed or at least dominated by infidels and *dhimmi* populations. Local Jews were thereby tied to a despised alien power and their loyalty was impugned. Earlier, in Ottoman Turkey, the same dynamic was played out between Christians and the majority Muslim population as the socially mobile Christians were sponsored by the European powers who, it was feared, would place them in charge after Ottoman defeat. The operating fear is ‘about “foreigners” attempting to destroy the empire’ by ‘becoming a collaborator with a foreigner’. Because Jews were not implicated in this dynamic, they were not attacked like the Armenians and other Christians.⁸⁸ Where they were, as in Soviet-occupied Poland in 1939 – Jews were accused of welcoming Soviet tanks with flowers and kisses – they were subject to terrible retributive violence by the local Poles – as were other non-Polish

⁸⁶ Mark Levene, ‘The “Jewish Question” in international affairs, 1919–1939’, in Frank McDonough, ed., *The origins of the Second World War: an international perspective* (Hambledon, forthcoming).

⁸⁷ Chris M. Hann, ‘Ethnic cleansing in eastern Europe: Poles and Ukrainians beside the Curzon line’, *Nations and Nationalism*, 2 (1996), pp. 389–406; Krystyna Kersten, ‘Forced migration and the transformation of Polish society in the postwar period’, in Philipp Ther and Ana Siljak, eds., *Redrawing nations: ethnic cleansing in east-central Europe, 1944–1948* (Lanham, MD, 2001), p. 80.

⁸⁸ Aaron Rodrigue, ‘The mass destruction of Armenians and Jews in twentieth-century perspective’, in Hans-Lukas Kieser and Dominick J. Schaller, eds., *Der Völkermord an den Armeniern und die Shoah* (Zurich, 2002), pp. 305–8; Mark Levene, ‘Creating a modern “zone of genocide”: the impact of nation and state formation on eastern Anatolia 1878–1923’, *Holocaust and Genocide Studies*, 12 (1998), pp. 393–433. See also the discussion of Bloxham below.

minorities seen to be disloyal.⁸⁹ Nazi propaganda made constant reference to Jewish–Zionist collaboration with British and American imperial designs in the Middle East, exhorting Egyptians to kill them should their rule be threatened. This exhortation was cast less as a race war than as a security emergency. Indeed, the Nazi radio broadcast accused Jews of ‘plotting against your security’ by ‘planning to violate your women, to kill your children and to destroy you’. Arabs should ‘annihilate’ Jews because they were ‘base supporters of British imperialism’.⁹⁰

Political sociology confirms these observations. The thesis of Roger Petersen’s *Understanding ethnic violence* is that sudden changes in ethnic status hierarchies, which typically accompany foreign occupations, cause intense fear and resentment among the previously dominant population, which exacts violent revenge after the occupiers leave.⁹¹ Historical research bears out this pattern of ‘double occupations’, especially in the borderlands of east-central Europe.⁹² If Petersen emphasizes resentment at status loss more than fear of extinction as the operative emotion – although fear is often expressed by subject majorities – he accurately points to the imbrication of rage and vengeance with accusations of collective, ethnic guilt.

An intersecting factor is ethnic and national memory. The traumatic experience of loss and occupation is not forgotten but nurtured, particularly in nationalist circles, as a motivating source for revenge and redemption.⁹³ For the traumatized consciousness, past events are never really past: they are all too present or, at least, the past can repeat itself all too readily. Mark Levene has pointed out how such learning processes are catastrophized: ‘never again’ will a group allow the disloyal national minority to undermine the survival of ‘its’ state. There are no limits in dealing with traitors in emergency circumstances.⁹⁴ What this dynamic tells us about the distinction with which this review began – between violence based on ‘hallucinatory’ and ‘real’ conflict – is that genocides *generally* are based on traumatic memories of past events in which ‘disloyal’ peoples are held collectively guilty and then collectively punished

⁸⁹ Jan T. Gross, *Revolution from abroad: the Soviet conquest of Poland’s western Ukraine and western Belorussia* (Princeton, NJ, 1988), pp. 29–37.

⁹⁰ ‘Despatch No. 502 from the American legation at Cairo, Egypt, Axis broadcasts in Arabic for the period July 3 to 9, 1942, Cairo, July 21, 1942’, p. 14. National Archives and Record Administration, Maryland, USA, RG 84: records of the foreign service posts of the department of state, US embassy and legation, Cairo, classified and unclassified general records, 1936–55, 815.4–820.02, box 77.

