THE GREAT WAR AND JEWISH MEMORY

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Abstract

The impact of the 1914–1918 conflict was so great as to constitute a crisis in Jewish life and thought. One important outcome of this crisis was the collision of history and memory as languages through which Jews ascribed meaning to the violence of the First World War. Consequently, the celebrated distinction between history and memory, advanced by Yerushalmi thirty years ago, is in need of revision. Surveying the centripetal and the centrifugal effects of war on the Jewish world in Europe, Palestine and North America, alongside the efflorescence of Jewish philanthropy, this article shows how, already during the war and in its immediate aftermath, writers and scholars, among them Ansky and Dubnow, created an amalgam of history and memory in their reflections on the upheaval of war. I have termed this practice 'historical remembrance'.

My subject – the Great War and Jewish memory – is a daunting one.[1] I will content myself with dealing with one major conceptual issue before turning to three facets of this story relating to the changing position of Jewish communities towards the state.

The major conceptual issue I want to raise is this. I claim that the Great War shattered Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi's celebrated distinction between history and memory in Jewish cultural life. I argue that Jewish history and Jewish memory collided between 1914 and 1918 in ways that transformed both and created a new category, which I term historical remembrance. Less the 'faith of fallen Jews', as Yerushalmi claims,[2] historical remembrance is the practice of finding some meaning in the revolution in violence which erupted in 1914 and has continued to this day. An amalgam of the very old and the very new, apocalyptic thinking took on the subject of industrialized killing in striking and surprising ways. Just consider for a moment Chagall's shocking use of the Crucified Jew as a metaphor for Jewish suffering in the twentieth century. Take a moment to reflect on the surreal landscape of Kafka's penal colonies and on the fate of Gregor Samsa in *The Metamorphosis*, and you will get a sense of what I mean. In this sense, my subject in this article, the Great War

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and Jewish memory, is not very different from Paul Fussell's classic *The Great War and Modern Memory*.[3] In both the Jewish and the non-Jewish worlds, myth, memory and history collided in the 1914–1918 conflict and created a complex sense of the past, which Jews and non-Jews share to this day.

On passing through the crucible of the century of total war, Jewish history and Jewish memory formed a new amalgam, a new way of approaching the past, which made writing history an essential language of remembrance. An immanent God was not the central issue; more critical still was the emergence of a Jewish sense of Stephen Daedalus's statement that history is a nightmare from which we are still trying to awaken – dreams and disasters in equal part. That is how we write about war; that is how we – Jews and non-Jews alike – know about industrial warfare, not starting from the Holocaust, but from the catastrophe that made it possible – the war of 1914–1918.

It is hardly surprising that this significant period in the configuration of Jewish practices of remembrance has been occluded by the Shoah and the struggle to create the State of Israel. As in the case of German history *tout court*, a later catastrophe masked scholarly investigation of an earlier one. Now, though, it is surely time to strip away the screen memory of what was to come to see the staggering significance of what was between 1914 and 1918 for Jewish life and thought.

As David Roskies and Alan Mintz have shown, Jewish reflections on catastrophe before 1914 were complex and sophisticated.[4] My claim is that the Great War turned a difference of degree into a difference in kind. That is what total war means; it is not total in any precise sense, but totalizing in the way it exponentially increases the killing power of industrialized nations at war. What happened between 1914 and 1918 was not just a larger version of Kishinev, or even of the American Civil War, which did point to the future, but the creation of a new kind of war the world had never seen before. That war began in 1914 but did not end in 1918. Throughout Eastern Europe and beyond, the killing continued, and in what my colleague Timothy Snyder calls these Bloodlands between Germany and Russia,[5] the ground was prepared for the catastrophe to come. It is my claim that without Verdun and the Somme, Auschwitz was unthinkable. It would never have happened. The break with older notions of constraints on war, on the protection of non-combatants, even on extermination itself, as in the case of the Armenian genocide, came before *Mein Kampf*, before the Nazi seizure of power, before the Second World War. We must trace the degeneration of warfare into the extermination of the Jews of Europe in the 1940s to three decades earlier, when the first total war in history unfolded.

Neither history alone nor memory alone was sufficient to configure this descent into barbarism. Industrialized warfare created the assembly line of

death to come, and left us with conceptual problems with which we are still struggling. Can anyone get their mind around the ten million dead of the Great War, before turning to the six million Jews? Are we capable of comprehending killing on this scale? Perhaps not, but the effort to do so required artists, writers, poets, composers, sculptors, architects and ordinary people to use whatever tools they had at their disposal to try to make sense of the senselessness of total war. In this effort, history and memory were reconfigured everywhere, including in the Jewish world.[6]

Let me offer a rough approach to the distinction between history and memory. I do not share the antinomian view that they are totally different, each existing in majestic isolation on its separate peak. Instead I see them as overlapping. History is memory seen through documents. Memory is history seen through affect. Both inform narratives about the past, and have done so more and more since the First World War. The mixture of the two is indeed one of the cultural legacies of that war.

This is evident in the commemorative avalanche we are currently enduring. But commemorating the outbreak of the 'Great War' is very, very remote from celebrating it. The term 'the Great War' has too much of a taste of ashes in it for that. Instead, we must try to take the measure of only tiny bits of its revolutionary character and consequences. Its traces in memory and history are all around us. All we need are the eyes to see them.

The structure of this article follows some of the insights of a much more sinister figure – Carl Schmitt. He saw the Great War for what it was – the inauguration of the permanent state of exception, that extended moment when those without weapons (and millions in uniform too) became nothing other than 'bare life', in Agamben's terms,[7] pawns in the biopolitics of total war. Here is Walter Benjamin's language of historical remembrance of that war and what it did to the individual human being, from his essay on 'The Storyteller', written in 1936.[8] Since 1914, Benjamin said,

> our picture, not only of the external world but of the moral world as well, overnight has undergone changes which were never thought possible. With the [First] World War a process began to become apparent which has not halted since then. Was it not noticeable at the end of the war that men returned from the battlefield grown silent –not richer, but poorer in communicable experience? . . . For never has experience been contradicted more thoroughly than strategic experience by tactical warfare, economic experience by inflation, bodily experience by mechanical warfare, moral experience by those in power.

