

REVIEW ESSAY

Jewish Capitalists, Jewish Bolsheviks: Conspiracy Thinking and Modern Judeophobia

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Francesca Trivellato, *The Promise and Peril of Credit: What a Forgotten Legend about Jews and Finance Tells Us about the Making of European Commercial Society* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2019)

Paul Hanebrink, *A Specter Haunting Europe: The Myth of Judeo-Bolshevism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2018)

We live in dark times, as Hannah Arendt might have said.¹ Just open the Jewish or general press on any given day and you will read about swastikas scrawled on buildings. Or hear about the reiteration of anti-Jewish tropes by members of Congress or by the president of the United States or by any number of European prime ministers. You might discover the latest instance of the desecration of Jewish cemeteries or the burning of synagogues. Or perhaps you will linger on the most recent incident of the beating of Jews in New York or Paris or Berlin. Most spectacularly, white Christian nationalists or militant jihadi terrorists have slain Jews en masse in several horrific events, most famously at the Tree of Life synagogue in Pittsburgh and in the linked attacks on *Charlie Hebdo* and Hyper Cacher in Paris.²

Two powerful myths underpin much of modern anti-Semitism, including today's post-Holocaust Judeophobia.³ Each is a conspiracy theory. There are those who link Jews to the control of financial markets and those who insist that Jews (want to) control the world. In Trivellato's and Hanebrink's books, versions of each of these legends are historicized in order to understand how and why they developed and to explore the cultural work that they do.

Still, on the surface there is little that ties these two books together. Chronologically, where Trivellato's story ends, Hanebrink's begins. Trivellato's book is about the

¹Hannah Arendt, *Men in Dark Times* (New York, 1968).

²On these incidents see Jonathan Judaken, "White Christian Nationalism and Terrorism in Pittsburgh," *Commercial Appeal*, www.commercialappeal.com/story/opinion/contributors/2018/10/29/white-christian-nationalism-and-terrorism-pittsburgh-opinion/1808434002, accessed 26 Jan. 2020; and Judaken, "Introduction," in Jonathan Judaken and Ethan Katz, eds., *Jews and Muslims in France before and after Charlie Hebdo and Hyper Cacher*, *Jewish History* 32/1 (2018), 1–17.

³I discuss how I understand the differences between various periods in the history of "Judeophobia" and "anti-Semitism" in Jonathan Judaken, "Rethinking Anti-Semitism: Introduction," *American Historical Review* 123/4 (2018), 1131–5.

purported role played by Jews in the origins of financial capitalism, while Hanebrink's book is about the myth that weds Jews to Communism. If the heart of Trivellato's history concentrates on France, then Hanebrink is focused on Central and Eastern Europe.

Nonetheless, each work is the interrogation of a myth of origin and its longer repercussions. In Hanebrink's case, it is about the myth of a two-headed monster: Judeo-Bolshevism. In Trivellato's work, it is the legend about how Jews created bills of exchange as a key instrument of finance and commerce in the early modern world, allowing them to manipulate and control markets. Hanebrink ties these two studies together when he stipulates that the myth of Judeo-Bolshevism was "like that of the malevolent Jewish cabal that had plotted Christianity's downfall for centuries, or the cunning and malicious Jewish financier who only seemed, at first, to be diametrically opposed to Bolshevik revolution" (27). As we will see, exploring the narratives of these works together will allow us to illuminate the story of modernity from 1492 to the present.

