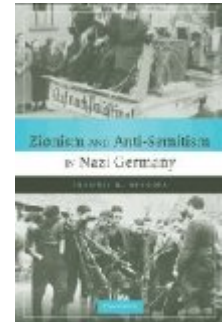


Francis R. Nicosia. *Zionism and Anti-Semitism in Nazi Germany*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008. xiv + 324 pp. \$85.00, cloth, ISBN 978-0-521-88392-4.



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In his latest book, Francis R. Nicosia returns to and explores in greater detail one of the major topics of his important earlier book, *The Third Reich and the Palestine Question* (1985): the complex and sometimes symbiotic relationship between German Zionists and the National Socialists before the Holocaust. Unlike most previous studies of relations between Germans and Jews in the modern era, which have focused on the incompatibility of German ethnic nationalism and the dominant liberalism of most Germans,[1] Nicosia's study addresses a different confrontation: the relationship of *völkisch* German nationalism and antisemitism to Zionism, described in the introduction as "a *völkisch* Jewish nationalist ideology and movement that started from some of the same philosophical premises as German nationalism with regard to nationality, national life, and the proper definition and organization of peoples and states in the modern world" (p. 2). Although Nicosia traces *völkisch* influences on Zionist thought in the nineteenth and early twentieth century and reveals certain assumptions shared

by Nazis and Zionists on how best to resolve Germany's "Jewish question" before the Second World War, he firmly rejects any suggestion of moral or political equivalency between German and Jewish nationalism. While Jewish nationalists wished to found a Jewish state in Palestine to escape from European antisemitism, German nationalists encouraged Jewish emigration to Palestine to rid their country of Jews. Both Zionists and antisemites rejected the liberal Enlightenment ideal of full Jewish assimilation in their host societies as free and equal citizens, but they did so for very different reasons. However, their differing motives and mutual hostility to each other did not prevent Nazis and Zionists from temporarily collaborating to achieve their respective ends.

Most of Nicosia's thoroughly researched book is devoted to examining how German Zionists tried to gain Nazi cooperation in the Zionist project and how the Nazis tried to use the Zionist movement to achieve their primary aim of creating a *judenrein* German Reich in the years before the Holocaust. In the first of his eight chapters,

"The Age of Emancipation," Nicosia traces the convergence of interests that slowly evolved in the nineteenth century between the requirements of Jewish nationalism in Palestine and the imperialist ambitions of the European powers in the Middle East. Ironically, in view of the prevalence of antisemitism in the German Empire, it was to Wilhelmine Germany that early Zionists such as Theodor Herzl looked for support, believing "that antisemites and their governments, perhaps more than most, would prove to be friends of Zionism" (p. 14) for reasons both of geopolitics and antisemitism.[2] Zionists expected antisemites to support their project because of their shared view of Jews as a distinct people who should avow and embrace their separate nationality. Although Wilhelm II refused to give Zionists the diplomatic support they sought for fear of alienating his Ottoman ally, he favored Jewish emigration to and settlement in Palestine, both to give Germany a foothold in the Middle East and to redirect east European Jewish emigration away from Germany and the West. Even such notorious racial antisemites and proto-Nazis as Paul de Lagarde, Constantin Frantz, Theodor Fritzsche, Houston Stuart Chamberlain, Heinrich Class, or Hermann Ahlwardt recognized the utility of Zionism as a means of freeing Germany of Jews. Their fear that a sovereign Jewish state in Palestine might strengthen the imagined "Jewish world conspiracy" was paradoxically mitigated by their simultaneous prejudice that Jews lacked the personal and racial traits required to build and defend a functioning modern state. German Zionists found themselves in a dilemma at the outbreak of the First World War.

