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Introduction

The Bolsheviks came to power in October 1917 and announced the overthrow of a world scarred by exploitation and oppression. Driven, first and foremost, by an unprecedented mobilization of class injuries, the revolution also offered deliverance from the injustices of gendered and racialized domination. The Bolshevik promise of a world free of racism resonated far and wide, reaching a multi-ethnic global audience, and is captured powerfully in the writings of the Jamaican American writer Claude McKay. McKay's interest in Bolshevism stemmed specifically from its opposition to antisemitism. Writing in September 1919, he proclaimed:

> Every Negro … should make a study of Bolshevism and explain its meaning to the coloured masses. It is the greatest and most scientific idea afloat in the world today … Bolshevism has made Russia safe for the Jew. It has liberated the Slav peasant from priest and bureaucrat who can no longer egg him on to murder Jews to bolster up their rotten institutions. It might make these United States safe for the Negro … If the Russian idea should take hold of the white masses of the western world … then the black toilers would automatically be free![1]

Yet the anti-racist promise ran counter to the actuality of Civil War. In the very moment of revolution, the Bolsheviks came face-to-face with mass outbreaks of antisemitic pogroms which spread across the vast regions of the former Pale of Settlement's western and south-western borderlands. Above all, the violence was carried out by forces hostile to the revolution. But the pogroms posed fundamental questions of the Bolshevik project, and revealed the nature and extent of working class and peasant attachments to antisemitism. To the dismay of Party leaders, sections of the Bolsheviks' social base participated in the violence.

[1] W. James, *Holding Aloft the Banner of Ethiopia: Caribbean Radicalism in America 1900-32* (London: Verso, 1999), 165–66.

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Beginning in the early weeks of 1918, the pogroms continued throughout the Civil War years, reaching a devastating peak in 1919 but lasting well into the 1920s. This was the most violent assault on Jewish life in pre-Holocaust modern history: conservative estimates put the number of fatalities at roughly 50,000–60,000, but the true figure likely reached 100,000 or more.[2] At the time, some Soviet officials speculated that as many as 200,000 may have perished.[3] What is certain is that at least 2,000 pogroms took place during the revolutionary period. Amidst the carnage, hundreds of thousands of Jews fled westward, over half a million were displaced and many more were left injured and bereaved.[4] The Russian Revolution, a moment of emancipation and liberation, was for many Jews accompanied by racialized violence on an unprecedented scale.

Antisemitism and the Russian Revolution has two fundamental aims. First, it examines the complex and at times explosive overlap between antisemitism and revolutionary politics. Second, it explores Bolshevik attempts to confront antisemitism, including within the revolutionary movement itself. Such a project inevitably engages a number of debates across a range of disciplines. First and foremost, this book is in dialogue with a large literature on the pogroms,[5] a recent (and growing) interest in

[2] In 1922, the Commissariat of Nationalities within the Soviet government calculated that approximately 100,000 had perished. Others reached for the higher figure of 120,000. See, for example, E. Heifets, *The Slaughter of the Jews in the Ukraine in 1919* (New York: Thomas Seltzer, 1921), 180.

[3] Iu. Larin, *Evrei i antisemitizm v SSSR* (Moscow: Gosizdat, 1929).

[4] J. Veidlinger, *In the Shadow of the Shtetl: Small-Town Jewish Life in Soviet Ukraine* (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 2013), 37.

[5] Key works on the pogroms include: N. I. Shtif, *Pogromy na Ukraine (Period dobrovol'cheskoi armii)* (Berlin: Wostok, 1922); E. Tcherikower, *Istoriia pogromnogo dvizheniia na Ukraine 1917–1921* (Berlin: Osjudisches Historisches Archiv, 1923); I. B. Shechtman, *Pogromy dobrovol'cheskoi armii na Ukraine (K istorii antisemitizma na Ukraine v 1919–1920 gg.)* (Berlin: Ostjudisches Historisches Archiv, 1932); N. Gergel, 'The Pogroms in the Ukraine in 1918–1921', *YIVO Annual of Jewish Social Science* 6 (1951): 237–51; E. Tcherikower, *Di Ukrainer Pogromen in Yor 1919* (New York: YIVO Institute for Jewish Research, 1965); P. Kenez, 'Pogroms and White Ideology in the Russian Civil War', in *Pogroms: Anti-Jewish Violence in Modern Russian History*, ed. J. D. Klier and S. Lambroza (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 293–313; O. V. Budnitskii, 'Jews, Pogroms, and the White Movement: A Historiographical Critique', *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 2, no. 4 (2001): 1–23; O. V. Budnitskii, *Rossiiskie evrei mezhdu krasnymi i belymi, 1917–1920* (Moscow: ROSSPEN, 2005); L. B. Miliakova, *Kniga pogromov: Pogromy na Ukraine, v Belorussii i evropeiskoi chasti Rossii v period grazhdanskoi voiny 1918–1922 gg. Sbornik dokumentov.* (Moscow: ROSSPEN, 2008); J. Dekel-Chen et al., eds., *Anti-Jewish Violence: Rethinking the Pogrom in East European History* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2011); V. P. Buldakov, *Khaos i etnos: Etnicheskie konflikty v Rossii, 1917–1918 gg. Usloviia vozniknoveniia, khronika, kommentarii, analiz* (Moskva: Novyi khronograf, 2010); L. Engelstein *Russia In Flames: War, Revolution, Civil War, 1914–1921* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 511–40.