⁹¹ Roger Petersen, *Understanding ethnic violence: fear, hatred, and resentment in twentieth-century Eastern Europe* (Cambridge 2002).

⁹² Gross, *Revolution*; Kate Brown, *Biography of no place: from ethnic borderland to Soviet heartland* (Cambridge, MA, 2004); Alexander Prusin, *Nationalizing a borderland* (Tuscaloosa, AL, 2005); Tim Snyder, *Bloodlands* (New York, NY, 2010).

⁹³ Dan Stone, ‘Genocide and memory’, in Donald Bloxham and A. Dirk Moses, eds., *The Oxford handbook on genocide studies* (Oxford, 2010), pp. 102–21.

⁹⁴ Mark Levene, *Genocide in the age of the nation state, II: The rise of the west and the coming of genocide* (London, 2005), pp. 54, 58, 77, 128, 158.

or deported or destroyed, *pre-emptively*, to prevent the feared repetition of the previous traumatic experience. For the paranoid subject, the ‘hallucinatory’ is all too real.

Consider the Armenian genocide. What ‘objective’ threat did Armenian women and children pose to Ottoman security during the First World War? None. But Ottoman authorities were firm believers in conspiracies between their Christian subject and rival Christian empires. Just as ‘the Jews’ had not betrayed Germany in 1918, neither had ‘the Armenians’ betrayed the Ottoman Empire in 1915 although a number of Jews and Armenians had participated in subversive activity. On the whole, these communities were loyal. The customary distinction, as Leo Kuper classically framed it, ‘between massacres of a weak defenceless hostage group used as a scapegoat, and massacres arising in the course of a conflict in which there is some realistic threat or challenge to the interests of the dominant group in the host society’ does not distinguish between the loyal and disloyal within such groups.⁹⁵ This is the ‘Holocaust paradigm’ that prevented the UN investigation committee from discerning the genocidal attacks in Darfur orchestrated by the Sudanese government. It is largely fruitless to search for ‘real’ interactions between victim and perpetrator, as Nolte did for Jews and the Nazis and many Turkish historians do when claiming the Ottoman state was ‘provoked’ by Armenian nationalists. The element of pre-emption means that groups are attacked *before* its members can subvert the state. And, as noted above, pre-emption is based on a temporal slippage, that is, on particular memories of past interactions, however fantastically interpreted. Pre-emption indicates paranoia; attacking groups because of what some or many of its members *might* do. Genocide, then, is governed more by fantastical security imperatives than by aesthetics of racial purity. The stark dichotomy of ideology and political rationality should be replaced with a spectrum that recognizes how paranoid threat assessment leading to pre-emptive strikes against collectives is present in genocides generally. All genocides can be placed on this spectrum with the Holocaust rather than treated separately.

It might be said, rightly, that the Nazi–Jewish political dynamic was based on a distorted interpretation of the past: the few Jewish Bolsheviks and capitalists were not acting as Jewish nationalists in the same way as the Armenian nationalists who so exercised Ottoman elites. There were not explicitly Jewish political parties to stab the German army in the back or ferment revolution in 1918. Indeed, the Jewish case is remarkable for the mediation or displacement of some ‘Jewish’ politics (leaving aside explicitly Jewish political movements like Bundism and Zionism) in essentially non-Jewish social forces like capitalism and Bolshevism.⁹⁶ The conspiracy accusation placed ‘the Jews’ as the hidden power behind them both, as Norman Cohn and other historians have noted for decades. For that

⁹⁵ Kuper, *Genocide*, pp. 91–4.

⁹⁶ Cf. Dan Diner, ‘Ambiguous semantics: reflections on Jewish political concepts’, *Jewish Quarterly Review*, 98 (2008), p. 102.

reason, the cultural history of these images and processes is important, and new research into them is underway.⁹⁷ But if we are to understand how and why such pervasive racism could be mobilized in a genocidal direction in specific instances, it is important to understand the interaction between it and the political activity of some of its victims. In doing so, it is necessary to avoid ‘blaming the victim’ as the Nazis did and those who empathize with them but also pretending that there is no interaction at all between different kinds of Jews and their enemies. Scholarship needs to move beyond the ‘kernel of truth’ argument, as if some rationality can be discerned in Nazi anti-Semitism. The Nazis did refer to ‘real’ events in the past – the point of their policies in Germany was to forestall another ‘1918’ – but their view of reality was always a distorted one. The fact is that the minority of Jews were Bolsheviks and a minority of Bolsheviks were Jews, and Jews eventually became victims of Bolshevism. Yet for paranoid anti-Semites, the behaviour of a small minority of Jews converted all Jewish civilians into potential deadly enemies who could be dealt with accordingly.⁹⁸

