Paul Hanebrink, *A Specter Haunting Europe: The Myth of Judeo-Bolshevism* (Cambridge, Mass. and London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2018), pp. 368.

by *Joanna Beata Michlic*

Judeo-Communism is one of the most powerful and long-lasting modern scapegoating and victimization myths directed against Jews. The aggressive hate speech of the Jobbik party, which entered the Hungarian parliament in 2010; vulgar posts about Judeo-Communism, allegedly responsible for the decades of suffering and the loss of independence of East European nations under the communist yoke, which circulate widely on mass and social medias in post-communist Baltic states, Hungary, Poland, Romania and Ukraine; and also the writings of professional historians such as Ernst Nolte (1987) and Johannes Rogalla von Bieberstein (2004): these are all good examples of the vast range and proliferation of this myth in the last two decades of the twentieth century and the first two decades of the twenty first century.[1]

From its inception to the present, the myth has showed a remarkable ability for self-transformation and adaptation under different political, social and cultural conditions. Its latest dangerous global manifestation is the accusation against Jews of causing the current Covid-19 pandemic, as reported by the UK Government's independent adviser on anti-Semitism, Lord John Mann and molecular biology expert Dr Lewis Arthurton in a 20-page report, "From antivaxxers to antisemitism: Conspiracy theory in the Covid-19 pandemic."[2] Given the ongoing rise of various anti-Jewish conspiracy theories, Paul Hanebrink's monograph *A Specter Haunting Europe: The Myth of Judeo-Bolshevism* is a timely and urgently needed analysis of this powerful, pan-European, antisemitic stereotype. The book has already been highly praised by historians of the Holocaust, modern Germany

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1 See, for example, Joanna Beata Michlic, "Judeocommunism," in *Encyclopedia of Jewish Cultures*, ed. Dan Diner, vol. 6, (Leipzig: The Simon Dubnow Institute for Jewish History and Culture, 2015), 584-588.
2 Aaron Reich, "Antisemitism rising in anti-vaxxer movement, UK study finds," *Jerusalem Post*, October 22, 2020. Accessed November 3, 2020,
https://www.jpost.com/diaspora/antisemitism/antisemitism-rising-in-anti-vaxxer-movement-uk-study-finds-646575.

and Eastern Europe for its sophisticated explanation of the power and persistence of the myth of Judeo-Communism over more than one century. This is the first study that treats the subject in a comprehensive manner, covering the history of the myth in both transnational and national contexts, from the beginning of the twentieth century up to the first decade of the third millennium. For that reason, the book should definitely be made an essential reading in upper undergraduate and graduate university courses not only in history, but also in sociology, journalism and media communication. In our current world, increasingly driven by dangerous post-truths and alternative knowledge, the book can also be viewed, on a more general level, as a timely warning and reminder of how easily false ideas become powerful social beliefs and tools for evaluating reality, directly linked to violence against national, ethnic, religious and cultural minorities.

A Specter Haunting Europe is an elegant looking monograph, consisting of an introduction, seven chapters and an epilogue. In the first chapter, Hanebrink discusses the origins of the myth among various political and cultural elites in European societies during the first decade of the twentieth century. He convincingly argues that the idea of Judeo-Communism was rooted in the "three venerable pillars of anti-Jewish thought" (p. 28). According to Hanebrink, the first pillar was the long-term, persistent association of Jews and Judaism with heresy and social disharmony that can be traced to the Medieval period. The second pillar was the widespread belief in an international Jewish conspiracy. Its most notorious example, the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion,* a Russian forgery, was first published in Russia in 1903, and accused Jews of seeking, through devious means, total rule over Christian societies. By 1920s, the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion* was translated into 16 languages and circulated worldwide in the press, including a British newspaper, the *Morning Post,* and the *Dearborn Independent* of American tycoon Henry Ford. The third pillar was anti-Semitic belief in Jewish religious fanaticism, with its most dangerous accusation of blood libel. Yet, in tracing the roots of the myth of Judeo-Bolshevism, Hanebrink does not seem to pay enough attention to another set of crucial anti-Jewish beliefs portraying Jews as an alien, "Asiatic folk" incompatible with the fabric of national communities of Europe. These ideas had already developed in Central and Eastern Europe as the flip side of romantic nationalism by the middle of the nineteenth century. In

Germany, they, can be traced, in a nascent form, to the writings of Johann Gottlied Fichte and Karl Marx, himself a baptized Jew, and in Poland, to two conservative writers, Julian Ursyn Niemcewicz and Zygmunt Krasiński.