By 'experience' Benjamin meant something like Reinhart Koselleck's distinction between the 'sphere of experience' and the 'horizon of expectation'.[9] Together they produce our sense of historical time, and that very sense of time, Benjamin wrote, was exploded on the battlefields of the Great War:

> A generation that had gone to school on a horse-drawn streetcar now stood under the open sky in a countryside in which nothing remained unchanged but the clouds, and beneath these clouds, in a field of force of destructive torrents and explosions, was the tiny, fragile human body.

Here is what the new amalgam of history and memory looks like: men have been reduced to poor, bare, forked animals overwhelmed by machines of destruction more powerful than any the world has seen before.

Starting with this premise, I want to introduce three facets of the history of Jews in this new configuration of power, the wartime state. The first I call the centripetal movement of millions of Jews towards defence of their homelands at war, from Australia to Austria. The second I term the centrifugal movement of millions of Jews, propelled by the war and pogroms into vast refugee columns throughout Eastern Europe and beyond. Many contemporaries termed the murder of perhaps 250,000 Jews by retreating Russian soldiers in 1915 the *Drittr Hurban*. It was indeed a catastrophe, but not the end of the story of Jewish survival during the war.[10] In Central and Eastern Europe, the war was an economic firestorm, one in which shortages of every kind, harvest failures and massive inflation destroyed the savings and the purchasing power of Jews and older charities helping them. In their place, a new and powerful transnational phase of Jewish philanthropy began, based in part on the Joint Distribution Committee, founded in New York in 1914 to help Jews in distress in Palestine and in Eastern Europe. When states broke down and inflation wiped out indigenous Jewish resources, American cash came to the rescue. The American role in the defence of Jewish life took on a new prominence as a result of the war: one which it has never lost.

The third central effect of the war on Jewish life arose out of the catastrophic effects of the war on the international system and on the successor states which were brought into existence by the Peace Treaty of 1919. The First World War transformed states into much more invasive, centralized and authoritarian entities. Soviet Russia never demobilized. It stood on a war footing from 1917 to 1945, waging a successful civil war against counter-revolutionaries before waging a war against its own people, imposing the first man-made famine on the Ukraine, then murdering millions of its own citizens in sequential purges throughout the 1930s. The Nazi state was the German warfare state of 1914–1918 stripped of dissent and made into a much more powerful killing machine. The Nazis consciously shifted the material hardships suffered by the German people in 1914–1918 onto the shoulders of millions of *Untermenschen*. Their success sent liberal political forces all over Europe into retreat, and finally into oblivion after the outbreak of war in 1939.

The cultural history of the period 1914–1939 reflected each of these three currents – first a flight towards the state, then a flight away from the killing fields, and finally a flight into the state of exception – which Carl Schmitt

described[11] and which Pasternak termed the ice age. In conclusion, I try to show that the Jewish Great War was very different from the war which followed twenty-five years later. As catastrophic as the Great First World War was for European Jewry, the Holocaust is not part of a thirty years' war from 1914 to 1945, but a diabolic tale all on its own. Here is the fundamental reason to speak of the Great War and Jewish memory as an integral part of what Paul Fussell terms 'modern memory', a mixture of history and mythical remembrance, which is how we all, Jew and non-Jew alike, configure and contemplate the violent century whose beginning we have been marking.

Centripetal Forces: Being Drawn into Centre

We know considerably more about the way in which throughout Europe the Great War brought Jews much more into the centre of national life than they had been before. It was, after all, only a decade since the sad dénouement of the Dreyfus affair, and while Jews exercised civil and political rights in Western and Central Europe, the bulk of Eastern European Jewry still lived in a world separate or remote from that of their Christian neighbours. The Kaiser himself famously observed that he saw only Germans when he surveyed his people. Freud offered his libido to the Austrian war effort in its first months, before regaining his senses over the next few months. Other Jewish intellectuals were similarly seduced by the chance of moving from the margins to the core of national life. They, too, lived to regret some of their more exotic professions of faith in the national or imperial cause.

On a more prosaic level, the German war effort was organized effectively by the son of the founder of AEG, Walter Rathenau, who headed the *Kriegsrohstoffabteilung* (KRA) or war resources board in 1914–1915. In 1915 Fritz Haber provided Germany with a new weapon of war – poison gas – and despite the outcry against this barbaric weapon, he won the Nobel Prize in chemistry in 1919 for his contributions to science. Chaim Weizmann's work as a chemist was equally important for the British war effort. His grain-distillation process for the synthesis of acetone increased by a factor of ten British production of acetone, a central element in dynamite. For a host of reasons including this achievement, the British Foreign Office were prepared to recognize his request that they accede to the Zionist programme of creating a Jewish homeland in Palestine, then occupied by the Ottoman army. The commander-in-chief of the Australian 3rd division was Sir John Monash, arguably the finest general officer in the Great War. He was the grandson of a rabbi and Talmud scholar, of German origin and the brother-in-law of the German historian Heinrich Graetz. None of Monash's German genealogy mattered in light of his organizational genius.

Jewish soldiers served in all combatant armies. This should not be surprising, since in the nineteenth century, Jewish participation in military mobilization had been widespread. The Canadian scholar Derek Penslar has shown recently that it is unwise to take at face value the Israeli myth that European Jews totally shunned the military, and that the creation of the Haganah in the Yishuv and then the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) were revolutionary events, transforming Jewish character from pious passivity to armed vigilance. Jews served at all ranks, including as generals, in European armies well before the 1914–1918 war.[12] The brutal seizure of Jewish youths in Russia by the tsar's armies was certainly a reality, but it was hardly a surprise that Jews responded to their call-up notices in 1914 or to appeals to volunteer with the same measured determination as did their non-Jewish countrymen. And they did so despite the recent memory of pogroms in the period surrounding the Russo-Japanese War and the Beilis case of 1913.