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the Soviet–Jewish encounter in the early years after 1917[6] and a now extensive literature on the 'national question' in Soviet Russia more generally.[7] Yet the story presented here stretches beyond the historiography on the Russian Revolution. The Bolshevik response to antisemitism had reverberations around the world, and found particular resonance among a layer of African American radicals engaged in the confrontation with white supremacy and anti-black racism.[8] *Antisemitism and the Russian Revolution* maintains this connection between racism and antisemitism, and in doing so, addresses recent debates within the Marxist left around race, class and anti-racist mobilization.[9] Further, in exploring how a revolutionary movement addressed the question of

[6] Recent key works on social, economic and cultural aspects of Jewish life in early Soviet society include: E. Bemporad, *Becoming Soviet Jews: The Bolshevik Experiment in Minsk* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2013); J. Dekel-Chen, *Farming the Red Land: Jewish Agricultural Colonization and Local Soviet Power, 1924-1941* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005); G. Estraikh, *In Harness: Yiddish Writers' Romance with Communism* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2005); K. Moss, *Jewish Renaissance in the Russian Revolution* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009); D. Shneer, *Yiddish and the Creation of Soviet Jewish Culture: 1918-1930* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004); E. Sicher, *Jews in Russian Literature after the October Revolution: Writers and Artists between Hope and Apostasy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006); A. Shternshis, *Soviet and Kosher: Jewish Popular Culture in the Soviet Union, 1923-1939* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006); Andrew Sloin, *The Jewish Revolution in Belorussia: Economy, Race, and Bolshevik Power* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2017); J. Veidlinger, *The Moscow State Yiddish Theater: Jewish Culture on the Soviet Stage* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006); Veidlinger, *In the Shadow of the Shtetl*; R. Weinberg, *Stalin's Forgotten Zion: Birobidzhan and the Making of a Soviet Jewish Homeland: An Illustrated History, 1928-1996* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998).

[7] The literature on this subject is vast. Key works include: F. Hirsch, *Empire of Nations: Ethnographic Knowledge and the Making of the Soviet Union* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005); T. D. Martin, *The Affirmative Action Empire: Nations and Nationalism in the Soviet Union, 1923–1939* (New York: Cornell University Press, 2001); R. G. Suny and T. D. Martin, eds., *A State of Nations: Empire and Nation-Making in the Age of Lenin and Stalin* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).

[8] See C. Bergin, *'Bitter with the Past but Sweet with the Dream': Communism in the African American Imaginary* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2016); C. Bergin, ed., *African American Anti-Colonial Thought, 1917-1937* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2016); James, *Holding Aloft the Banner of Ethiopia*; P. Heideman, ed., *Class Struggle and the Color Line: American Socialism and the Race Question, 1900-1930* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2018). On the continuing reverberations of Bolshevism in later decades among African American radicals, see M. Stevens, *Red International and Black Caribbean: Communists in New York City, Mexico and the West Indies, 1919-1939* (New York: Pluto Press, 2017). On the influence of Bolshevism on the thought of C. L. R. James, see C. L. R. James, *World Revolution, 1917-1936: The Rise and Fall of the Communist International – The C. L. R. James Archives*, ed. Christian Høgsbjerg (Durham: Duke University Press, 2017).

[9] For recent contributions to this long-standing debate, see S. Virdee, *Racism, Class and the Racialized Outsider* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014); D. Roediger, *Class, Race and Marxism* (London: Verso, 2017).