This latter set of beliefs contributed to the development of and interacted in a powerful way with the myth of Judeo-Communism and had devasting repercussions on the scope and scale of anti-Jewish violence in twentieth century Poland. Here I can give a lesser-known example: in 1858, Niemcewicz published the pamphlet *Rok 3333 czyli Sen niesłychany* (The Year 3333 or an Incredible Dream), which he had written three decades before. In the pamphlet there is a vision of a future Warsaw that becomes a Jewish city and is renamed *Moszkopolis*.[3] To the readers at the time of publication, this pamphlet was a humorous story, but by the late nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth the work was frequently circulated and quoted as a warning, foreseeing the tragic future of Poland's transformation into Judeo-Polonia. In the anonymous edition of 1913, the pamphlet's introduction described it as a warning against the "dangerous alien who slowly digs a grave for Poles." In 1932, the Polish-acculturated Jewish writer Roman Brandstaetter called it "the most malicious pamphlet about Jewry written in Polish literature."[4] The intertwined beliefs in Judeo-Polonia and Judeo-Communism would become part of the same powerful anti-Semitic trope propagated by anti-Communist discourse, which would intensify among right-wing nationalistic circles in the 1930s. Characteristically, in this discourse Communism was defined as an ideology and a movement that stood in total opposition to Polish nationalism and Polish statehood. The actual fact that the communists in inter-war Poland supported a non-national agenda intensified the classification of Communism as a primarily anti-Polish movement and ideology, advocating an anti-Polish ethos. In 1936, a special committee, the so-called Komitet Prasy Młodych (Youth Press Committee), was set up in order to fight Communism and at the same time promote the ideology of Polish nationalism,

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[3] *Moszkopolis* is made up of two words: *Moszko/Moshko*, a diminutive of the name Moses, and *polis*, which means city in Greek

[4] Roman Brandstaetter, "Moszkopolis," *Miesięcznik Żydowski* (Jewish Monthly), 1932. Cited in Maria Janion, *Do Europy, Tak, ale razem z naszymi umarłymi* (Warsaw: Wydawnictwo Sic!, 2001), 123.

which was defined in opposition to Communism. In the late 1930s, some key politicians, representing the government, endorsed this definition. This interpretation of communism inevitably led to the reinforcement of the stereotype of the pro-Soviet, pro-Communist and anti-Polish Jew on the eve of the Second World War.

In Chapter two, Hanebrink paints a compelling, detailed and disturbing picture of how Judeo-Communism reached its zenith in terms of its political, social and cultural scope and impact in the aftermath of the First World War and during the short interwar period of 1918 to1939, when Europe was engulfed in real and imagined fears of the first newly established communist entity, Soviet Russia (1917), and the swift rise of communist movements and political parties in European nation-states. The author uses an impressive range of examples to illustrate how lay people, conservative and nationalist politicians, journalists and writers of both secular and religious ideological orientation, and Christian clergy began to use constantly terms such as Judeo-Bolshevism, Judeo-Masonry and "Red Jews" to describe what they perceived as the chief enemy of Christian European civilization and its nation-states and respective national interests. Hanebrink masterly shows the links between the spread of Judeo-Communism and anti-Jewish violence in different parts of Eastern Europe since the final part of the First World War - the war that was supposed to end all wars. He rightly asserts that in that region, "the idea of Judeo-Bolshevism was inseparable from violence against Jews" (p. 45) and was used as an argument to rationalize anti-Jewish violence as a legitimate act of national self-defense, in spite of international condemnation of such violence as a violation of humanitarian norms since the end of the First World War.

In Chapter three, that opens with the powerful statement "Judeo-Bolshevism made Adolf Hitler" (p. 83), Hanebrink shows how the myth of Judeo-Communism was employed by German Fascism from the birth of this deadly racist ideology, first as a tool to consolidate power within Germany, and secondly as a tool to launch a genocidal international war to fulfill the Nazi colonization project. One of the most important aspects of Hanebrink's discussion of the role of Nazi Germany on the international stage in interwar Europe is the powerful

description of how ethno-nationalist conservative political elites in countries such as Hungary and Romania welcomed, without hesitation, Hitler's racist vision of the world and his leadership of an international anti-Communist front after 1933. However, in contrast to the well-illustrated discussion of the dilemmas among French and Spanish nationalists, Hanebrink does not seem to pay enough attention to the contradictions among the ethno-nationalist conservative elites in interwar Poland, including the leaders of the Catholic Church. It is true, as Hanebrink states, that "Polish nationalists had little enthusiasm for a German-led international crusade against Judeo-Bolshevism" (p. 112) and yet, when it came to defining Polish Jews as the key internal national enemy, their conceptualization resembled the Nazi German categorization of German Jews as the national enemy, though they insisted that:

> We are not racists [...] Our main goal is to serve the nation. There is no conflict between our nationalism and Catholicism. We define the Jews as the enemy of our nation and as a foreign element, which has caused the degeneration of European culture and civilization [...] The battle of the Polish nation with the Jews does not stand in conflict with the Roman Catholic Church, but in fact serves its interest.[5]

In Chapter four, Hanebrink poignantly demonstrates how the idea of Judeo-Communism was crucial to the Nazi German conception and implementation of the Final Solution against European Jews. He also takes the reader on a tour of how the myth of Judeo-Bolshevism continued to be a powerful tool of perception of reality not only in Nazi Germany, but also among the East European nations that politically collaborated with Nazi Germany during the war, such as the Baltic states, Hungary, Romania, and Ukraine. That was the case also in Nazi-German and Soviet-occupied Poland, where, by the time of the German and Soviet invasions of September 1939, the myth of Judeo-Bolshevism was used to make

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[5] "Katolicyzm, rasizm i sprawa zydowska," *Myśl Narodowa* 51 (1935), 1-2. Cited in Joanna Beata Michlic, *Poland's Threatening Other: The Image of the Jew from 1880 to the Present* (Lincoln: Nebraska University Press, 2008), 86. *Myśl Narodowa* was the main theoretical newspaper of the National Democrats, the chief ethno-nationalist party and movement in Poland.

sense of a world that was breaking free from the Polish right-wing ethno-nationalists' control and intellectual grasp.

Hanebrink also convincingly demonstrates how the myth of Judeo-Bolshevism continued to be the chief tool of the language of hatred and how the myth was used to initiate, rationalize and justify anti-Jewish violence during the Second World War in Nazi-collaborative East-European states such Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania, Hungary and Ukraine, as well as in German-occupied Poland. The myth of Judeo-Communism, with its deadly implications, intensified in the region during the so-called First Soviet Occupation, from September 1939 to the summer of 1941, for which Jews as a collectivity were blamed, and for which they paid a heavy price. For example, in Nazi-occupied Poland, anti-Jewish violence orchestrated by members of local communities swept north-eastern and south-eastern parts of the country, especially during the interregnum period in the summer of 1941, when the Soviet army had fled and the Germans had not yet established their rule fully in those areas. Another salient issue to the discussion of the deadly implications of the myth of Judeo-Bolshevism, namely its effect on the rescue of Jews during the Holocaust in Eastern Europe. The last two decades of historical investigation have shown that the myth was one of the main factors responsible for the low societal approval of rescue activities of Jews from Nazi persecution in wartime Poland, because helping a Jew was identified in radical underground Polish right-wing anti-Semitic propaganda as helping the key national enemy and, as a result, some non-Jewish Polish rescuers of Jews also paid a heavy price by being beaten up, harassed and killed by local underground radical anti-Communist military units.

In Chapter six, that forms the most original and fascinating part of the book, Hanebrink deals with the important issue of how the myth of Judeo-Communism was transformed in the aftermath of the destruction of Hitler's empire and the emergence of the new, postwar Europe, divided between a Communist dominated East and a liberal democratic West. He masterly shows how in the West the discourse on anti-Communism was totally reshaped in the aftermath of the Holocaust. The myth of Judeo-Communism was completely erased from Western anti-Communist politics, political thought and debates. In the United States,