There is ample visual evidence of a Jewish presence in the armies of both sides during the war, including images of a social club formed by Jewish soldiers in the Romanian army. There were thirty Jewish chaplains in the German army – Leo Baeck was one of them – and seventy-six in the Austrian army, and there is a striking photo of German soldiers at a Yom Kippur service in Brussels in 1915; their well-ordered ranks indicate perhaps that the needs of propaganda took precedence over individual soldiers' choices about the sanctity of the day.[13] Perhaps 320,000 Jews served in the Austro-Hungarian armies, alongside another 100,000 Jews who served in the German armies; the number of Jews in the Russian army is not known, but it was probably significantly larger than the combined total of German and Austrian Jews mobilized.

A rigorous count of Jewish war participation and Jewish war losses is very difficult to produce, especially in light of the destruction of archives and the political occlusion of the war in post-revolutionary Russia and its adjacent territories. A plausible estimate of total Jewish war deaths in the Great War is roughly 170,000 out of perhaps two million Jews who served in uniform during the war. The bulk of the war dead were Russians (90,000), but there were also 40,000 Austrians, 12,000 Germans, 8,000 British and 7,000 French Jews who died for their countries.[14]

Jewish war losses were a smaller proportion of the total Jewish population mobilized (perhaps 8 per cent killed of those who served), compared to national figures of roughly 12 per cent. Some anti-Semites tried to make something of this in the case of the German army, but there the proportion of Jews serving and dying was about the same as that of Germany as a whole. The 'Jew census' of 1916 was quietly buried when these results appeared.

War cemeteries and war memorials in a number of different countries testify to Jewish participation in the Great War. There are examples of these

throughout Europe. Jewish soldiers in the German, French and British armies who died in the war had Jewish stars carved on their tombstones. It is ironic that the Nazis did not destroy these traces of Jewish military service during their occupation of France during the Second World War. Dead Jews could be left in peace.

War memorial plaques from Perth to Merthyr Tydfil to London adorn synagogues with the names of the men who went to war and did not return. A soldier's prayer book was prepared by the British Board of Deputies and distributed to synagogues, where families were encouraged to send them to their sons, brothers and husbands. The Imperial War Museum has one such booklet, carried by a British soldier throughout the war.

Substantial archives document the effect of the war on Jewish life in the East. Most of them testify to the second element in wartime life – the centrifugal forces sweeping through and over Jewish settlements in Eastern Europe. Contact with the state in this context meant contact either with the army or with occupying authorities. The first German confrontation with *Ostjuden* took place in 1914 and was received by many Jewish groups as liberating. These people paid for such views by suffering a murderous retreat of the Russian army in 1915, after defeat in one early phase of engagements on the Eastern Front. This massive pogrom, the *Drittr Hurban*, was a catastrophe on a completely different scale from that suffered in Kishinev and elsewhere a decade before. Surprisingly, the commander of Russian forces who had looked aside when these killings took place was cashiered, and there was no repetition of these killings until the end of the war, when the Russian empire collapsed.

Ober Ost, the German army command in northeast Poland and Lithuania, launched a cultural programme in 1916 and 1917 to 'civilize' the local populations, and to introduce elements of German culture and administration to a region they treated like a colony of barbarians. This meant providing photographs and personal documents to inhabitants, and introducing rudimentary medical care to areas where they feared German soldiers might contract local diseases. At this time, the war against disease had no murderous undertones. Armies of occupation usually behave this way, and the German and Austrian forces in contact with Jewish communities had no intention of ruling over them indefinitely or of driving them out of their homes. That came twenty-five years later.

The contact between occupying soldiers and Eastern European Jews can be followed in some remarkable archival collections. One of them is housed at the Leo Baeck Institute in New York. Bernard Bardach was a Viennese physician on duty in the Austrian army in Poland and in Volhynia, now in western Ukraine. He served on a front which was quiet for long periods of time. For his family, he preserved the photos he took and the paintings he

made in a war scrapbook. It is a remarkable document, with some of the power of Vishniak's elegiac portraits of Polish Jewish life on the edge of destruction. Bardach intended no such thing, and we must try to look at these photos without seeing prefigurations of the Shoah in them.

The best way to understand these images[15] is to see them as anthropological in character. Bardach was a sophisticated and talented physician, sent to a very remote and isolated corner of the Eastern Front. He had a great deal of time on his hands, and he used that time to record his confrontation with a distinct people, who had some surface resemblance to him as Jews, but who were at an entirely different level of development and culture. At the same time, the French Jewish banker Albert Kahn financed a photographic and filmic effort to go to the remote parts of the world to photograph indigenous people before their contact with 'the West' transformed them or even made their world disappear. Bardach did something of the same kind, and thereby left a photographic profile of Jewish life in disarray.

Bardach was an assimilated Jew, but he welcomed the chance to observe Yom Kippur, even in Volhynia. Here is his description of the day, 7 October 1916:

> Day of Atonement – Yom Kippur – At the invitation of the field chaplain Levi, I drove to Wladimir Wolynski [Volodymyr-Volynskyi] at 9.30 a.m., in a car that the general himself lent me.… I spent the whole day in temple in a place of honour next to Levi, with the exception of the afternoon break from 2 till 4.… I returned to the temple and stayed until 5.30 pm whereupon I drove back and reached the command post at 7.00 pm. The car was supplied to me for the whole day. I fasted until that point, [which was] actually very easy, and I didn't feel hungry at all. The sermon this time was so much better than the one for the New Year. The prayer itself was sincere and in Hebrew – an excellent cantor – just the company was rather lowly, a bunch of ordinary soldiers and Russian Jews.[16]

Note the snobbery – ordinary German soldiers and Russian Jews were grouped together as 'lowly' or of low social status. It is this low life that he documented with his paintbrush and his camera over the following year.