Two other dimensions of political paranoia are also worth mentioning. First, it produces the truth the perpetrators want to prevent. If ‘world Jewry’ came to oppose the Nazi state in the 1930s – with international boycotts and demonstrations against Germany, Weizmann’s ‘war declaration’ – that was not because ‘world Jewry’ set out to destroy Germany, as the Nazis claimed, but because Jews were reacting to Nazi persecution in Germany.⁹⁹ Secondly, it leads to excessive reactions to the very opposition that the paranoid subject conjured. As in genocides generally, the exaggerated fear that one is about to be destroyed by the enemy licenses ‘final solutions’ to perceived risks. To explain why genocides occur, then, it is necessary to understand the workings of political paranoia and its self-fulfilling prophecies.

Given the centrality of political paranoia to Herf’s books, it is remarkable that he does not discuss the concept in any detail. It is no longer sufficient to cite Richard Hofstadter’s essay from 1964 as methodological guidance.¹⁰⁰ Much has been written on the subject since then, mainly by social scientists and psychologists. Take the standard work, *Political paranoia: the psychopolitics of hatred*, by Robert

⁹⁷ Alon Confino, ‘Fantasies about the Jews: cultural reflections on the Holocaust’, *History and Memory*, 17 (2005), pp. 296–322; Alon Confino, *A world without Jews: Germans’ memories of Jews in the Third Reich* (forthcoming); Dan Stone, ‘Holocaust historiography and cultural history’, *Dapim: Studies on the Shoah*, 23 (2009), pp. 52–68.

⁹⁸ Cf. Semelin, *Purify*, p. 21; Jan Gross, *Fear: anti-Semitism in Poland after Auschwitz* (Princeton, NJ, 2006).

⁹⁹ Dan Stone, *Responses to Nazism in Britain, 1933–1939* (Houndmills, 2003); Richard A. Hawkins, ‘“Hitler’s bitterest foe”: Samuel Untermyer and the boycott of Nazi Germany, 1933–1938’, *American Jewish History*, 93 (2007), pp. 21–50; Moshe Gottlieb, ‘The anti-Nazi boycott movement in the United States: an ideological and sociological appreciation’, *Jewish Social Studies*, 35 (1973), pp. 198–227.

¹⁰⁰ Richard Hofstadter, ‘The paranoid style in American politics’, *Harper’s Magazine*, Nov. 1964, pp. 77–86.

S. Robins and Jerrod M. Post.¹⁰¹ Drawing principally on the psychoanalytic thought of Melanie Klein, they regard political paranoia as a form of projective identification in which the subject displaces intolerable, negative feelings onto others who thence incarnate the disavowed, persecutory self. By externalizing internally experienced feelings of worthlessness, they are rendered manageable, and a positive self-image is maintained, though at considerable cost: the construction of a delusional reality. The subject is always the victim and the other the persecutor.¹⁰² Political paranoia, then, is at once a psychological regression to a child-like ‘paranoid-schizoid position’ and an interpretative disorder constituted by hysterical threat assessments.¹⁰³

Their victims are not selected randomly. Because they represent the abject attributes disowned by the paranoid perpetrator, empathy with the victims is all the more threatening: for to occupy imaginatively their subject position would entail introjecting the intolerable feelings that were split off in the first place. This empathetic disconnection means that enemies are represented as absolutely evil, thereby licensing their destruction in self-defence and with a clean conscience.¹⁰⁴ The interaction with ‘enemy’ is thus ‘real’ to a certain, if limited, extent: ‘For most political paranoids the delusion is likely to involve exaggeration and distortion of genuine events and rational beliefs rather than pure psychotic invention.’¹⁰⁵ Fatally, if the victim responds to their role in the paranoid’s externalization, ‘what began as fantasy is transformed into reality’ – the self-fulfilling prophecy mentioned above.¹⁰⁶ That is the fatal, productive power of paranoia. Forty years ago, Gombrich pointed out this self-confirming dynamic thus:

Once you are entrapped in this illusionary universe it will become reality, for if you fight everybody, everybody will fight you, and the less mercy you show, the more you commit your side to a fight to the finish. When you have been caught in this truly vicious circle there really is no escape.¹⁰⁷