which became the new Safe Heaven for many Jewish survivors of the Holocaust from German-occupied Europe, the idea of Judeo-Bolshevism was replaced by the idea of a Judeo-Christian civilization that, in turn, became a pillar of postwar anti-Communist thought. In the new Cold War climate, the United States transformed itself into a central player in a new struggle against the Soviet power. There was simply no room, in the American reshaped vision of anti-Communism, for the myth of Judeo-Bolshevism. The ideas of freedom, truth, the West and its Judeo-Christian civilization, as conceived in the postwar American political discourse, became central aspects of anti-Communist Cold War thought and politics not only in the USA, but also in liberal western Europe. In postwar Germany and Austria, the process of reshaping the key tenets of anti-Communist ideology and discourse took place gradually, helped also by the fact that many Christian thinkers had been persecuted by Nazi Germany. Postwar anti-totalitarian discourse allowed Western Germans and Austrians to re-imagine the concept of a Christian Europe and to enter a dialogue with American Cold War anti-Communist thought. However, in the Soviet zone of influence in Eastern Europe, the myth of Judeo-Communism did not, and perhaps could not, undergo the same transformation because of the political situation in the region. The brutality of the Soviet occupations and the visibility of a small minority of Jews among Jewish Holocaust survivors in the new communist governments definitely contributed to the persistence of the myth of Judeo-Communism as a powerful social truth. The communist regimes, soiled with widespread anti-Semitism within their own rank and file, were not interested in the effective and total removal of the myth of Judeo-Communism from the official communist thought. They were also powerless in eliminating it from the underground anticommunist social memories within their respective nations.

Hanebrink rightly notes the continuity of the myth of Judeo-Communism between the communist and post-communist periods in the Soviet zone of influence, but he does not seem to pay enough attention to the key narratives about Jews that circulated during the Sovietization period in the aftermath of the Second World War among the underground anti-Communist political camps in the region. Narratives that would resurface with a vengeance after 1989.

For example, looking closely at early postwar Poland behind the Iron Curtain, there is no doubt that the idea of Judeo-Communism outlived the devastating Second World War period. During the political struggle over the future of the Polish state, from 1945 to 1949, the main fighting anti-Communist organizations categorized the communist take-over ì as Communism with a Semitic face, namely Judeo-Communism. The only novel aspect of Judeo-Communism at that time was the claim of the actual realization of Judeo-Polonia, which the Polish nationalist press had feared so much since the late nineteenth century. In the eyes of the illegal political opposition, this goal was achieved by the remnants of the Jewish community who had survived the Holocaust, and who were hardly distinguishable from non-Jewish Poles. At the same time, in the illegal anti-communist press, communist non-Jewish Poles were sometimes portrayed as being totally controlled by the Communist Jews.[6]

Interestingly, during the 1960s the myth of Judeo-Communism also underwent a major transformation in the discourse among the Polish Communist elites ruling the country. It was reversed to the theme of Judeo-anti-Communism, the claim that it was the Jews who prevented the successful political and economic development of communist Poland, and not the non-Jewish Polish comrades. This cleverly modified myth was used to justify the official state-sponsored anti-Jewish/anti-Zionist purge of 1968. The theme of the anti-communist Jew as the polluter of the communist PZPR (*Polish United Workers' Party*) was invariably intertwined with the basic ethno-nationalist theme of the Jew as the polluter of the Polish state and the Polish nation. The message conveyed in these two intertwined themes was that if it were not for the Jewish comrades, Polish communism could have developed in agreement with Polish national traditions since 1944, and would thus have become a popular people's ideology. Were it not for the Jewish Communists in the Polish communist movement, the Polish Peoples Republic would have become a prosperous country, without any economic, social and political troubles. This explanation of all the ills that troubled socialist Poland since its foundation in 1945 resembled the National Democracy movement's explanation of all Polish social, economic and political ills

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[6] Michlic, *Poland's Threatening Other*, 200-201.

during the interwar period. The use of such arguments by the communist regime in the 1960s was the Party's attempt to present itself as the people's party, and to become more popular within an ethnically homogeneous society. These arguments drew on the stock of popular ethno-national sentiments that were shared by the majority of the non-Jewish Polish rank and file of the PZPR and its leadership.[7]

In Chapter seven, titled "Between History and Memory", Hanebrink engages with the topical issue of the persistence of the myth of Judeo-Communism in post-communist Eastern Europe, and painstakingly analyses how the myth has become central to the politics of Holocaust memory in the region. This is a central topic not only for the study of the memory of the Holocaust, but also for the current troubling politics of post-communist Europe. As it is now widely recognized, the concept of the memorialization of the Holocaust arrived in Eastern Europe only in the aftermath of what the historian Padraic Kenney calls a "carnival of revolution"[8] in communist Eastern Europe that led to the political and economic transformation of 1989 and 1990.[9] In the climate of ascending liberal democracy in the region during the early 1990s, the Western-born model of the memorialization of the Holocaust as an international and European project for the education of civil society, had been endorsed by the emerging local liberal democratic elites. No doubt, they had also pragmatically recognized that the Holocaust had become the contemporary European entry ticket, as discerningly observed by the late Tony Judt in *Postwar*.[10] However, from the beginning of the implementation of the Western model of memorialization, with its culture of apology to the Jewish victims, the local ethno-nationalist and conservative elites did not only disapprove of it, but, in fact, rejected it outright. Drawing on the theory of twin totalitarianisms, Nazism and Communism, they insisted on the importance of the

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[7] Ibid., 252-253.