Indeed, these two books read side by side call on us to explore an even longer history. For both Hanebrink and Trivellato understand the myths that they investigate as having deep and far-reaching roots. For Trivellato, it is connected to the webs of meaning established by medieval conceptions of Jews and usury: "after the late Middle Ages," she writes, "Christian associations of Jews with money displayed remarkable stability because they combined and recombined a set of preexisting tropes" (192) about the Jewish love of lucre, about Jews' manipulation of financial instruments for personal gain, and about Jews' unscrupulousness when it came to the pursuit of wealth. Hanebrink's story, on the other hand, updates medieval associations between Jews and the Devil and Christian conspiracy theories about Jews' plotting to dismantle Christendom.⁴

But while they are both cognizant of the *longue durée*, both authors ultimately disrupt transhistorical or eternalist treatments of anti-Semitism in terms that Robert Wistrich called "the longest hatred."⁵ Both Trivellato and Hanebrink are vested in trying to understand how a long-standing discourse about Jews was deployed in specific ways toward specific ends in specific contexts. As Hanebrink aptly puts it, "Long continuities across centuries shaped the tropes used and reused in anti-Jewish language. But the cultural logic of antisemitism functioned differently from one historical context to another" (7). Or as Trivellato fittingly notes, "Negative group stereotypes tend to be remarkably impermeable to reality, even as they possess a striking ability to conjure new meanings out of a finite repertoire" (13). "Prejudice is at once tenacious and protean," she continues. "It builds on motifs from earlier times that are transmitted through both learned and popular culture and at the same time gives voice to tensions that are locally bound and highly specific. This dual nature of prejudice is fully reflected in the legend of the Jewish invention of bills of exchange" (15). The legend also helps us to understand another facet of the duality of stereotyping because it links medieval castigations of usury and the admiration of Jewish abilities at commerce. Read together,

⁴The classic text that historicizes this connection is Joshua Trachtenberg, *The Devil and the Jews: The Medieval Conception of the Jew and Its Relation to Modern Anti-Semitism* (Philadelphia, 1983).

⁵Robert Wistrich, *Antisemitism: The Longest Hatred* (New York, 1991).

these two books also make evident once more that stereotyping and stigmatization are more about embodying social anxieties than the reflection of a coherent view on the world, since otherwise Jews could not personify the fear of both capitalism and Bolshevism.

These two books are also stylistically similar. Both are written in clear prose and they are each based on deep research in multiple languages, but also on the distillation of a huge amount of secondary research, as is evident in their copious endnotes. Hanebrink's book is so fluidly composed that it is a brisk read, but nonetheless filled with interesting examples from a wide range of contexts. Perhaps because the early modern context is less familiar to me, Trivellato's book is denser. Her focus on a body of literature about commerce and law is also more arcane. Making up for this, at times it felt as if she borrowed from the genre of detective stories to unravel a long-buried mystery. She then provides the forensic evidence that she accrued to solve the crime in the appendices that end the book.

Trivellato also inserts more meta-analysis into her writing, discussing the ways in which she brings together different historiographic currents in economic and cultural history, in approaches to textuality, and in Jewish and French history. She is also firm about conceptual rigor. She insists that what she traces is a "legend," not a "myth," as in Hanebrink's title, writing that "by most definitions, a legend, unlike a myth, has human rather than supernatural protagonists and is anchored in a kernel of historical truth" (298 n. 2). Legends are historical narratives with long resonance. She does concede, however, that legends generally focus on an individual, not on a group, which is the case in her study. She does also sometimes substitute "tale" for legend, since both are invented traditions.

On the other hand, "myth" is Hanebrink's operative term, although he does not reflect on what it means to discuss the construct of Judeo-Bolshevism as such. He does note that his book is not about debunking the myth so much as treating it as a "cultural code" in the sense formulated by Shulamit Volkov. Borrowing her fecund phrase from her riffs on Clifford Geertz, Volkov conceived of anti-Semitism as an interconnected symbolic package that required decoding, which is what Hanebrink sets out to do with claims about Judeo-Bolshevism.⁶ Ultimately, both authors unravel the legends, myths, fables, and narratives that they consider, taking us into a discursive mesh that continues to have life-and-death ramifications for Jews today.