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anti-Jewish violence, the book sits within resurgent debates around the historical and contemporary significance of antisemitism and the left.[10]

'Red Antisemitism' in the Russian Revolution

The presence of antisemitism on the left in the Russian Revolution has long been known but, until recently, seldom examined in any depth. Foundational works by Elias Tcherikower, published in the early 1920s and mid-1960s, established that antisemitism traversed the political divide in revolutionary Russia.[11] No political formation, insisted Tcherikower, remained out of its reach, including the Bolsheviks. This was brought to a wider audience still by the journalist and playwright Isaac Babel, whose literary account of antisemitism within the Red Army led him to pose the haunting question: 'Which is the Revolution and which the counter-revolution?'[12] Yet, as the literature on the Civil War–era pogroms emerged, the focus remained largely on the culpability of anti-Bolshevik military units. And for good reason. In his classic study, Nahum Gergel calculated that the bulk of the atrocities had been carried out by the Petliura and Denikin armies (40 per cent and 17.2 per cent respectively). In contrast, the Red Army was responsible for 8.6 per cent of the Civil War pogroms, thereby making it among the least prone to anti-Jewish violence of all main military forces in the Russian Revolution.[13] Nevertheless, for decades there were no serious examinations of the nature and extent of anti-Jewish violence enacted by the Red Army. This changed with the publication of important new works by Russian historians Oleg Budnitskii and Vladimir Buldakov, which have done

[10] See J. Jacobs, *On Socialists and 'The Jewish Question' after Marx* (New York: New York University Press, 1992); E. Traverso, *The Jewish Question: The History of a Marxist Debate* (Leiden: Brill, 2018); J. Jacobs, ed., *Jews and Leftist Politics: Judaism, Israel, Antisemitism, and Gender* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2017); L. Fischer, *The Socialist Response to Antisemitism in Imperial Germany* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010); M. Kessler, *On Anti-Semitism and Socialism: Selected Essays* (Berlin: Trafo, 2005); R. Fine and P. Spencer, *Antisemitism and the Left: On the Return of the Jewish Question* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2017); D. Hirsh, *Contemporary Left Antisemitism* (London: Routledge, 2017); B. McGeever and S. Virdee, 'Antisemitism and Socialist Strategy in Europe, 1880–1917: An Introduction', *Patterns of Prejudice* 51, no. 3–4 (2017): 221–34.

[11] See Tcherikower, *Istoriia pogromnogo dvizheniia na Ukraine 1917-1921*; Tcherikower, *Di Ukrainer Pogromen in Yor 1919*. On Tcherikower and the gathering of his pogrom archive, see J. M. Karlip, 'Between Martyrology and Historiography: Elias Tcherikower and the Making of a Pogrom Historian', *East European Jewish Affairs* 38, no. 3 (2008): 257–80; J. M. Karlip, *The Tragedy of a Generation: The Rise and Fall of Jewish Nationalism in Eastern Europe* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013), 40–45.

[12] I. Babel, *Red Cavalry* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2003), 65.

[13] Gergel, 'The Pogroms in the Ukraine in 1918-1921', 248.

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much to deepen our understanding of the significance of antisemitism within the Red Army during this period.[14]

Antisemitism and the Russian Revolution builds on these recent studies by offering an analysis of the articulation between antisemitism and the revolutionary process. Although marginal to the overall picture of anti-Jewish violence during the Civil War, the Red Army pogroms are placed centre stage here because of the fundamental questions they posed of the Soviet government and its commitment to internationalism and anti-racism. By moving beyond neat, categorical distinctions between 'antisemites' and 'non-antisemites', 'revolutionaries' and 'counter-revolutionaries', the book uncovers the complex ways in which antisemitism could find traction within revolutionary politics. It does so, above all, by offering the most extensive discussion yet of the role of antisemitism and pogromist violence within the Red Army.

Antisemitism was present within both the counter-revolutionary *and* revolutionary movements. It was located to a significant degree in the former, but it could be found in the latter too. Early warnings of this were apparent in the rise of antisemitism during Russia's year of revolution in 1917, when episodic reports of antisemitic agitation within the working class and socialist movement began to appear. This only came into full view, however, in the pogrom wave of the spring of 1918 – the first to follow the October Revolution. These pogroms, discussed in depth in Chapter 2, were principally carried out by loosely assembled ranks of the Red Army stationed in the borderlands of western Russia and eastern Ukraine. In the shocking case of Hlukhiv, Soviet power was constituted *through* anti-Jewish violence. These events revealed the nature and extent of antisemitism within sections of the working class and peasantry. The first test of the Bolshevik leadership's position on antisemitism, then, would be to confront pogromist violence perpetrated by its own cadres.