His photographic scrapbook illustrates many facets of life in occupied Volhynia. He presented general images of towns and churches alongside portraits of individual Jews and their environment. He made one portrait of the wandering Jew, a symbol of the centrifugal forces of war, impelling this old man God knows where. Bardach took note of the dangers of unsanitary conditions affecting occupied and occupier alike: he photographed the tombs of Jewish doctors who had died of cholera; Bardach himself was inoculated against it. He ensured his colleagues' Jewish identities were honoured on their graves. His interest in Jewish life extended to photographing the synagogue in

Volodymyr-Volynskyi, where he had prayed on Yom Kippur, and its adjacent Jewish cemetery. A photo of an old Jewish man crossing a street could have been anywhere in the east, but the Ukrainian flag of allies of the Central powers locates it more particularly in Western Volhynia.

Bardach saw other sides of the war too. He was charged with examining prostitutes – almost certainly Jewish prostitutes – living near his encampment. Their services were used regularly by the men stationed there, and his job was to control the spread of venereal disease. Another form of entertainment was the local soldiers' cinema, which showed Charlie Chaplin in the Ukraine in 1918. What a splendid instance of the meaning of global warfare! Fighting Russian and irregular troops led German soldiers in his sector to burn down houses and destroy villages, execute spies and engage in infantry and cavalry operations in the old style. (Horses were everywhere on the Eastern Front; without them the war would have ground to an immediate halt.)

There is little indication in Bardach's diary or his photographic collection that he saw the *Ostjuden* around him as brothers or kindred spirits. They were men from another world, one of extreme poverty, one filled with long columns of Jewish refugees, and one which he would leave to its fate in 1918, when his unit was called home to a very uncertain future. He was distressed at the break-up of the old empire and on 21 October 1918 blamed both domestic politicians and Woodrow Wilson for the disaster:

> The long-desired answer of Wilson to our Monarchy finally came and destroyed all of our hopes. Many were of the opinion that Wilson would treat us mercifully in order to turn us away from Germany – all of them were mistaken, the answer exceeds all baseness ever, he is not negotiating with Austria, at all, just with the Czechoslovakians!!
>
> As a reaction to the imminent collapse of Austria into federal states, Hungary answers with separation from Austria and the foundation of a personal union. Our people seem to have lost their head. From the bottom of my heart, I wish revenge on these brawlers. Truly everyone should be convinced that our people prefer to live together further in peace and harmony in a peaceful Austria, but these brawlers and betrayers of the fatherland envision something else.[17]

What is so intriguing about the Bardach archive is the extent to which it shows the fissiparous tendencies of the war effort, and through the camera of an Austrian observer we see the outlines of a world unbalanced, in movement and in crisis. What Bardach saw was a very small part of a human flood, out of the line of fire, away from the fighting which destroyed homes and people alike. One historian has estimated that in 1917, one in five of all inhabitants of the western provinces of the Russian empire were on the move.[18] What was happening in Volhynia was happening in Lithuania, in Belarus, in Russia, in the heartland of the old Pale of Settlement. This century-old domain was

being dislocated by its roots, a casualty of the centrifugal tendencies of global war. Bernard Bardach's portrait of one Jewish family on the road, stopping in a field near Lublin for *Shaharit*, the morning prayer, gives a glimpse of this unanchored world on the move, filled with uncertainty on the one hand and faith on the other. It is evident that those drawn into the centre of their country's war effort saw at close hand the centrifugal effects of war on other Jewish populations.

Fragmentations: The New World Order

The suffering of European Jews was worsened considerably by economic difficulties and food shortages during and after the war. The conflict triggered a massive and irreversible inflationary spiral. The rate of inflation by 1918 in Germany was perhaps 400 per cent, rising to 600 per cent the following year; it grew exponentially thereafter, reaching dizzying heights in 1922–1923. The sick and the infirm were hit particularly hard, since the charities which supported them had their real incomes wiped out by inflation. What could have fed hundreds in 1914 fed one or two five years later; these resources fed no-one at the height of the inflation.

This crisis in Jewish charitable assistance produced a response, indeed, a development of great importance for Jewish life later in the century. Transnational hunger and poverty produced a transnational answer in American Jewish philanthropy. The earliest appeal for help for Jews in distress in the United States was a 'Community rally for the relief of Jewish victims' held in Washington, D.C. on 25 October 1914. This appeal was a response to the initial westward move of Russian armies into Austro-Hungarian territory.[19] When Palestinian Jews faced hunger as the Ottoman Turks could not feed them and Jewish charities quickly ran out of cash, and when Eastern European Jews faced widespread violence and displacement, new American philanthropic efforts met the challenge of war. Already in 1912, a Russian Jewish medical organization, *Obschestvo zdravookhraneniia evreev,* known as the OZE, had aimed to reach Jewish communities in need. After the war, this organization relocated first to Berlin and then to Paris, where as *Oeuvre de Secours Aux Enfants,* or OSE, it wrote a signal chapter in humanitarian aid by saving thousands of Jewish children in France during the Second World War. In the earlier war, it found a new partnership with its American brethren in the Joint Distribution Committee (JDC), formed in 1914.

Among the Jewish notables who breathed life into what is now known as the 'Joint' or JDC was Henry Morgenthau, the American ambassador to Constantinople. Morgenthau was also instrumental in mobilizing international condemnation of the Armenian genocide of 1915. From

the earliest days of the war, his consuls sent regular reports about the catastrophic economic consequences of the conflict, throughout the Ottoman Empire. His sources told him similar tales of massive suffering on the other side of the border with Russia. In New York, he contacted prominent Jews and sent a cable asking for the help of Jewish notables in responding to the dire state of the Yishuv in Palestine. The response was immediate and generous, funding the delivery of food and medical supplies to Jerusalem a few months later.