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As noted, the focus of Trivellato's work is on bills of exchange, a now-forgotten financial instrument whereby a merchant, on a slip of signed paper smaller than a check, would agree to pay a certain amount in a certain currency on a certain date in a certain place (through an agent there). Over time, bankers were able to trade in these slips of paper and make money on fluctuating exchange rates. "Bills of exchange were," thus, "the invisible currency of early modern Europe's 'international republic of money'" (2).

⁶Shulamit Volkov, "Anti-Semitism as a Cultural Code," *Leo Baeck Yearbook* 23/1 (1978), 25–46.

Trivalleto examines the legend that bills of exchange were invented by Jews in order to secure their resources when they were first expelled from various European states. The legend originated in a work by Étienne Cleirac (1583–1657), *Us et coutumes de la mer* (Usages and Customs of the Sea), now a forgotten text. In its day, it was a best-seller because it was the most comprehensive collection until the mid-nineteenth century of European maritime laws published in the vernacular. It was written for a broad reading public interested in commerce and its adjacent issues: law, theology, humanism, and the practical question of how to make money. In examining the origins and spread of this legend, Trivellato explores conflicting attitudes about commercial credit and examines how Jews embodied the negative associations with it. Ultimately, the legend of the Jewish invention of bills of exchange was an index of concerns about capitalism and modernity.

Demonstrating her synthetic virtuosity and attention to periodization and shifts in time, Trivellato provides a few extremely useful pages on three different epochs of Christian thinking about Jews' economic roles. First, the medieval era, culminating in the Fourth Lateran Council (1215), in which Jews were identified with usury. This association meant that Jews allegedly had no fellow feeling with Christians, whom they cheated when they could. Usury was identified as the ultimate form of antisocial behavior, and Jews were purportedly programmed to exploit Christians. At the same time, as David Nirenberg has demonstrated, all financially exploitative behavior was portrayed as metaphorically Jewish.⁷

Second, after the mid-sixteenth century, as European commerce began to explode, a second discourse emerged that Jonathan Israel has termed "philosemitic mercantilism," in which Jews found favor, since they were supposed to have unique commercial skills that could benefit a state in the competition with overseas competitors. This was the era in which Jews were allowed to (re)enter into a number of cities and states hoping to benefit from their purported financial acuity. A third discourse emerged during the Enlightenment that once more identified Jews with the monied economy, but often did so in order to suggest that their hyper-specialization and ability were a result of their persecution and confinement to niches in the economy. These were never discrete periods, but rather overlapped, and were each shot through with complexities, as the story that Trivellato tells makes evident.

Cleirac's legend was shaped by his environment. He was a native of Bordeaux, where he spent his whole life in a period when it was transforming into an Atlantic hub of trade. Bordeaux was a port city and banking center with a Jewish minority who had to hide their Jewishness. These crypto-Jewish migrants from the Iberian peninsula were invited into Bordeaux in 1550 with the same rights as all other French subjects. Other cities had also invited New Christians in the sixteenth century, including Florence, Ferrara, and Antwerp. By the 1590s, they were being welcomed openly as Jews in Venice, Livorno, Hamburg, and Amsterdam. This was the age of the port Jews.⁸

⁷David Nirenberg, *Anti-Judaism: The Western Tradition* (New York, 2013).

⁸See, for example, David Sorkin, "The Port Jew: Notes toward a Social Type," *Journal of Jewish Studies* 50/1 (1999), 87–97; and Jonathan Sarna, "Port Jews in the Atlantic: Further Thoughts," *Jewish History* 20/2

Trivellato shows that Cleirac's book appeared in a context in which merchant voyages by sea and the financing of the deals that went along with them were transforming modern economic exchange, provoking great anxiety. Cleirac's association of bills of exchange with Jews and with usury was a mechanism for distinguishing good and bad creditors and good and bad credit instruments, as the market became ever more impersonal and old distinctions and hierarchies eroded.