These dynamics reached their most violent and bloody crescendo in the pogrom wave of 1919, which extended across whole sections of the western and south-western borderlands, including into several regions of the Russian 'interior' as well. The situation was particularly acute in Ukraine, where to secure the revolution in mid-1919, the Bolsheviks were forced, however reluctantly, to rely on a social base, sections of

[14] Budnitskii, *Rossiiskie evrei mezhdu krasnymi i belymi*; Buldakov, *Khaos i etnos*; V. P. Buldakov, 'Freedom, Shortages, Violence: The Origins of the "Revolutionary Anti-Jewish Pogrom" in Russia, 1917-1918', in *Anti-Jewish Violence: Rethinking the Pogrom in East European History*, ed. J. Dekel-Chen et al. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2011), 74–94.

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which were deeply shaped by the politics of antisemitism. In its frontstage propaganda, the Soviet government framed antisemitism as the preserve of the 'counter-revolution'. Yet internal Party and government archival documents show that the actuality of revolution was considerably more complex. In the spring and summer of 1919 in Ukraine, many in the Red Army saw no contradiction between fighting for 'soviet power' (in its populist sense) and attacking what they called 'Jewish exploiters'.

Popular anti-bourgeois sentiment, on the one hand a crucial reservoir of revolutionary socialism, was at the same time a resource of antisemitic mobilization. On the ground, the categories of class struggle were sometimes deployed in ways over which the Bolsheviks often had no control. While antisemitism was primarily located on the political right, there were elements of antisemitic thinking that had a particular appeal to sections of the left. As the late Moishe Postone has perceptively noted, in moments of crisis antisemitism 'can appear to be anti-hegemonic'. Its danger for socialists and anti-capitalists lies in its unique configuration 'as a fetishized form of oppositional consciousness, [as] the expression of a movement of the little people against an intangible, global form of domination'.[15] In 1919, Bolshevism proved to be vulnerable to this very tendency as the Party's ranks swelled and its radical message was taken up in the field of mass politics.

The Bolshevik Response to Antisemitism

Antisemitism and the Russian Revolution also sets out to offer the first in-depth analysis of Party attempts to confront antisemitism. It is well known that the Bolshevik leadership opposed antisemitism and viewed the pogroms as a threat to the survival of both Jews and the revolution. However, detailed studies of the actual response of the Soviet government during the revolutionary period have been thin on the ground. Pioneering work by Oleg Budnitskii has gone some way to addressing this deficit, but there remains no book-length study in any language of the Bolshevik confrontation with antisemitism during the Russian Revolution.[16] *Antisemitism and the Russian Revolution* provides such an analysis. Studies of Bolshevik opposition to antisemitism after October 1917 generally set off from the famous Sovnarkom decree of July 1918,

[15] Moishe Postone, 'History and Helplessness: Mass Mobilization and Contemporary Forms of Anticapitalism', *Public Culture* 18, no. 1 (2006): 99.
[16] Budnitskii, *Rossiiskie evrei mezhdu krasnymi i belymi*, 124–34; O. V. Budnitskii, *Russian Jews between the Reds and the Whites, 1917-1920* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012), 95–104.

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signed by Lenin.[17] However, as argued in Chapter 3, this decree marked not the beginning, but the *culmination* of the first phase of the Soviet response to antisemitism. Between April and July 1918 lies a period of profound political activity in opposition to antisemitism, which until now has mostly escaped the attention of scholars.[18] As soon as the Red Army pogroms in Hlukhiv and other regions became known, a group of loosely connected non-Bolshevik Jewish socialists in the Moscow Jewish Commissariat initiated a Soviet campaign. Their crowning achievement was to successfully establish, in May 1918, the first Soviet state institution dedicated to the confrontation with antisemitism. Perhaps most important of all, these activists were the first, indeed only, group within the central institutions of the Soviet government in 1918 to raise awareness of antisemitism within the Red Army. Their campaign predates Lenin's Sovnarkom decree by three months.

However, these initiatives were to be short-lived. In mid-May 1918, the Jewish Commissariat in Moscow was dissolved at the peak of its practice, having been swept up in the wider drive towards centralization within the Soviet state. Its disbanding had immediate consequences: with neither the personnel nor institutional means available for its continuation, the Soviet campaign against antisemitism of April and May 1918 ground to a halt. When the most ferocious wave of pogroms yet broke out in Ukraine in early 1919, the Soviet government was caught unprepared. A campaign did re-emerge in the first half of 1919 in Ukraine, but it was largely reactive and sporadic.