Private donations flooded in to the organization, and the Joint set up a transmission department to channel aid to individual towns and families. In 1917, when the US joined the war, complicating financial links to occupied Poland and enemy Palestine, the Joint set up a committee in neutral Holland to transmit funds to both destinations. Morgenthau continued to lead a massive campaign to provide assistance to Jews in all war zones, saying that action was necessary since the Jewish people were about to die. They may not be able to save everyone, but at least, Morgenthau wrote, 'we can prove ourselves Jews and prove ourselves their brothers'.[20]

The flood of funds was immediate and the cash was converted into food for orphanages in Palestine, and, at the end of the war, into part of the American Relief Aid effort to Central Europe and Russia organized by Herbert Hoover. Public health groups reached Poland on Joint money, and there was even a commitment to help the Falasha in Ethiopia: Jewish brotherhood in action indeed.

This shift of power over the Atlantic had long-term consequences for the future of Zionism too. Substantial parts of the American Jewish community were of Russian or Polish origin, and had every reason to support efforts to help Jews escape first from the tsarist regime and then from the famine and violence of the civil war. Thereafter the freezing of the revolution under first Lenin and then Stalin provided more evidence that the future of the Jewish masses in Eastern Europe was not in Russia, but either in the United States or in Israel. American money became essential for the development of the Yishuv, too, once more developing Morgenthau's early initiative into a permanent financial and political platform on which Jewish life in Palestine could grow.

The flight of Eastern European Jews from the fighting and from starvation was a time of misery, only partially buffered by international aid. If war and civil war were not bad enough, there was famine in the Ukraine and in Byelorussia (Belarus) in 1921–1923, and then worse under Stalin later in the decade. The war created a massive migratory wave, but those who tried to start their lives after the war were hit by a series of disasters well before they were swept away in the Holocaust. The war after the war was as bad as the 1914–1918 conflict itself.

From Total War to Total Destruction

This devastated landscape is the one that Jewish writers faced in the period of the Great War and its extended and painful aftermath. This was the world of Isaac Bashevis Singer and Arnold Zweig, of Joseph Roth and Isaac Babel, of Martin Buber and Franz Rosenzweig, of Gershom Scholem and of Walter Benjamin. Some older beliefs survived, and it was still possible for Rosenzweig and others to reconfigure their faith in the 'star of redemption';[21] but only for a while, and only until the kind of total war that was born in 1914–1918 mutated and wiped out those who remained in the old Pale of Settlement.

Once more, the disaster of war was deepened by the faulty peace treaties of 1919–1923. Ironically, a war between global empires had produced in its wake a system of nation states with much more powerful means of waging war against their neighbours or against their own citizens. Total war in 1914–1918 meant the extension of the reach of the state so that it could see and control everyone in it; the Bolsheviks and later the Nazis seized these tools with alacrity. Modern communications and transportation provided the instruments of domination which easily escaped legal controls in what was referred to above as Carl Schmitt's 'state of exception', when the word of the sovereign was law.

Before 1914, victims of persecution could escape to the West. But after 1914, that was no longer possible. Indeed the first phase of what is termed globalization came to an end in 1914. The vast flow of migrants west across Europe and towards the Americas and the Antipodes was halted abruptly by war. The free movement of goods and capital came to an end too. Paradoxically, a global war halted globalization and created a system of weak new nation states in Europe and unravelling empires elsewhere. Britain and France were too exhausted by war to be able to keep a solid grip on their colonial possessions, in which larger numbers of people began to take for granted that one day, they would achieve independence.

Violence accompanied this shift in perception of the Great War as the apogee of empire to the Great War as the beginning of the end of empire. There were riots in Cairo, Amritsar, Seoul and Beijing in 1919, and violence continued thereafter in Palestine, in Ireland and all over Eastern Europe. Qiryat Shemona was built to honour victims of such violence; a monument nearby honours Joseph Trumpeldor, a soldier who fought for Russia in the Russo-Japanese War and for Britain in the Zion Mule Corps at Gallipoli, where he was wounded. He was killed at Tel Hai in 1920. The great Hebrew writer Yosef Haim Brenner was killed the following year in Jaffa.

The 'Greater War',[22] which had begun in the Balkans in 1912, carried on in Poland, the Baltic states, Russia, Ireland and Turkey, where a new regime

tore up the Treaty of Sèvres, in which imperial interests came before Turkish independence, and won a war against Greek forces, displacing over a million Christians from Turkey, who fled west just as their Muslim neighbours had fled east a decade before. Ethnic cleansing was legitimated by international law.

The United States was the real winner of the war, but its economic power, reflected in Jewish American philanthropy and Herbert Hoover's relief work, was not matched by a political will to impose order on Europe, as it did in 1945. Absent from the League of Nations, the USA's international standing suffered when its economy collapsed in 1929, sending much of the world into a spiral of indebtedness which bankrupted everybody.

Clearly, the international order, with a weak League of Nations, without the US or the USSR in it for much of the inter-war years, and without Germany in it for all but seven years, was no guarantor of the peace or of the security of Jews within member states. The League was committed to defending minority rights, but did not have the political muscle to enforce them. The combination of the failed peace and the world economic crisis led to the rise of fascism Germany, the weak-kneed response to whose foreign policy we term appeasement, and a cynical bargain with the other devil that produced the Molotov–Ribbentrop Pact of 1939, ensuring the outbreak of a second total war in 1939.

My view is that both the waging of the Great War and the making of the peace treaty made it very likely, though not inevitable, that a second world war would come. Consider what the war had done for and to the Jews. First, millions of Jews had rallied to the cause on both sides. Somewhere in the region of two million Jews put on uniforms, and roughly 170,000 were killed or died in the war. Perhaps twice that number were wounded. There were thousands of Jewish orphans alongside those of other religions all over the world. Jewish industrialists and bankers had played a significant role in forging the weapons of war, and through the chemist's war provided both sides with radically new means of destruction. And yet none of this made a difference when the new states of Central and Eastern Europe faced an embittered Germany on one side and revolutionary Russia on the other.