Historians are rightly suspicious of psychologizing arguments, so it is helpful that Robins and Post inquire after the material conditions of political paranoia. They identify ‘two major historical circumstances’: foreign occupations and social decay, though the latter term is already an overdetermined concept indented to paranoia. At any rate, both are experienced as collective disintegration. These obviously at times overlapping traumas result in apocalyptic, compensatory visions of redemption.¹⁰⁸ One might add previously experienced genocidal attacks (or the perception of having previously experienced them) to the list. The social

¹⁰¹ Robert S. Robins and Jerrod M. Post, *Political paranoia: the psychopolitics of hatred* (New Haven, CT, 1997). Other recent treatments include Jeffrey M. Bale, ‘Political paranoia v. political realism: on distinguishing between bogus conspiracy theories and genuine conspiratorial politics’, *Patterns of Prejudice*, 41 (2007), pp. 45–60; Stanley Schneider, ‘Fundamentalism and paranoia in groups and society’, *Group*, 26 (2002), pp. 17–27.

¹⁰² Semelin, *Purify*, p. 46.

¹⁰³ See generally Timothy Melley, *Empire of conspiracy: the culture of paranoia in postwar America* (Ithaca, NY, 2000).

¹⁰⁴ Robins and Post, *Political paranoia*, p. 104.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 49, 19.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 94.

¹⁰⁷ Gombrich, *Myth*, p. 23.

¹⁰⁸ Robins and Post, *Political paranoia*, p. 13.

psychological literature on trauma and ‘apocalyptic disintegration’ can be consulted with profit, as well. How such experiences figure in genocide studies is apparent in recent research.¹⁰⁹

V

This review began by asking about the possible convergence of Holocaust historiography and genocide studies. The barriers are great. Few historians are willing or able to become expert in more than one case of mass violence. Leaving language issues aside, the breadth and depth of research in some is now so extensive that an entire career can be spent contributing to, let alone mastering a single instance.¹¹⁰ Some are less daunted. Rather than engage in the straight comparative work of previous generations who, mainly as social scientists, grouped genocides across time and space to isolate ‘independent variables’ and make theoretical points, they are investigating the transnational and geopolitical factors that make for particular genocidal conjunctures.¹¹¹ Mainly British, they are working out of the English tradition of international history.

Blazing the trail is Donald Bloxham, who has applied this approach in books on the Armenian genocide, the Holocaust, ‘ethnic cleansing’ in nineteenth- and twentieth-century Europe, and the Nuremberg trials.¹¹² This impressive body of work, which represents an integrated culmination of the Holocaust and genocide literatures, has not been sufficiently registered in either community of scholars. I give a brief synopsis here. Bloxham upsets established interpretive patterns, which often reflect the apologetic self-understanding of historical protagonists, by situating genocidal events in a larger frame than the usual oppressive nation-state-versus-minority dynamic. In doing so, he explains why these events develop in the first place. The title of his book on the Armenian genocide, *The great game of genocide: imperialism, nationalism and the destruction of the Ottoman Armenians*, reflects its thesis that the great powers and geopolitics were a key factor in those terrible events. Bloxham had originally set out to write a book about the denial of the Armenian genocide but found himself going back to the original events because the structures that prevented their recognition were the same as those that led to the deportations and murders in the first place: ‘great power involvement in Ottoman internal affairs’.¹¹³ Unlike Armenian historians who mimic the Holocaust narrative by highlighting relentless Turkish-Muslim oppression of

¹⁰⁹ Cristina Jayme Montiel, ‘Political trauma and recovery in a protracted conflict: understanding contextual effects’, *Peace and Conflict: Journal of Peace Psychology*, 6 (2000), pp. 93–111.

¹¹⁰ See the introductory comments of Dan Stone, *Histories of the Holocaust* (Oxford, 2010).

¹¹¹ See e.g. Levene, *Genocide*, and Christian Gerlach, *Extremely violent societies: mass violence in the twentieth-century world* (Cambridge, 2010).

¹¹² Donald Bloxham, *Genocide on trial: war crimes trials and the formation of Holocaust history and memory* (Oxford 2001); Donald Bloxham, *The great game of genocide: imperialism, nationalism and the destruction of the Ottoman Armenians* (Oxford, 2005); Donald Bloxham and Tony Kushner, *The Holocaust: critical historical approaches* (Manchester and New York, NY, 2005); Donald Bloxham, *Genocide, the world wars and the unweaving of Europe* (London, 2008); Bloxham, *Final Solution*.
¹¹³ Bloxham, *Great game*, p. 5.