This situation was transformed in the second half of 1919 by the incorporation into the Soviet government of a new layer of non-Bolshevik Jewish revolutionaries, in this case communist Bundists and Fareynikte activists. Having broken from their respective parties, they joined the Soviet government and constituted a renewed confrontation with antisemitism. As Chapter 6 shows, they brought with them an opposition to antisemitism born not of tactical or strategic concerns, but of an urgency and ethical imperative rooted in the experience of antisemitic violence.

[17] G. V. Kostyrchenko, *Tainaia politika Stalina: Vlast' i antisemitizm* (Moscow: Mezhdunarodnye otnosheniia, 2003), 56; G. Ia. Aronson, 'Evreiskaia obshchestvennost' v Rossii v 1917-1918 g.g.', in *Kniga o russkom evreistve 1917-1967*, ed. Ia. G. Frumkin, G. Ia. Aronson, and A. A. Gol'denveizer (New York: Soiuz Russkikh Evreev, 1968), 132; S. M. Schwarz, *The Jews in the Soviet Union* (New York: Syracuse University Press, 1951), 274.

[18] The exception is Ulrich Herbeck, whose wide-ranging analysis of the 'Jewish question' in revolutionary Russia does include a discussion of the Bolshevik response to antisemitism in the spring of 1918. See U. Herbeck, *Das Feindbild vom 'jüdischen Bolschewiken'. Zur Geschichte des russischen Antisemitismus vor und während der Russischen Revolution* (Berlin: Metropol, 2009).

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Just as in 1918, the flow of agency moved from the (non- or recently turned Bolshevik) Jewish left to the Party centre. Coalescing around the Central Bureau of the Evsektsiia (the Jewish Sections of the Russian Communist Party), they established in August 1919 a new state institution dedicated to the confrontation with antisemitism (the 'Committee for the Struggle against Antisemitism'). This unique initiative singled out antisemitism as a separate and dedicated sphere of Party work. Like its predecessor in 1918, the Committee's strategy was an educative one: to instil in the working class, Red Army and peasantry a cultural and political opposition to antisemitism. Yet again, however, just a matter of weeks into its work, it too was closed down by the Party centre. With its closure fell away the most promising strand of opposition to antisemitism to emerge in the Russian Revolution.

This underlines a core argument of the book: there *was* a Soviet response to antisemitism, but it was not Bolshevik in origin. Bolshevism certainly adopted a standpoint of opposition to antisemitism that stretched back to the late-imperial period. But when it came to actualizing – that is, putting into practice – such sentiments after October 1917 and through the Civil War, the process relied to a significant extent on the agency of a small grouping of non-Bolshevik Jewish radicals within the Jewish Commissariats and Evsektsii (Jewish Sections of the Communist Party).

From Standpoint to Actuality

Soviet opposition to antisemitism is widely understood to have flowed from the internationalist and assimilatory currents of Bolshevism, that is, from the Party leadership, for whom attachments to ethnicity were weak, even non-existent. Yet once disaggregated to the level of agency, we discover that the Soviet confrontation with antisemitism had rather different origins. As this study makes clear, it was profoundly overdetermined by the inclusion into the state apparatus of a group of loosely connected Jewish radicals, whose politics were as 'particular' as they were universal. Whether Marxist-Zionist or territorialist, Bundist or Bolshevik, these revolutionaries were engaged in the elaboration of a broadly defined Jewish national-cultural project. They were, in other words, part of what Ken Moss identifies as the 'Jewish renaissance' in the Russian Revolution.[19] Their route to Bolshevism was neatly captured

[19] Moss, *Jewish Renaissance in the Russian Revolution*. Moss locates the period of the Jewish renaissance as occurring between the interregnum of the February Revolution and the Bolshevik seizure of power (which occurred in late 1917 in Russia and late 1919 in Ukraine). Bolshevism was ultimately a damaging force for Moss; it interrupted and

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by Evsektsiia leader Avrom Merezhin in 1921: 'The Jewish question was the door through which they came to us.'[20]