Over time, the anti-Semitism of the leaders of the new Polish state became blatant, and anti-communists elsewhere saw Jewish Bolsheviks as their enemies in Berlin as well as in Moscow. In this way, the Great War intensified political anti-Semitism by providing it with a target in the worldwide communist conspiracy. Anti-Allied propaganda in Germany easily replaced the rapacious image of the Allies greedily reaching for Germany's wealth with the very same image of Jews and Bolsheviks doing precisely the same thing. Those embittered by the 'unjust' peace terms could see this conspiracy clearly behind the scenes. Those who published and those who read *The Protocols of*

the Elders of Zion after the war in Germany and in the United States had the certainty of the paranoid about such cabals.

The way the war was waged and its outcome particularly in Eastern Europe provided many reasons to support the Zionist claim that the place of Jews was not in Europe but in Palestine. However compromised by other foreign policy initiatives that said different things to the Arabs, the Balfour Declaration was a major achievement, one which was probably unthinkable before the Great War. And yet the vast bulk of the Jewish population of Eastern Europe failed to heed the call.

Conclusion

One preliminary conclusion of this survey must be that the centripetal force of the 1914–1918 war, its tendency to bring Jews to the centre of their states, did not produce lasting benefits for the Jews, aside from the Balfour Declaration, and even that event made little difference to *klal Yisrael* in Eastern Europe. At the same time, the centrifugal forces of war starved or destabilized much of Eastern Europe, and produced in the example of the Armenian genocide a terrible precedent of which the Nazis were well aware. What the Turkish triumvirate had done in 1915 was to take a long-standing ethnic conflict and finish it, once and for all. That is what total war permits – and the Nazis did the same thirty years later. They finished (or tried to finish) what they saw as a fight to the death between Germans and Jews. This apocalyptic vision had been there for centuries; what total war did was to provide the conditions to see it through in Turkish Anatolia in 1915.

It is tempting to adopt the view that the wars of the first quarter of the twentieth century determined the fate of Jews twenty-five years later. One counterfactual example may suffice to show what I mean. It is chastening to consider what would have happened to the culturally spectacular Jewish community in Thessaloniki if it had not been transferred to Greek sovereignty after the Balkan wars of 1912. The fifty thousand Jews who lived there would have remained Turkish citizens, just as they had been when Mustafa Kemal Atatürk was born there in 1881. Anti-Semitism of a kind was not unknown in Turkey in the 1920s, but Turkish neutrality in the Second World War would have kept these Jews away from Nazi occupation and deportation, which annihilated them virtually completely. They were Greek because Turkey had lost a war against her Balkan neighbours in 1912.

Other counterfactuals have intrigued historians for decades. What if Britain had stayed out of the war, Niall Ferguson has argued, and what if Germany had defeated France in 1914? Would that not have created a German-dominated European Union forty years before one eventually came about,

and left Britain the imperial assets she cashed in in order to win the protracted war which would not have come about?[23] What if Germany had persuaded the Allies to accept a trade-off in 1917: Germany would evacuate all occupied territories in Belgium and France, and pay for their reconstruction, in return for which the Allies would give Germany a free hand in creating a series of satellites in Poland, the Ukraine and Byelorussia (Belarus), before Lenin had a chance to seize power? What if Wilson had been able to force Lloyd George and Clemenceau to accept a peace treaty which was not punitive, but welcomed a democratic Germany among the community of nations? Would there have been a Nazi movement supported by millions? Would its radical anti-Semitism and anti-communism have subsided well short of the invasion of the Soviet Union and the Holocaust? Each of these counterfactuals is worth reflection, especially since they remind us of the power of contingency in history.

For these reasons and others, we must be cautious about merging the two world wars into what some historians term one 30 years' war. Those who wrote during and after the Great War did not have the Holocaust in mind; the Great War generation lived through a different catastrophe, one that cannot be conflated with later events. The undermining of sacrificial and redemptive tropes, which Alan Mintz has studied in the aftermath of the pogroms of the 1880s in Russia, did intensify during and after the Great War. Notions of martyrdom – the tradition of treating Jewish victims as dying '*al Kiddush ha-Shem*' – were still alive, but as David Roskies has shown, their purchase on Jews' thinking about their fate was loosened even further by the First World War and its violent aftermath. No one could have foreseen how horrifying the future would be. What had happened between 1914 and 1918 was bad enough. We have to avoid the distortions of what Freud termed screen memory, that tendency to see the distant past through the lens of the more recent past.

The *Drittr Hurban* and the rest of the horrors of the Great War must not be eclipsed or obscured by the Shoah. The disaster of 1914–1918 both demonstrated and undermined Jewish claims to citizenship and equality through the way millions took up the burdens of military service. And yet serving the German state in one war meant nothing in the next. I do not know the exact number of French soldiers of the Great War who were taken to Drancy and then Auschwitz despite having the Croix de Guerre on their chests. The war tore apart vast areas of Jewish settlement in Eastern Europe which during the civil war of 1918–1921 and in the 1920s and 1930s were hit by further murderous assaults, exactions and hardships.