Christian minorities,¹¹⁴ Bloxham shows how the Ottoman attempt to modernize its empire by granting equal rights to its Christian populations upset the assumed ethnic hierarchy, especially when Muslims were being expelled into Anatolia from the Caucasus and Balkans by the Russians, or Christians in the Balkans seeking independence from Istanbul. What turned this familiar pattern of ethnic anxiety into a potentially genocidal conflagration was the 'internationalization' of the Armenian question. The constant intercession on behalf of the Armenians by the European powers, especially with the Treaty of Berlin in 1878, undermined Ottoman confidence in their loyalty. The secessionist aspirations of Armenian nationalists, inspired by the ultimately successful, if very bloody, Bulgarian uprising, only compounded the suspicion that Armenians were conspiring with the empire's enemies. The nationalists' naiveté was revealed when the great powers refused to intervene on their behalf, as hoped, to protect them from Ottoman reprisal massacres in the 1890s. Bloxham's point is that the great powers would only take action that accorded with their interests. For the British, maintaining the stability of the Ottoman empire was paramount, lest an independent Armenian entity become a vassal of its rival, the Russians.

If Bloxham is critical of the Armenian nationalists for their provocation strategy, he does not exculpate Ottoman leaders who attacked Armenian civilians. Their argument about security cannot explain why virtually all Armenians were targeted for deportation. The Ottoman leaders were also driven by a modernizing nation-building agenda to replace the successful Christian bourgeoisie with a Muslim one, although that agenda was informed by security concerns. They made informed choices and should be held responsible for their actions. There was, then, a genuine interaction between Armenian nationalists and Ottoman elites, though grossly one-sided and filtered through the latter's paranoia about the security threat posed by the former. In this way, Bloxham deftly negotiates the space between recording angel and hanging judge, transcending the Armenian view that they were agentless victims of the Ottoman's Nazi-like genocidal racism, and the Turkish-nationalist insistence that they were merely protecting their homeland from internal subversion and external invasion.

The geopolitical frame thus allows for the linkage of factors that are endogenous and exogenous to the state: it is genuinely explanatory because the motivations and interactions of historical subjects are referable to chains of causation that can be traced back as far as the historian wishes, while also allowing for contingency. That is, this approach can explain how prejudice develops and becomes politically mobilized instead of beginning the analysis by presuming its existence. The master-concepts of racism or nation-building or

¹¹⁴ Vahakn Dadrian, *The history of the Armenian genocide: ethnic conflict from the Balkans to Anatolia to the Caucasus* (Providence, RI, 1995).

total war, as advocated by Jay Winter, do not suffice because they do not account for the enabling context.¹¹⁵

If the geopolitical frame can be applied to the Armenian and other cases in which perpetrator elites could at least point to the existence of some Armenian insurgents, can it extend to the Holocaust where the belief in a 'Jewish enemy' was delusional? Bloxham shows that it can. The argument advanced in *The Final Solution: a genocide* (2009) was laid out five years earlier in a little-noticed book, *The Holocaust: critical historical approaches*. The target is a monolithic view of the Holocaust that traces a single process of policy escalation which culminated with total genocide in 1941 or 1942. He can demonstrate that there was no single process or even policy crystallization. Expulsions from parts of the larger empire in the east were ongoing in 1942, and exclusory and genocidal practices varied in different parts of the Nazi empire, particularly in relation to its unoccupied allies. On closer inspection, what has become known as 'the Holocaust' morphed throughout the war, depending on military and other contingencies. Because killing followed expulsion plans, Bloxham notes that, to a large extent, Nazi policies extended the ethnic cleansing option that was so ubiquitous in east-central Europe and Eurasia in the first half of the twentieth century. Because 'the continent was already a place where extreme collective violence was an accepted measure of resolving identity crisis', the analytical frame should be continental.¹¹⁶

The salient context is once again the dangers of state formation for minorities. As the emblematic transnational minority in all countries, Jews were particularly vulnerable, associated as they were by newly empowered national elites with former imperial rulers, such as the Habsburgs. Unconventionally, therefore, *The Final Solution* devotes three of its eight chapters – 130 of 383 pages – to this European background, explaining the origins and appeal of violent population expulsions since the Eastern Crisis of the 1870s. In this way, Bloxham shows the processes at work in the Armenian genocide culminating in the Holocaust, rather than engaging in ahistorical comparisons between them.¹¹⁷ Never before has the Holocaust been so firmly embedded in a context beyond the customary German-Jewish nexus, exemplified most recently by Saul Friedländer's *Nazi German and the Jews: the years of extermination*.¹¹⁸ Bloxham casts the Nazis as 'answering' common European 'problems' of the time, though in the most radical manner and continental extent. The extremity of their 'answer' can be attributed to their greater penetration of the state apparatus, a penetration that not only signalled ideological concurrence (highlighted by scholars like Herf and Friedländer) but also career opportunities (noted, among others, by Hannah Arendt and Michael Wildt). Rather than fixate on race, Bloxham highlights the importance of security