The World Zionist executive declared its neutrality in the war, moving its headquarters from Berlin to neutral Copenhagen, and eventually establishing itself in London after the war. Its German branch, however, the Zionistische Vereinigung für Deutschland (ZVfD), like other German-Jewish organizations, declared its full support for the German war effort, framing the war as a

struggle against tsarist Russia, where Jews were openly persecuted. ZVfD leaders even questioned the sincerity of the British Balfour Declaration of November 1917 and successfully induced the German government to make a similar gesture in favor of a Jewish national homeland in Palestine in January 1918. Throughout the Weimar era, as Nicosia details in chapter 2, the German government continued to support Zionism as a means of promoting German economic goals in the Mideast. In keeping with its "ethnocentric definition of nationhood" (p. 54), the ZVfD stayed out of German politics and prohibited its officials from seeking high political office in Germany. It also ruled out cooperation with the venerable Centralverein deutscher Staatsbürger jüdischen Glaubens (CV), founded to combat antisemitism in 1893, for fear of reinforcing the CV's assimilationist tendencies. Kurt Blumenfeld, president of the ZVfD from 1924 to 1931, identified the appeal of Marxism, the "ultimate assimilationist mechanism" (p. 60), as the greatest danger to Jews, and propagated Jewish separateness as a prelude to emigration to Palestine as the only workable form of Jewish self-defense against the hostility they faced in Europe. Yet, Zionism had little appeal to German Jews. In 1933 membership in the Centralverein outnumbered ZVfD membership by more than ten to one. Nonetheless the ZVfD faced continuing attacks from the antisemitic radical Right during the Weimar years, not only as a Jewish organization, but also for supporting the British mandate in Palestine.

Determined to reassert a positive Jewish identity and convinced of the futility of assimilation, German Zionist leaders tended to underestimate the threat of the Nazis coming to power and to overestimate the opportunities that a Nazi government might open up for the Zionist movement. In chapter 3, "Nazi Confusion, Zionist Illusion," Nicosia traces the pragmatic cooperation between Zionists and the Nazi government leading to the Haavara Transfer Agreement of September 1933, which made it possible for German Jews to emi-

grate to Palestine without leaving all their assets behind, while boosting the German economy by promoting exports to Palestine. Approximately fifty-three thousand German Jews were able to use the Haavara system to migrate to Palestine before the termination of this program in December 1939 as a result of the disruption of all commercial and diplomatic relations with Britain after the start of the war. Yet, between 1933 and 1937 German Jews comprised only 20 percent of Jewish immigrants to Palestine and constituted proportionally even less of the total Jewish population of Palestine. Although even such extreme anti-semites as Alfred Rosenberg were quite prepared to exploit the Zionist movement to force Jews out of Germany, their tactical support for Zionism as a means to create an ethnically pure *Volksgemeinschaft* in no way diminished their distrust of Jews as alleged agents of sedition and subversion, nor did it diminish their certitude that Jews were out to dominate the world. Nicosia is particularly successful in fleshing out the complexities and contradictions in "the dual nature of Nazi policies toward Zionism" in the 1930s (p. 73). On the one hand, the Nazi regime exploited Zionism to promote Jewish emigration to Palestine (though not to create a Jewish state); on the other hand, the regime refused to grant Zionist demands for Jewish civil rights as an officially recognized national minority in Germany during the transition. Aware that German economic restrictions on Jews impeded Jewish emigration, Adolf Hitler sought to shift the blame to Britain for restricting Jewish immigration to Palestine and imposing entry fees on Jewish immigrants. It would be much better, he told his audience in the Berlin *Sportpalast* in October 1933, "if instead [the British] would say everyone can enter" (p. 78). For their part, German Zionists operated under the illusion that by endorsing Germany's national rebirth under National Socialism, its principles of ethnic or racial descent, and its consciousness of national uniqueness, they could secure German cooperation in establishing a Jewish nation state. In a formal state-

ment addressed to the Nazi regime in June 1933, the ZVfD "questioned the French Revolution's notion of the individual and a nation of individuals that rejected the idea of a people bound together by blood, history, and a spiritual uniqueness" (p. 92). Right-wing Revisionist Zionists, represented in Germany by the newly formed Staatszionistische Organisation, issued a position paper in 1935 recognizing "the right of the German people to form its own national life that will exclude all undesirable mixing of peoples" and calling for the dissolution of "any Jewish organizations in Germany that oppose such [separatist] measures" (p. 95). German Revisionist Zionists also proved useful to the Nazis in opposing an international boycott of German goods, even defying Vladimir Jabotinsky, the founder of the Revisionist movement, on this particular issue.