And yet so much survived the First World War. In the new Museum of the History of Polish Jews in Warsaw, there are two ration cards for matzah, dated 1916. Pesach survived the war. So did the rich Jewish life my family

shared in Warsaw until the ghetto was liquidated. Consider too the Oyneg Shabbos archives buried under the ruins of the ghetto. The survival of such a rich body of Jewish poetry, prose and documentation is something of a miracle, an affirmation of a belief in *Kiddush ha-Chayim*, the sanctification of life, as much as and perhaps even more than a belief in *Kiddush ha-Shem*, in martyrdom. Ringelblum and Huberband knew all there was to know about bringing history and memory together, and through their efforts, we can see and feel the force of both.[24]

One final point. I believe the construction of a hybrid, blending history and memory, was evident while the Great War was going on. The most powerful instance is S. Ansky's contemporary memoir, written in Yiddish, and published in Russian as *Razrushenie Galitisii*[25] (*The Destruction of Galicia*), available in English as *The Enemy at His Pleasure: A Journey through the Jewish Pale of Settlement during World War I.* Ansky was a polymath, poet, playwright, Social Revolutionary, folklorist, fabulist, tribune of the Jewish nation. He knew or claimed to know everyone in the East European Jewish world, including Simon Dubnow. Aside from his play *The Dybbuk*, his account of the Galician Jewish world in the midst of the Great War is unsurpassed in its range of reference and documentary value. Of course, his writing must be treated with the same caution as any other first-person account. He was a socialist who wrote the anthem of the Bund, a gifted storyteller and a poet. Perhaps his knowledge of folklore inclined him to see (as many First World War soldiers did) the difference between true accounts and the truth. Surely all Great War memoirs share this conundrum: the war was so huge an event that no one could see even a small part of it with perfect clarity. Robert Graves famously said that only those who lied about the war could tell the truth about it in subsequent years. Ansky was a truth teller, but he was also a political actor. He not only witnessed the misery of Galician Jews, but managed to do all he could to relieve it. He died in 1920, and left behind his Galician memoir as part of a rich and varied legacy.

The language of Ansky's memoir is precisely that: a memoir, the language of memory, his memory of the effort he undertook to distribute humanitarian aid not only in Galicia but throughout the Pale. But his first-person account is also in part a history of Eastern European Jews in the crucible of war, firmly straddling the divide between history and memory. He tells of an encounter with Lipo Shvagar, who owned a bookshop in Chorostków, southeast of Lvov (Lviv). Shvagar said he had been entrusted by the Rebbe of Kospehinyets before the Russians arrived in 1915 to hide some letters written by the Baal Shem Tov himself. Shvagar did indeed hide the letters, and came back to recover them. After searching for a considerable time, he found the box in which he had hidden them. The paper was there, but the writing on them had vanished.

To Ansky, these 'flying letters' 'summed up the fate of Galician Jews'.[26] Elsewhere he used a similar metaphor of destruction, this time writing of 'broken tablets'. His message was not a return to memory, but to enfold memory in the history of singular events. In 1914–1915, he wrote, the Jewish wartime disaster was palpable but had not 'reached the depths of the soul'. But thereafter everything changed. 'The heroes of the national tragedy had become professional beggars. They had forgotten the past, they were afraid to look into the future.… They roamed about, neglected, silent, despondent, indifferent to their dreadful situation'. 'And all these living corpses', he added, 'trudge past me not as shattered tablets, but as tablets from which the letters have been erased'. Their dignity was gone.[27]

There are many other passages that could be mentioned to make the same point; but this one links Ansky directly with another chronicler of historical remembrance, Primo Levi. Who can miss the parallel between Ansky's walking ciphers and Primo Levi's *Muselmänner* – those who had lost their human dignity and their will to live in Auschwitz? Both writers described a moment when history fractured, and memory followed in its wake. That is what total war did: it transformed both history and memory into languages of horror, the one inseparable from the other. In our war-torn world, when the letters of the Baal Shem Tov vanish, they vanish for good. Their absence is not transitory. The void they leave behind allows no room for the narrative or hope of redemption. And without that hope, Jewish memory does not simply vanish; instead it informs Jewish history. As in Ansky's narrative, history and memory flow together in a stream we all inhabit, a stream I call historical remembrance.

There is one other document which supports my view that Jewish history and Jewish memory were braided together in powerful and inextricable ways during the Great War. In 1915, the great Jewish historian Simon Dubnow wrote a pamphlet entitled *The History of a Jewish Soldier, 1880–1915*. It hit the barrier of tsarist censorship, was published partially in 1916 and appeared in full only after the revolution of February 1917. The text was reedited in Russian a year later, and translated into French in 1929.

Right at the outset, Dubnow notes that the pamphlet is based on facts turned into a narrative with the author's voice created by Dubnow himself. His claim is that he is being truthful to a man who died in 1915, but whose voice echoed so many others that it can stand for them all. Later in the twentieth century, such generic documents, telling of the sufferings of a people through a story, the sources of which are true but the form of which is in the language of the author and not of the subject, was termed 'testimonial literature'. The Nobel-prize winner Rigoberta Menchú Tum wrote of horrifying acts of cruelty in the genocidal campaign against indigenous people in Guatemala in the period 1960–1996. Her testimony was challenged by others and on occasion, her

stories were found to be not credible. Her claim was that the kind of event she described happened so many times, that the accuracy of an individual episode mattered less than the truth of the general indictment behind it.[28]

Dubnow's pamphlet *History of a Jewish Soldier* is precisely this kind of document. It is written in the first person, but the fact that the narrator knows that he is dying places the author, Dubnow, in a position of a man trying to tell another's story as faithfully as possible after his death. Fiction is bound to enter the tale, but as in many other war memoirs, narrative truth is not the same as documentary truth. In effect, Dubnow the great historian fuses history and memory together here.