[8] Padraic Kenney, *A Carnival of Revolution: Central Europe, 1989* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002).

[9] For a systematic study of the developments of the Western model of memorialization of the Holocaust in post-communist Europe between the 1980s and 2010, see John-Paul Himka and Joanna Beata Michlic, eds., *Bringing the Dark Past to Light in Postcommunist Europe* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2013).

[10] Tony Judt, *Postwar: A History of Europe since 1945* (New York: Penguin, 2005), 803.

memorialization of the Red Holocaust as a greater evil in the twentieth century history of their respective nations. Thus, they rejected the Western conceptualization of the Holocaust as a fundamental event in the European history of the twentieth century.[11] At the same time, they began to feed on Western memorialization practices of the Holocaust for the purpose of acquiring new models and strategies to develop their own version of remembrance of the Red Holocaust and the Second World War. As a result, they have also been engaged in the production of a home-grown ethno-nationalist version of the (anti)-memorialization of the Holocaust filled with new-old anti-Semitic narratives and anti-Jewish tropes.

The myth of Judeo-Communism is one of the central anti-Semitic tropes in the sinister (East)-European ethno-nationalist reworking of these nations' dark past, and their role in the history and memory of the Holocaust. It serves various purposes: it replaces troubling memories of anti-Jewish violence in the summer of 1941 and the early post-Holocaust period. In political debates and historiography of right wing ethno-nationalistic orientation, the theme of Judeo-Communism is used to rationalize, justify and neutralize this violence. Moreover, radical ethno-nationalists use the myth as a tool to forget dark aspects of the Holocaust in the history of their respective nations and, at the same time, to emphasize their own national victimhood and "collective innocence" with regard to the treatment of their respective Jewish, and other, minorities.[12]

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[11] On the Holocaust as a fundamental event in European political cultures, see, for example, Dan Diner, "Restitution and memory: the Holocaust in European political cultures," *New German Critique* 90 (2003): 36-44; Klas-Göran Karlsson, "The Holocaust as a problem of historical culture: theoretical and analytical challenges" in *Echoes of the Holocaust: Historical Cultures in Contemporary Europe*, eds. Klas-Göran Karlsson and Ulf Zander (Lund: Nordic Academic Press, 2003), 18. On the importance of memory as a leading cultural term in history, see Alon Confino, "Remembering the Second World War, 1945-1965: Narratives of Victimhood and Genocide," *Cultural Analysis* 5 (2005): 1-23, with the response by Robert G. Moeller, http://socrates.berkeley.edu/~caforum/volume4/vol4_article3.html, accessed November 20, 2007.

[12] On the problem of whitewashing the Holocaust in post-communist Europe in the post-2015 period, see Jelena Subotić, *Yellow Star, Red Star: Holocaust Remembrance After Communism* (Ithaca NY: Cornell University Press, 2019); Robert Rozett, "Distorting the Holocaust and whitewashing history: toward a typology," *Israel Journal of Foreign Affairs* 13, no. 1 (2019): 23-36; Joanna Beata Michlic, "The Return of the Image of the Jew as Poland's Threatening Other: Polish

In the Epilogue, Hanebrink rightly claims that the "figure of the Jewish Bolshevik continues to flicker around the issue of European identity" (p. 282). However, the myth of Judeo-Bolshevism does not only transpose into totally new debates about European identity, as Hanebrink states, but it also continuously undergoes various modifications in order to demonstrate that the Jew is the central culprit that controls and manipulates the world to the detriment of ordinary, real people, not only in Europe, but also in the global world. In the current growing climate of discontent and instability on both sides of the Atlantic, different strands of anti-Semitism of both left-wing and right-wing origin take geographical and ideological trips. As a result, they merge and mutually feed on each other. For this reason, it would be important to carry on this study and research how the myth of Judeo-Communism currently interacts with other global anti-Semitic tropes in both transnational and national contexts. No doubt, Hanebrink's impressive monograph represents a vital inspiration for such a study.

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national identity and antisemitism in the third decade after the end of communism in 1989," in *Research Handbook on Nationalism*, eds. Liah Greenfeld and Zeying Wu (Oxford: Elgar Edward, 2020), 406-427.