In an era in which paper money was still rare, bills of exchange were only backed by the solvency of their signatories, not by the state or a central bank. Since the wealth of creditors was not transparent, a merchant's reputation was paramount. The virtue of one's character and social rank were the primary determinants of good credit. In Cleirac's work, usury became a stand-in for "everything he regards as the opposite of prudent, upright, and legal ways of handling bills of exchange" (62). The legend he concocted was part of his effort to sort out the significance of changes in the legal, political, and social order that the expansion of overseas commerce created. He drew upon the reservoir of the medieval association of Jews with usury, which deemed Jews inherently unvirtuous and untrustworthy, and gave them a reputation for extorting from Christians by charging immoral rates of interest on loans.

Trivelleto's stand-alone chapter on usury expertly explains the roots not only of Cleirac's legend, but also of the modern negative associations of Jews and finance. She clarifies that the Catholic Church did not prevent all profit from business, nor did they have a uniform doctrine when it came to usury. There were different definitions of the term and the Church "granted considerable leeway to ecclesiastical or secular tribunals investigating those charged with the sin (a sin that in some polities had been made into a crime)" (49). But given the history of the vociferous debates about it, by the eighteenth century, "usury" was a term used for any number of shady economic behaviors, and the assumption that Jews engaged in these activities was thoroughly naturalized. When Cleirac penned his best seller, he inherited a grammar of demonization from the medieval world that blamed Jews for victimizing Christians, even if things worked exactly otherwise. His vocabulary about Jews as usurers was based on the hope that it was possible to draw a clear line between respectable merchants and rapacious cheats.

Cleirac's legend would be canonized in two key works of the seventeenth century. Jacques Savary's *Le parfait négociant* (1675) was the great manifesto of seventeenth-century French commercial society: the most reprinted, translated, and plagiarized merchant manual of early modern Europe. He repeated the legend penned by Cleirac, but cut the worst anti-Jewish language included in Cleirac's account. After Savary's death his two sons published a massive dictionary of commerce, the first of its genre, which was another best seller, thus further disseminating the legend. "Taken together," Trivelleto writes, "the complete works of the Savarys, father and sons, constitute the most articulate explication of the norms and ethos that infused the practice and politics of commerce under the reigns of Louis XIV (r. 1643–1715) and Louis XV (r. 1715–1744)" (99).

(2006), 213–19. For a critique of the concept see C. S. Monaco, "Port Jews or a People of the Diaspora? A Critique of the Port Jew Concept," *Jewish Social Studies: History, Culture, Society* 15/2 (2009), 137–66.

This was a new period in commercial capitalism, and it gave rise to a new trope: that of the all-powerful Jewish trader who achieved domination by serving as a middleman between Christian Europe and the Muslim Mediterranean, adding a “proto-Orientalist discourse” (102) to this stereotype. This new trope infused the origin myth with new meaning.

Trivellato then charts the evolution of the legend’s reception in France from the mid-seventeenth century to the French Revolution. She plots four periods in its propagation, separated by two periods of discontinuity: (1) The “consecration” phase (1647–1690), initiated by Savary *père*; (2) the “dissemination” phase (1700–1748), interrupted by the earliest disputes of the legend by Jacques Dupuis de la Serra; (3) the bifurcation phase (1748–1775), which was a result of the momentously important intervention of Montesquieu in *Spirit of the Laws*, which reversed the negative valence of Cleirac’s legend; and (4) a final phase (1775–1791) in the lead-up to Jewish emancipation during the French Revolution, which gave rise to a reprise of the negative associations of Jews and money.

Taking on big questions via her niche history of how bills of exchange were characterized, Trivellato reconsiders the debates about Jewish emancipation in the eighteenth century, reevaluating the gradualist history of emancipation. The gradualist thesis maintains that Jewish emancipation came about slowly and inevitably as a result of modernity, Enlightenment ideas, and the role played by Jews in the modern economy. Her chapter hinges on two moments that come together: Montesquieu’s total revaluation of the legend that Jews were at the origin of bills of exchange in the 1740s and the debates about Jewish rights in the last quarter of the eighteenth century.