The story Dubnow tells is 'a long and sad song', which reveals the 'recollections which constitute the memory contemporaries had … of the long chain of the sufferings of an entire generation'. 'I have written it in the form of an historical essay', Dubnow claims, but it tells the tale of what he calls the 35-year war against the Jews in Russia, in the language of a man destroyed by it. Wounded in the Russo-Japanese war, injured in a pogrom following it, living the life of an émigré in New York until the voice of his people called him back to Russia, imprisoned and exiled for his political work, the subject of this pamphlet lives through all of the upheavals of the pre-1914 period. Nevertheless, he feels that the outbreak of the war is an opening for the Jews, a chance for liberation, and so he rejoins the Russian army. Nothing of the sort ensues. He speaks to a wounded German Jewish prisoner-of-war, who claims that he was fighting to liberate Russia's Jews from their oppressors, to seek revenge for Kishinev, for the Beilis trial. This message stuns the soldier, who sees the absurdity of his position as a soldier in an army waging a way against both the Germans and Russia's Jews. Consequently he ages twenty years in a few months at the front. Seeing the horrors of the pogroms following the Russian retreat of 1915, he almost welcomes the wound he receives from a German bullet at the front. Never giving up faith in 'my nation, unique and eternal' and in 'universal conscience', he faces his coming death with equanimity.[29]

This document is remarkable in several respects. First, it constitutes a first-person account of a Russian who served in the last two wars before the fall of the Tsar. It is withering in its indictment of Russian anti-Semitism at all levels, both before and during the war, and it captures the predicament which perhaps six hundred thousand Jewish soldiers in the Russian army faced. Secondly, though, its first-person narrative is one of the first in a long line of soldiers' tales of the Great War that employ testimony to provide a view from within the belly of the whale of war, as it were. This Jewish soldier is what Avishai Margalit calls a moral witness: someone who tells us not only what happened, but what it felt like to be in the midst of the violence.[30] True, he did not live to tell the tale, as Margalit's moral witnesses tend to do, but he let Dubnow tell

the tale. Thus perhaps the greatest Jewish historian of the last century brought history and memory together in this work, and showed that the bifurcation at the core of Yerushalmi's interpretation had effectively disappeared. History and memory fused in the Great War, for Jews, as for everyone else, creating a new kind of narrative of suffering which lasted throughout the violent twentieth century and is with us still.

Notes

1. For helpful comments and observations, thanks are due to Marc Saperstein, Petra Ernst, Vivienne Liska and colleagues attending paper presentations of earlier versions of this article in London, Graz, Leipzig and Antwerp. A different version of this article will be published in Petra Ernst's volume of papers presented to the Graz meeting on Jewish literature of the First World War.
2. Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi, *Zakhor: Jewish History and Jewish Memory*, Seattle 1996, p. 86.
3. Paul Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory*, New York 1975.
4. David Roskies, *Against the Apocalypse: Responses to Catastrophe in Modern Jewish Culture*, Cambridge 1984; Alan Mintz, *Hurban: Responses to Catastrophe in Hebrew Literature*, New York 1984.
5. Timothy Snyder, *Bloodlands: Europe between Hitler and Stalin,* New York 2010.
6. For further elaboration, see Jay Winter, *Remembering War: The Great War between History and Memory in the Twentieth Century*, New Haven 2006.
7. Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen, Stanford 1998.
8. Walter Benjamin, 'The Storyteller: Reflections on Nikolai Leskóv' in *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt and trans. Harry Zohn, New York 1968, pp. 192–251, quotes below at 193–194.
9. Reinhart Koselleck, *Futures Past: On the Semantics of Historical Time*, trans. Keith Tribe, Cambridge 1985.
10. See S. Ansky, *The Enemy at his Pleasure: A Journey through the Jewish Pale of Settlement during World War I*, ed. and trans. Joachim Neugroschel, New York 2002.
11. Carl Schmitt, *The Concept of the Political*, trans. G. Schwab, Chicago 2005, and *Political Theology: Four Chapters on the Concept of Sovereignty*, trans. G. Schwab, Chicago 2006.
12. Derek Penslar, *Jews and the Military: A History*, Princeton 2013.
13. The Belgian scholar Daniel Dratwa (this volume) has reported how Belgian Jews were deeply offended by the use of their synagogue by the occupying German Jewish soldiers. See below, p. 105 and p. 109 note 42.
14. Veronique Chemla, 'Les Juifs dans la Grande Guerre, 1914–1918 (5675–5679)', 20 May 2013, http://www.veroniquechemla.info/2010/11/les-juifs-dans-la-grande-guerre-1914.html (accessed 14 January 2015).
15. Leo Baeck Institute, Center for Jewish History, Bernhard Bardach Collection, AR 6632. Available on the Leo Baeck Institute website: see http://www.lbi.org/digibaeck/results/?term=bardach&qtype=basic&dtype=any&filter=All&paging=25 (accessed 14 January 2015).
16. Bardach Collection, AR 6632, Bardach diary, 7 October 1916, my translation.

17. Bardach Collection, AR 6632, Bardach diary, 21 October 1918, my translation.
18. Peter Gatrell, 'Refugees' in *Cambridge History of the First World War*, ed. Jay Winter, vol. 3, pp. 186–215.
19. Marc Saperstein, *Jewish Preaching in Times of War, 1800–2001*, Oxford 2008, pp. 299–309.
20. Letter reproduced in: http://archives.jdc.org/about-us/from-the-archives/index.html?dateType=date&startDate=7/01/2011&endDate=8/01/2011 (accessed 14 January 2015).
21. Franz Rosenzweig, *The Star of Redemption*, trans. Barbara E. Galli, Madison, WI 2005.
22. I owe this term to John Horne and Robert Gerwarth.
23. Niall Ferguson, *The Pity of War*, London 1998.
24. Samuel Kassow, *Who Will Write Our History? Emanuel Ringelblum and the Oyneg Shabes Archive*, Bloomington 2007.
25. As cited in Gabriella Safran, *Wandering Soul: The Dybbuk's Creator, S. An-sky*, Cambridge, MA 2010, p. 333.
26. Ansky, *The Enemy at His Pleasure*, p. 382.
27. Ibid., pp. 250–251.
28. David Stoll, *Rigoberta Menchú and the Story of All Poor Guatemalans*, Boulder, CO 1999; and Arturo Arias (ed.), *The Rigoberta Menchú Controversy, with a Response by David Stoll*, Minneapolis 2001.
29. Simon Dubnow, *Histoire d'un soldat juif 1880–1915*, trans. Laurence Dyevre and Alexandre Eidelman, Paris 1988.
30. Avishai Margalit, *The Ethics of Memory*, Cambridge, MA 2003, ch. 5.