Such dynamics were far from unique to the Russian Revolution. As the historical sociologist Satnam Virdee has shown, the anti-racist impulse of European socialism in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries often had to be introduced from the outside by those 'internal others' against whom the nation was (and is) so often defined. Virdee conceptualizes this social layer as 'racialized outsiders'. Drawing on W. E. B. Du Bois,[21] he suggests that the experience of racialization and outsiderdom endowed this minority current of socialists with a 'second sight'; a 'vista' that opened up a certain perspective on society as seen from its margins. This enabled them to see 'further' than other parts of the working class and socialist movement, and to bring into view, for the benefit of the wider movement as well as for themselves, a clear-sighted critique of race and domination.[22]

Antisemitism and the Russian Revolution brings these theoretical insights to bear on its analysis of the Russian Revolution. It argues that those Jewish radicals who entered the Soviet government in 1918 and 1919 brought with them a particular approach to the question of antisemitism, accrued from their positionality within a Russian social formation defined by recurring waves of anti-Jewish violence. The story of how the world's first successful Marxist revolution dealt with antisemitism, then, is intimately bound up with the development of Jewish cultural and national projects involving diasporic Jewish socialists and Marxist Zionists, who temporarily displaced their aspirations for a Zionist homeland in order to instead contribute to the profound cultural and political revolution in Jewish social life in Soviet Russia. As Chapter 6 argues, the closer one stood politically to a Jewish socialist-national project in the Russian Revolutionary context, the more likely one was to elevate and take seriously the question of antisemitism in one's own political

closed down the process of Jewish cultural revival ushered in by the February Revolution. The analysis presented here, however, points in a slightly different direction: I argue that what Moss refers to as the Jewish renaissance should be extended *into* the early Soviet period. At the level of personnel, but at the level of politics, too, Jewish cultural projects of nation building flowed into Soviet Jewish political work, including, as argued here, into the Soviet confrontation with antisemitism.

[20] Z. Gitelman, *Jewish Nationality and Soviet Politics: The Jewish Sections of the CPSU, 1917-1930* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1972), 222–23.

[21] W. E. B. Du Bois, *Darkwater: Voices from Within the Veil* (London: Verso, 2016).

[22] Virdee, *Racism, Class and the Racialized Outsider*; S. Virdee, 'The Second Sight of Racialized Outsiders in the Imperialist Core', *Third World Quarterly* 38, no. 11 (2017): 2396–410.

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practice. That is to say, proximity to a Jewish socialist-national project seems to have facilitated a more urgent form of anti-racist praxis.

But agency alone did not bring the Soviet response to antisemitism into being. What was remarkable about the Bolshevik project was that it transformed these 'outsiders' into *insiders*. In their youth, Jewish revolutionaries encountered state antisemitism, quotas in education and employment, and blocked mobility paths, all of which were integral to their political radicalization.[23] The revolution of 1917 was Russian Jewry's moment of emancipation. In opening up the state and announcing the total transformation of social relations, the Bolsheviks gave life to a revolution that had been building within Jewish social, cultural and political life over the previous century.[24] As they entered the Soviet state, these revolutionaries established Yiddish schools and journals, worker clubs and state theatres.[25] This was the Soviet-Jewish encounter: a meeting between a layer of radicalized Jewish revolutionaries and a nascent Bolshevik government that afforded unprecedented scope for ethnic minority political mobilization at the level of the state. The Evsektsiia and Jewish Commissariats were living embodiments of this Bolshevik commitment to internationalism and 'affirmative action'.[26] Previous studies have shown how the Jewish revolutionaries who staffed these institutions brought their own cultural, political and ideological agenda into the Soviet state.[27] This work suggests they also brought with them a critically important degree of anti-racist agency. In reframing our understanding of how the world's first Marxist state responded to unprecedented antisemitic violence, *Antisemitism and the Russian Revolution* aims to offer a new contribution to the complex history of the relationship between Marxism and anti-racism.

Historical Setting

By 1917, the Bolsheviks could draw on three decades of experience of socialist confrontation with pogromist violence, for the pogroms of 1917–1921 marked not the first but the third wave of anti-Jewish violence in modern Russian history. The first followed the assassination of tsar Alexander II and took place over a two-year period between 1881 and

[23] L. Riga, *The Bolsheviks and the Russian Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).
[24] Sloin, *The Jewish Revolution in Belorussia*, 11.
[25] Shternshis, *Soviet and Kosher*; Veidlinger, *The Moscow State Yiddish Theater*; Shneer, *Yiddish and the Creation of Soviet Jewish Culture*.
[26] Martin, *The Affirmative Action Empire*.
[27] Shneer, *Yiddish and the Creation of Soviet Jewish Culture*, 29.

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