In direct contrast to Cleirac, Montesquieu praised Jews for creating these new credit instruments. In chapter 20 of Montesquieu’s *Spirit of the Laws*, he clearly lauded “How Commerce Broke Through the Barbarism of Europe.” Reappraising Cleirac’s legend, he gave the origin story a positive twist. Montesquieu’s spin ultimately transformed the meaning of the legend for those sympathetic to the new economy and to the role Jews played in it as leaven. Jews, Montesquieu suggested, were “harbingers of modernity” (134).

Despite only a brief mention in his work, Montesquieu’s version of the legend proved incredibly influential. It underpinned his notion of *doux commerce*: the overcoming of the dark ages of religious obscurantism, economic stagnation, and tyrannical rulers. “Commerce is a cure for the most destructive prejudices,” he wrote, “for it is almost a general rule, that wherever we find agreeable manners, there commerce flourishes; and wherever there is commerce, there we meet with agreeable manners” (137). Montesquieu thought credit instruments so important that he placed them (as did Francis Bacon) alongside the printing press, the compass, and firearms as pillars creating the modern world.

After Montesquieu, the reception history of the legend diverged between those who followed him and those who repeated the negative narrative of Cleirac. The legend appeared in both of these varieties in Diderot and D’Alembert’s *Encyclopédie*. Both strands are also evident in Voltaire’s *Dictionnaire philosophique*, a work generally hostile to Jews, blaming Judaism for the superstitions and absurdities in Christianity, while at the same time lauding commerce and with it “Jews’

commercial aptitude” (141). If some of the *philosophes* were swayed by Montesquieu, then the writers of commercial and legal literature tended to follow Cleirac.

As these discussions came to a head in the debates about Jewish emancipation, the Jewish role in commerce played an important role. It was in Alsace-Lorraine, the region with the largest population of Jews in France, where the first appeals for Jewish rights were voiced, but also countermanded. It was also a region with a significant Jewish minority and a deep reservoir of anti-Jewish antipathy. It was the cauldron that shaped the Abbé Gregoire’s calls for Jewish civic equality, but also the heartland of his most vociferous opponents. Trivellato surveys these winding paths, offering new insights into this formative period.

She then follows the trail beyond the borders of France, across the European continent, covering Britain, the United Provinces, the Holy Roman Empire, and the Italian and Iberian peninsulas. In doing so, she shows three things. First, confessional lines were not determinative in how the legend travelled. Second, what did matter was the intensity of debates about the merchant profession and the place of commerce in national politics. Third, that there was no simple correlation between society’s commercialization and positive images of Jews, since in England and the United Provinces, it was the rise of the stock market that now catalyzed negative views on Jews.

By the nineteenth century, the legend was so widespread across the continent that Trivellato comments that a full account of its reception could occupy another book. Taking her story forward, what she does explore in a final chapter is how three giants of German thought—Karl Marx, Max Weber, and Werner Sombart—each picked up the thread of the origin of financial capitalism as a result of the Jewish invention of bills of exchange. She consequently shows how each of these towering figures in the history of economic thought was influenced by the early modern debates at the center of her story.

But she also shows why no one remembers the debates about bills of exchange any longer. For by the nineteenth century, the terms of the debate about capitalism were focused on new forces:

with the second industrial revolution underway, new economic and financial institutions, including factories, deposit banks, the corporation, and the stock market (rather than bills of exchange), became the focus of contemporary discussions of the productive and destructive forces of modern capitalism. The legend thus ceased to be a compass of the morality of credit, as it had been in the Old Regime, but entered the academic grand narratives about the emergence of Western capitalism. (214)

Trivellato’s book unearths a buried past and in doing so brings to life a ghost that continues to haunt Jewish life: the ways in which the association of Jews with lucre morphed from medieval discussions of usury, to early modern instruments of credit and commercial capitalism, to the beginnings of the stock market, only to take on new life in the age of industrialization, and once more in the era of globalization. At each phase in this trajectory, the specter of complex and uncontrollable economic

forces is personified by age-old tropes of Jewish materialism, manipulation, and insatiable hunger for their thirty pieces of silver.