¹¹⁵ Eric J. Weitz, *A century of genocide: utopias of race and nation* (Princeton, NJ, 2003); Jay Winter, 'Under the cover of war: the Armenian genocide in the context of total war', in Winter, ed., *America and the Armenian genocide*, p. 49.

¹¹⁶ Bloxham, *Final Solution*, p. 130.

¹¹⁷ E.g. Robert Melson, *Revolution and genocide: on the origins of the Armenian genocide and the Holocaust* (Chicago, IL, 1996).

¹¹⁸ Saul Friedländer, *Nazi German and the Jews*, II: *The years of extermination* (New York, NY, 2008).

considerations in the sources. Not for nothing was the Security Service (SD) within the Reich Security Head Office responsible for Jewish policy. The language of threat eradication evident in SD correspondence relating to Jews and other enemies was not a ‘cover’ or pretext. Taking the Nazis’ ideology seriously means acknowledging that they truly believed what they said and wrote.¹¹⁹ Far from hallucinatory in many respects, the SD systematically eliminated potentially troublesome nationalist leaders in occupied territory. The invasion of the Soviet Union was accompanied by a ‘pre-emptive pacification policy’, a point also made recently by Alex Kay.¹²⁰

Bloxham’s book also contains extensive discussions of Nazi colonialism, perpetrator motivations, and the Holocaust uniqueness argument. It is untrue, for example, that the Nazis prioritized killing Jews over their war-making capacity. Nazi allies were not pressed to hand over Jews if it would jeopardize military objectives.¹²¹ The final chapter is devoted to comparison, deftly discussing how other genocides can illuminate the Jewish Holocaust and vice versa. Never underplaying anti-Semitism, he shows how the Jewish experience of modernity made them especially vulnerable to ethno-nationalist paranoia; it resembled and exceeded the experience of other victim minorities, and for socio-historical rather than metahistorical reasons. ‘Borderless high finance, international minority “protection”, and the great powers’ arbitration of borders provided the grounds for new stereotypes of invisible, rootless influence, and of the fifth column: the link between “inner and outer enemies”.’¹²² Although he does not explicitly address the ‘interaction’ between Jews and the Nazis, it is evident that he thinks elite paranoia is present in all genocides to varying extents and to a remarkable extent in the Nazi case. *The Final Solution: a genocide* represents the state of the art in both Holocaust and genocide fields, applying tools to the former that are recognizable and applicable in the latter, though without flattening out the Holocaust to ‘just another case of genocide’, the fear of proponents of the uniqueness hypothesis.

Scholarship in Holocaust historiography bears out Bloxham’s approach. Mark Roseman’s discussion of the Wannsee conference highlights the continuing appeal of ‘territorial solutions’ to the ‘Jewish problem’ among German administrators. There is no evidence of central instructions regarding Jews in late 1941; instead, it suggests a series of regional measures. An outright murder policy only congealed in November and December. The Wannsee conference announced rather than created or planned it.¹²³ Jane Caplan’s analysis of early Nazi detention policies is remarkable for the prevalence of pre-emptive security rhetoric. Habitual criminals were placed in indefinite ‘security detention’ (*Sicherheitsverwahrung*) and others in ‘preventive detention’ (*Vorbeugungshaft*). In 1937,

¹¹⁹ Stone, ‘Holocaust historiography and cultural history’, p. 67.

¹²⁰ Bloxham, *Final Solution*, p. 200; Alex J. Kay, *Exploitation, resettlement, mass murder: political and economic planning for German occupation policy in the Soviet Union, 1940–1941* (Oxford, 2006), p. 105.

¹²¹ Bloxham, *Final Solution*, p. 187.

¹²² *Ibid.*, p. 332.