In separate chapters on "Zionism in Nazi Jewish Policy," "German Zionism: Confrontation with Reality," "Revisionist Zionism in Germany," and "Zionist Occupational Retraining and Nazi Jewish Policy," Nicosia describes in detail the fitful collaboration even beyond the *Kristallnacht* pogrom between German Zionists, preparing for Jewish renewal in Palestine, and Nazis, eager to expel Jews in preparation for the coming war for German living space in the east. Revisionist Zionists, who supported the Nazi ban on intermarriage, also proved useful to the Nazis in countering foreign criticism of the Nuremberg Laws. Officials of the Interior Ministry, the Economics Ministry, the Foreign Office, as well as of the SD and Gestapo, were instructed to give preferential treatment to Zionist organizations over other Jewish organizations (which did not, however, exempt individual Zionists from the same ill treatment meted out to other Jews). Only the Zionist movement was permitted to function in Austria after its annexation in March 1938, even though, as Nicosia repeatedly emphasizes, for the Nazis "Zionists were nothing more than convenient tools for facilitating the removal of Jews from Germany" (p. 206). Representatives of the Jewish Agency for Palestine were

permitted repeated entry into Germany to work for Jewish emigration even after all Jewish immigration or reentry into Germany was halted in 1938. The regime also supported occupational retraining and Hebrew-language instruction for Jews subject to their commitment to emigrate, despite reservations by ideological hard-liners that agricultural and technological retraining of Jews in Germany would inevitably lead to undesirable social contact between Jews and Aryans. German authorities preferred Palestine as a destination for Jewish emigration for fear of intensifying anti-German feelings in neighboring European countries. The Nazi regime showed no sympathy for Arab nationalism before the start of the war. Indeed, fearing that growing Arab opposition to Jewish immigration would hamper German emigration efforts, the SD issued a report in early 1937, announcing that "any attempt to foster anti-Jewish sentiments among the Arabs in Palestine is strictly prohibited" (p. 135). However, support for Jewish emigration to Palestine did not translate into support for a Jewish state. Indeed, Ernst von Weizsäcker, the leading civil servant in the Foreign Ministry, cautioned against concentrating Jews in Palestine so as not to facilitate the formation of a Jewish state. Instead, he advocated dispersing Jews into small minorities all over the world. Both the Nazis and Revisionist Zionists opposed the Peel Commission's partition plan for Palestine in July 1937—the Nazis, because they opposed a Jewish state; the Revisionists, because they opposed an Arab state. Nonetheless, as the British government showed no interest in implementing the Peel Commission's plan, "obstacles to increased Jewish immigration into Palestine were viewed with greater alarm in Berlin than the spectre of a Jewish state" (p. 132). The purpose of Adolf Eichmann's clandestine visit to Palestine in October 1937 was to explore cooperation with anti-British, anti-Arab, and anti-communist officials of the Haganah (the Jewish militia founded in 1920) in efforts to increase both legal and illegal Jewish immigration from Germany. These con-

tacts bore little fruit, however, as the British, intent on restricting Jewish immigration, barred Eichmann from reentering Palestine.