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Hanebrink's book, on the other hand, considers the myth of "Judeo-Bolshevism," which maintains that "Communism was created by a Jewish conspiracy and that Jews were therefore to blame for the crimes committed by Communist regimes," a fable propagated by counterrevolutionaries, those opposed to democracy, and racist ideologues (4). Hanebrink explores how the myth emerged in the context of World War I and the revolution and civil war in Russia from 1914 to 1923. It was picked up and became central to fascist and conservative regimes and governments in the interwar wars. It was key to legitimating the Holocaust as it unfolded. Post-Holocaust, the myth morphed differently in the East and West. It was then reengineered after 1989 and continues to circulate today. In the process, Judeo-Bolshevism was depicted as a dangerous border crosser, a threat to European civilization, thus encapsulating older images of "invasions from the east" from "barbarians, Mongols, and Ottoman Turks," that today manifest in contemporary European and American phobias about Muslims and Islam.

The idea of Judeo-Bolshevism was a product of the success of the Bolshevik Revolution. After 1917, the notion that Jews were puppeteers behind this success "went viral" (32), especially when conjoined with the blueprint for all modern conspiracy theories, the publication of the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion* that after 1917 "circulated like wildfire" (28). But the notion of Jews as the powerbrokers pulling the strings from the shadows had percolated for some time. In the Russian revolutions of 1905–6, Jews were blamed for the political unrest. Beyond the Pale, with the rise of political anti-Semitism in the 1880s, the widespread anxiety generated by the second industrial revolution and the economic depression after 1873 fixated upon Jewish success and global power. As noted, the reservoir for these ideas was in the Christian Middle Ages. Tracing this history, Hanebrink's opening chords offer little that is new.

Where Hanebrink's account really takes off is in his second chapter, which shows that World War I in Central and Eastern Europe didn't really end in November 1918, as it did on the western front. In Poland, Hungary, and Romania, territorial sovereignty and borders were hotly contested, even as diplomats haggled in Paris over the terms of peace. Civil war raged in Russia. There massive pogroms destroyed communities or led to the murder of tens of thousands of Jews. These were the hot spots where "Judeo-Bolshevism" personified these new threats from within and without: "Local events—revolutions, border wars, the failures of nationalization policy—fueled their anxieties," and these "would give the Judeo-Bolshevik menace its full meaning" (72). By consistently contextualizing the specific events that enabled the myth to have social power, Hanebrink avoids turning it into a free-floating set of ideas, and shows why it served as an explanatory conspiracy theory for many.

The axial point for Hanebrink's story is surely the centrality of Judeo-Bolshevism to Nazism, since "Judeo-Bolshevism made Adolf Hitler" (83), and consequently Hitler recast the significance of Judeo-Bolshevism. There were two keys to Hitler's

ideology: anti-Semitism and the creation of “living space” in the East. The myth of Judeo-Bolshevism joined the two. The short-lived Communist revolution in Munich and the Communist uprising in Berlin in 1919 put flesh on the specter inside Germany. The rise of Popular Front governments in France and Spain and rumors of Soviet atrocities in the 1930s substantiated its validity externally. These events reinforced the ideology that a new crusade was required that would finally purge the threat. It transformed Hitler into the leader of an “international anti-Communist front” (120). If many reactionaries in Eastern Europe shared Hitler’s concerns about this fearsome enemy, they nonetheless worried that his aims for expansion into their homelands would collide with their own goals.

The Nazi objective of eastward expansion was fully actualized with the war on the Soviet Union. The apogee of the myth of Judeo-Bolshevism followed this Nazi war of annihilation. As Walter von Reichenau insisted in his general order to his troops, “Judeo-Bolshevism was ‘the source of all the bestialities inflicted on German and racially related races’” (132). This apocalyptic language helped to legitimate the mass killing that unfolded in the Bloodlands.⁹ As a set of studies on the Holocaust has now shown, the bloodbath was often worst in places of double occupation, first by the Soviets and then by the Germans.