¹²³ Mark Roseman, ‘Shoot first and ask questions afterwards? Wannsee and the unfolding of the final solution’, in Neil Gregor, ed., *Nazism, War and Genocide* (Exeter, 2005), pp. 131–46.

the interior ministry issued regulations for ‘combating crime by preventive police measures’. Pre-emption applied inside Germany as much as it did in combating partisans in the east.¹²⁴

Of course, security imperatives were refracted through paranoid and racist lenses. Take Raphael Scheck’s book on the German army’s treatment of African – mainly Senegalese – soldiers in the French army during the summer 1940 invasion.¹²⁵ About 63,000 French African troops served in this theatre and 10,000 were killed, many of them massacred by German forces after their surrender. Feeding off lurid stories that the *Tirailleurs sénégalais* mutilated fallen Wehrmacht soldiers, and furious with the French for the indignity of posting them against the civilized Germans, they shot them in their hundreds after capture. To be sure, some officers prevented summary executions by their troops, but ingrained racism, combined with indignation at the supposed partisan-like fighting methods of the Africans, led to spontaneous ‘reprisals’ that Scheck links to the Wehrmacht’s behaviour against civilians in Poland the year before. The discourse of civilization united both fronts when propaganda cast blacks, Poles, and Polish Jews as ‘perfidious, primitive, and similar to animals’.¹²⁶ The paranoid posture is apparent in the outcome: killing civilians in the name of civilized warfare for supposedly violating its norms.

VI

If I have identified signs of convergence in the Holocaust and genocide literatures, it does not follow that everyone has moved in the same direction. The traditional view that genocides are perpetrated by totalitarian states governed by parties implementing programmes of racist utopianism is still widespread. This ‘liberal’ or ‘commonsense’ view, widely shared by historians, rejects the proposition that the European colonial empires committed genocide or that ‘modernity’ might be a context for the metastaziation of mass violence. On the contrary, the culprits are the extremist ideologies of left and right that emerged with the breakdown of traditional authorities after the First World War. As noted in the introduction, these worried liberals find in political Islam an echo of those political religions.¹²⁷ Genocidal anxieties are thus as current as ever. Consider the political commentary of Jeffrey Herf as symptomatic of a widely-shared mood, especially in the United States. In recent years, he has written numerous articles for public consumption arguing that Islamism is the latest incarnation of ‘reactionary modernism’, indeed a form of contemporary Nazism, thereby licensing a pre-emptive strike on Iran, which he fears is bent on destroying

¹²⁴ Jane Caplan, ‘Political detention and the origin of concentration camps in Nazi Germany, 1933–1935/36’, in Gregor, ed., *Nazism*, pp. 22–41.

¹²⁵ Raphael Scheck, *Hitler’s African victims: the German army massacres of Black French soldiers in 1940* (Cambridge, 2006).

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 153.

¹²⁷ William Rubinstein, *Genocide* (Harlow, 2004), p. 295. An antidote is Michael Mann, *The dark side of democracy: explaining ethnic cleansing* (Cambridge, 2005).

Israel.¹²⁸ A proponent of the war on Iraq in 2003, he is aware of the criticism that pre-emptive wars, which he confuses with preventive ones, are difficult to justify; doing so to stop Hitler in 1938 would have encountered numerous obstacles because the Holocaust was largely unforeseeable. But today we benefit from hindsight, so there is no excuse to act, for ‘the decision to go to war must rest on a set of judgments that project ideology, past behavior and capabilities into the future’. The Munich analogy holds, then, but how reasonable is a threat assessment that argues in these terms: ‘Those who wish to harm us may be weak; quite possibly they are weaker than many of us thought a few years ago. But that can always change. Therefore we must never underestimate their ideology?’¹²⁹ Zertal’s book shows us that Herf and others are repeating arguments that go back to the 1960s in Israel. Is it surprising that they are insisting that we are facing a ‘1967’ situation?

Here we are, then, with the question of ideology and genocide as a cultural problem with which we began. At least in this mode, the liberal view is a partisan approach to the subject, scholarship deployed as a tool of threat assessment – identifying ‘our’ enemies who want to destroy ‘us’ – rather than an analysis of how and why these eliminationist ideologies develop at all. An obvious point of departure with Iran would be to inquire after the role of historical memory and great power interference in its affairs, which might yield different conclusions and lessons than those entertained by those advocating war. Do they hate us for what we are or for what western governments have done to Iran in the past? The importance of ideology is not diminished by studying the geopolitical context of its origin. After all, such ideologies are rarely about domestic regeneration alone but also concern self-assertion against neighbours that have been (supposedly) instrumentalizing internal minorities and other divisions. They are exercises in geopolitics as well as misguided utopianism.