1938 did mark a turning point in Nazi anti-Jewish policies, not only because the *Anschluss* of Austria (and, a year later, the annexation of Bohemia and Moravia) added urgency to Nazi efforts to force Jews out of the greater Reich, but also because the violence and destructiveness of the *Kristallnacht* pogrom had the paradoxical effect of shifting authority to those Nazi agencies that regarded *Radauantisemitismus* as counterproductive, both for the damage it did to the German economy and for its adverse effects on Germany's image abroad. In the bureaucratic infighting on how best to solve Germany's "Jewish question," the SS favored a more "rational" and "systematic" approach than street violence, but also more punitive measures to force Jews to leave than those enacted by the Interior Ministry. As head of the Four Year Plan, Hermann Göring assigned authority to Reinhard Heydrich to centralize and forcibly expedite the process of Jewish emigration on the model of the Zentralstelle für jüdische Auswanderung, which was headed by Adolf Eichmann in Vienna and eventually in Berlin. All independent Jewish organizations, including both the ZVfD and the Revisionist Zionist organization, were dissolved and brought under Gestapo control as the Reichsvereinigung der Juden in Deutschland in 1939. Forced emigration of German Jews remained official German policy right up to the dissolution of the Jewish Agency's Palestine Office in Berlin in May 1941, as described in Nicosia's final chapter, "From Dissolution to Final Solution." The SD worked with agents of the Mossad le'Aliyah Bet (Committee for Illegal Immigration) to step up the illegal movement of Jews from central Europe past British authorities into Palestine in 1938 and 1939 after the imposition of tighter immigration restrictions in the British mandate. The start of the war created further impediments to Jewish emigration, but as late as 1940 "the SS was still focused on emigration as the

solution to the Jewish question within the borders of the Greater German Reich" (p. 264). In November 1939, Heydrich wrote to the Foreign Ministry, "the opinion is unanimous that, now as before, the emigration of the Jews must continue even during the war, with all of the means at our disposal" (p. 264). So great was the Nazi emphasis on cleansing Germany of its Jews that the German government prohibited emigration of Polish Jews and refused to grant transit visas to Lithuanian Jews in 1940 lest such migrants reduce the number of entry permits available to Jews from the *Alt-reich*. Added to all the other problems that willing German-Jewish émigrés faced was the reluctance of Italy, Yugoslavia, and other neutral countries to issue transit visas for fear that British authorities would return illegal refugees to the countries from which they had set sail.

On the basis of copious research in more than two dozen German, Israeli, British, and North American archives, Nicosia confirms the current historical consensus that the Nazis had no plan for systematic genocide before 1941, although the potential for genocide was always present in Nazi ideology and the party's anti-Jewish policies. Nicosia concludes that before 1941 "the Nazi obsession with removing the Jews from German life was centered primarily on Greater Germany alone ... with a particularly critical role assigned to Zionism and Palestine" (p. 292). His findings certainly confirm the crucial importance of anti-semitism in the origins of the Holocaust, but they also point to war as the key to the radicalization of antisemitic measures to a policy of physical annihilation (as threatened by Hitler as early as his notorious Reichstag speech of January 1939). Nicosia is critical of "the ever-present tendency to judge the past from the present," noting that from a post-Holocaust perspective, "it is easy today to dismiss early Zionist hopes of some form of accommodation with antisemitism as shockingly naive and illusory" (p. 291). *Zionism and Anti-semitism in Nazi Germany* is a scrupulous work of history, not politics, and Nicosia makes no ref-

erences to the present, except to point out the irony that while anti-Zionism or criticism of the state of Israel in Europe or the United States today is often equated with antisemitism (or viewed as motivated by antisemitism), before 1933 anti-semites were more likely to support Zionist aims than to oppose them. Until the Nazi policy of ethnic cleansing left Jews with no alternative to emigration, the most prominent critics of Zionism tended to be Jews who rejected the Zionist claim that Jews had a distinct ethnic or national (as opposed to cultural or religious) identity that made them aliens in the countries in which they lived.

Notes

[1]. The classic study remains Peter Pulzer, *The Rise of Political Antisemitism in Germany and Austria* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988).

[2]. For a suggestive analysis of how Herzl's desire to create a new, manlier Jewish identity was rooted in his own internalization of some of the antisemitic stereotypes so prevalent in his time, see Jacques Kornberg, *Theodor Herzl: From Assimilation to Zionism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993).

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