The Soviets occupied vast territory in Eastern Europe from the Baltic states to the Black Sea, including eastern Poland (today western Ukraine and western Belarus), Lithuania and Latvia, and Bessarabia and Bukovina. When these areas were overrun by the Germans, violent attacks against Jews were unleashed often in the name of a crusade against Judeo-Bolshevism. This assuaged the guilt of those who had supported the Bolsheviks, enabled the looting, aligned groups with the Nazi behemoth, and underpinned the aim of indigenous supremacy by nationalists.

When the war had turned against Germany by 1943, the Nazis amped up the propaganda in their global struggle against Judeo-Bolshevism. The war was now represented as a struggle of Western civilization “against an ethno-ideological enemy that was motivated by both zealous fanaticism and a savage disdain for Western values and traditions” (162). This vocabulary would endure beyond the death knell of Nazism. The German army was beaten back westward from Stalingrad. As they advanced on Berlin, the Soviets liberated the surviving Jews in the Budapest Ghetto, in Majdanek in July 1944, and in Auschwitz in January 1945. They toppled anti-Semitic regimes in Hungary and Romania, and they released working-class activists from prison, restoring hope for a revival of the left in postwar Europe.

But when the war was over and the Soviet occupation endured, the myth of Judeo-Bolshevism took on a new life. Three factors fused together in this new iteration: “fear and anger in reaction to the brutality of Soviet occupation forces; the sudden visibility of Jews; and the new power exercised by Eastern Europe’s Communist parties” (171). This toxic cocktail shaped how the new political reality was interpreted, focusing ire on the Jewish origins of leading Communists by those who opposed the new order.

As is the case throughout the book, Hanebrink spends little time parsing the numbers as far as Jewish Communist cadres in the new governments were

⁹Timothy Snyder, *Bloodlands: Europe between Hitler and Stalin* (New York, 2010).

concerned. What matters is that the overrepresentation of Jews in the security corps, in foreign relations, in culture, and in the press “seemed significant” (171). Given the widespread association of Jews and Communism, Communist parties sought to inoculate themselves against the charge that the Soviet occupation meant Jewish rule, sometimes by downplaying anti-Jewish rhetoric or pogroms, or by instrumentalizing them against their enemies.

The deadliest of these pogroms took place in July of 1946 in the Polish city of Kielce where forty-two Jews were killed. Eyewitnesses reported that the mob clearly associated Jews and Communism in order to legitimate their fury. A Catholic commission set up by the Bishop of Kielce then blamed the violence on Jews, since “they were ‘the main propagators of Communism in Poland, while the Polish nation does not want Communism, which is being imposed on it by force ... Ministries are full of Jews ... They are in charge of security police offices, and carry out arrests’” (174), he claimed.

If the Kielce massacre shows the power of the myth of Judeo-Bolshevism, the Slánský show trial in Czechoslovakia illustrates how Communist Party leaders used the image of the Jewish Bolshevik as cunning and deceitful to their own ends. In the last of the great show trials between 1948 and 1953, Slánský and thirteen others, eleven of whom were Jews, were put on trial for conspiracy. On radio and in newspapers across the Soviet bloc, audiences were stunned to read of their treachery against the state and the Communist Party.

The defendants were condemned for their bourgeois nationalism, Zionism, and cosmopolitanism, themes that were highlighted in the persecution of Jews in the last years of Stalin’s rule. They would emerge again in the Doctor’s Plot in 1953 and in other cases across the Eastern bloc, reaching a new crescendo in Poland in 1968, where student unrest was laid at the door of an “international Zionist mafia” (188), leading to a purge of Jews from the Party, from their jobs, and ultimately from the country.