The palpable panic in some writing about the Holocaust, genocide, and Islamism today indicates more than the presence of the Holocaust memory.¹³⁰ The salience of genocidal anxieties and conspiracy theories in the Islamic world, which are no less paranoid, suggests a global phenomenon that is mutually reinforcing, in which each ‘side’, whether Jewish, Christian, Islamist, or Hindu considers itself a victim of the other, and claiming the right of pre-emptive attacks in self-defence against second Holocausts, terrorist attacks, or genocidal imperial

¹²⁸ Jeffrey Herf, ‘How the 1960s left never died’, www.frontpagemag.com, 25 Sept. 2008; Jeffrey Herf, ‘The totalitarian present: why the west consistently underplays the power of bad ideas’, *New Republic*, 26 Apr. 2009; Jeffrey Herf, ‘Hate radio’, *Chronicle of Higher Education*, 22 Nov. 2009; Jeffrey Herf, ‘It will not go away’, review of Robert Wistrich, *A lethal obsession: anti-Semitism from antiquity to the global jihad* in *The New Republic*, 4 Feb. 2010; Jeffrey Herf, ‘Killing in the name: a progressive foreign policy will require more focus on Islamic radicalism’, *New Republic*, 8 Apr. 2010.

¹²⁹ For arguments against the Munich analogy, see Richard E. Neustadt and Ernest R. May, *Thinking in time: the use of history for decision makers* (New York, NY, 1988); Jeffrey Record, ‘The use and abuse of history: Munich, Vietnam and Iraq’, *Survival*, 49 (2007), pp. 163–80.

¹³⁰ Leon Wieseltier, ‘Against the ethnic panic of American Jews: Hider is dead’, *New Republic*, 27 May 2002.

conquests.¹³¹ Over a decade ago, the Indian historian Sanjay Subrahmanyam coined the term ‘millenarian conjuncture’ to describe the cultural and material factors that led to the ‘end of days’ mood of many Muslims of south and western Asia in the sixteenth century.¹³² We might use the term ‘apocalyptic conjuncture’, a secular version of Zertal’s ‘catastrophic messianism’, to describe the intersectional quality of today’s anxieties. Its roots lie in the interwar period, which saw the collapse of four major Eurasian empires. The destabilizing effects on central Europe are known but were equally devastating for the Sunni Muslim world, which experienced the rupture of centuries of attachment to a political and religious metropole. Fuelled by a sense of apocalypse, it too saw the rise of movements of revolutionary restoration, namely Islamism.¹³³ But we know that Islamism is not the only component of this conjuncture, as the rhetoric of terrorism in the west shows.¹³⁴

Historians are not politicians, nor is it their job to devise answers for them. Still, the critical rationality implicit in academic research should be opposed to and function as an antidote to paranoia: namely the scrutinizing of subject positions rather than the displacing of intolerable thoughts, such as one’s coproduction of the hated object, or the acting out of trauma; and imaginatively reconstructing the life worlds of strangers, however challenging, instead of participating in Gombrich’s vicious circle of paranoid threat assessments that contribute to self-fulfilling prophecies of escalation and destruction. Self-discipline is needed to transcend the partisan identifications and the urge to ‘settle accounts’ with those who, like Hannah Arendt, maintained their composure and resisted the siren songs of political paranoia.¹³⁵

¹³¹ Victoria Clark, *Allies for armageddon: the rise of Christian Zionism* (New Haven, CT, 2007).

¹³² Sanjay Subrahmanyam, ‘Connected histories: notes towards a reconfiguration of early modern Eurasia’, *Modern Asian Studies*, 31 (1997), pp. 735–62.

¹³³ ‘Aftershocks: violence in dissolving empires after the First World War’, special issue of *Contemporary European History*, 19, 3 (2010); Robert Gerwarth, ‘The central European counter-revolution: paramilitary violence in Germany, Austria and Hungary after the Great War’, *Past and Present*, 200 (2008), pp. 175–209; Aviel Roshwald, *Ethnic nationalism and the fall of empires: Central Europe, Russia, and the Middle East, 1914–1923* (London, 2005); Mehdi Mozaffari, ‘The rise of Islamism in the light of European totalitarianism’, *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions*, 10 (2009), pp. 1–13.

¹³⁴ Mark Levene, ‘Battling demons or banal exterminism? Apocalypse and statecraft in modern mass murder’, *Journal of Human Rights*, 3 (2004), pp. 67–81.

¹³⁵ Cf. n. 24 above. David N. Myers, *Reinventing the Jewish past: European-Jewish intellectuals and the Zionist return to history* (New York, NY, 1995), pp. 87, 137.