Communist Judeophobia was one sign in the West for how the ostensibly totalitarian systems in the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany converged. Indeed, the rhetoric of “totalitarianism” would emerge as central for unifying liberal democracies post-Holocaust, as would a shared commitment to a set of Western, “Judeo-Christian” values. Hanebrink details the overlaps in “the myth of the Judeo-Christian tradition,” as Arthur Cohen termed it, and Judeo-Bolshevism.¹⁰

The construct of Judeo-Christian civilization was popularized in the United States in the 1930s as a means to enjoin Christian support for the struggle against Nazism. It was shared by organizations like the National Conference of Christians and Jews, and championed by prominent theologians like Reinhold Niebuhr, Jacques Maritain, and Paul Tillich. Marc Chagall provided the visual iconography in a series of images of Jesus crucified, but clearly wearing Jewish garb, like a Jewish prayer shawl (*tallit*). According to the myth post-Holocaust, what underpinned Western, liberal, democratic society was Judeo-Christian civilization once under threat by Nazism, but now besieged by Soviet barbarism, materialism, and atheism. This consensus enabled Judaism to disassociate from Communism, becoming a shared pillar in the anti-Communist West.

¹⁰ Arthur A. Cohen, *The Myth of the Judeo-Christian Tradition: And Other Dissenting Essays* (New York, 1971).

Post-Communism, Judeo-Bolshevism would emerge once again as the return of the repressed. This is because after 1989, Judeo-Bolshevism would become entangled in the politics of memory. Whenever the crimes of the Soviet Union were compared to the crimes of Nazi Germany, the specter would haunt the discussion. This was the case in the historical controversies in West Germany in the late 1980s, specifically the *Historikerstreit* or “historian’s debate.” Set off in 1986 by the publication of an article by conservative historian Ernst Nolte, “The Past That Will Not Go Away,” in which he suggested that the crimes of the Soviet Union were little different from those of Nazism, a huge public debate erupted about the meaning of the Nazi past for West German political and public life. Ultimately the transnational memory of the Holocaust that declared “never again” was widely accepted in Western Europe as the *sine qua non* of liberal, democratic regimes who supported multiculturalism, human rights, and tolerance.

But vexed memories about the Nazi and Soviet past were even more fraught in Eastern Europe. While many regimes sought admittance to the European Union, which entailed establishing their democratic bona fides in part by sharing in the consensus about the meaning of the Nazi past, this clashed with right-wing and populist calls in Eastern Europe to acknowledge other victims, not only of the Nazis, but also of the Communists, who were once again associated with the Jews, who purportedly buttressed them.¹¹ These contested memories linger today.

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Hanebrink concludes with reflections on how the specter of Judeo-Bolshevism also haunts discussions in Europe today of migrants and Muslims. Once more the threat of Eastern barbarism, the dangerous border crosser, the subject whose allegiance is to a supranational culture, lurks. Today, the group marked as outside Judeo-Christian Western nations is clearly the Islamic fundamentalist avatar.

In ending his timely and important study on this note, Hanebrink suggests that there is a “new Jew” haunting Europe: the marginalized Muslim. He is not wrong. But alas, this narrative short-cuts the complexity of the contemporary moment. Tragically for Jews in Europe, Muslims who suffer from Islamophobia and discrimination, not least those who are ideologically radicalized by militant jihadism or by other prophets decrying the structures and institutions that clearly oppress them, sometimes punch up by striking out against Jews. The alt-left too, burning for the revolution against global capitalism, sometimes personify the system they oppose by identifying it with the face and force of powerful Jews. Now with the rise of white Christian nationalism surging across Europe, Jews are in the crossfire once again. The “new Jew,” it turns out, shares a fateful history with the older chimeric “Jews” that these notable books help to illuminate.

¹¹See Tony Judt, “Epilogue. From the House of the Dead: An Essay on Modern European Memory,” in Judt, *Postwar: A History of Europe since 1945* (New York, 2005), 803–31.