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The Wartime “Special Relationship”, 1941–45: Isaiah Berlin, Freya Stark and Mandate Palestine

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In 1972, the world renowned Oxford academic Isaiah Berlin (1909–1997) invited “historians to say whether the beliefs and policies of those who followed Weizmann – the men of the centre, amongst whom I count myself – were written in water, built on shifting sands.”¹ In taking up this invitation, this study uses an entirely new research path to establish Berlin’s role in arranging for Freya Stark (1893–1993), the leading British Middle East explorer and best-selling travel writer (attached to the wartime British Ministry of Information in the Middle East), to undertake a speaking tour of the United States in late 1943 and early 1944. At the time, in the run-up to Roosevelt’s 1944 re-election campaign,² increasingly radicalized US Zionists within the key Democratic Jewish constituency mounted sustained attacks on British policy, including the first official demand for an independent Jewish state in the Biltmore Resolution of May 1942 and pleas for the recruitment of a Jewish army in Mandate Palestine, thereby potentially embarrassing the wartime Anglo-American alliance. On arrival, Stark’s outspoken anti-Zionism and support for the controversial, anti-immigration 1939 British White Paper on Mandate Palestine triggered a wave of protests, given that many wartime Jewish refugees from Nazi-occupied Europe vainly sought a refuge willing to accept them.

Adopting a fresh approach leads to a new reconstruction of the story and its repercussions for Berlin and Stark, both during the war and in the decades afterwards. The available evidence suggests that a combination of Berlin’s complicated wartime attitude to pre-state Zionism and his “anxiety to please” his Foreign Office colleagues may be a plausible explanation for an apparent paradox: why did an apparently life-long Zionist³ (albeit of a hesitant,

¹ Isaiah Berlin, “Zionist Politics in Wartime Washington: A Fragment of Personal Reminiscence – The Jacob Herzog Memorial Lecture” (hereafter, ZP), Jerusalem, 1972, in Isaiah Berlin, *Flourishing: Letters 1928–1946* (hereafter, L1), ed. Henry Hardy (London: Chatto & Windus, 2004).

² F. D. Roosevelt (1882–1945), Democratic politician, 32nd US President, 1933–45.

³ See e.g. ZP, 667, “My sympathies had been pro-Zionist since my schooldays. When I read in the memoirs of . . . Maurice Bowra that my pro-Zionist views seemed to him, in the years before the war, the most prominent and characteristic of all my political convictions, this came as no surprise to me.”

Weizmannite variety) such as Berlin admire such a fierce critic of Zionism as Freya Stark? Since the available evidence raises far more questions than it can possibly answer, this study also considers a more speculative, byzantine possibility – that Berlin might have advocated Stark’s US tour, knowing full well how counter-productive it was likely to be, thereby sabotaging the British anti-Zionist efforts from the inside.

Isaiah Berlin was seen by many as one of the leading liberal thinkers of the twentieth century, a transatlantic public intellectual who argued with great eloquence in his collected writings against deterministic ideologies and totalitarian oppression. He maintained ‘three strands’ in his life – British, Russian and Jewish – which became tightly intertwined during his diplomatic service with the British embassies in Washington, DC (1942–45) and Moscow (1945–46).⁴ The first Jew ever to be elected to an All Souls fellowship at Oxford (in 1932), despite all his accolades, Berlin’s sense of himself as an outsider stemmed from his birth in Riga and his emigration to England in 1921. He grew up in a strongly Zionist family: one uncle was Yitzchak Sadeh, a leading Palmach fighter, the subject of a warm essay by Berlin in which he is described as a “Jewish Garibaldi”;⁵ another uncle was Yitzchak Samunov, by 1936 the secretary of the Jerusalem Community Council with access to the Jewish Agency leadership. Berlin’s biographer describes his mother’s Zionism being “bred in the bone.”⁶ Berlin himself first visited Mandate Palestine in 1934, returned many times in subsequent decades and received the Jerusalem Prize in 1979. From the late 1930s he sympathized with Chaim Weizmann’s moderate brand of Zionism but rejected offers to work for Weizmann (1874–1952) after his installation as the first president of Israel in 1949.⁷ While critical of individual Israeli governments, Berlin never ceased to celebrate the creation of Israel in public and in his writings.⁸

By contrast, Freya Stark’s views on Mandate Palestine were shaped by her travels around the wider Middle East from the 1920s onwards, which supplied the material for her successful travel books, of which there were seven by 1945 and more than twenty by the time she died aged 100 in 1993. She had learnt fluent Arabic, studied Persian, Kurdish and Turkish, and gained access

⁴ Berlin worked at British Information Services (BIS) in New York in 1940–42 and then at the British Embassy in Washington, DC, in 1942–45.

⁵ Isaiah Berlin, *Personal Impressions*, ed. Henry Hardy, intro. Noel Annan, 2nd ed. (London: Pimlico Press, 1998), 88.

⁶ Michael Ignatieff, *Isaiah Berlin: A Life* (London: Vintage, 2000), 27.

⁷ Weizmann was a chemist and a Zionist leader, the President of the World Zionist Organization and Jewish Agency for Palestine, 1921–31 and 1935–46.

⁸ See Isaiah Berlin, “The Origins of Israel” and “Jewish Slavery and Emancipation”, in *The Power of Ideas*, ed. Henry Hardy (London: Pimlico Press, 2001), 143–61 and 182 respectively; “The Achievement of Zionism”, lecture at the Institute of Jewish Affairs, London, 1 June 1975, available at the Isaiah Berlin Virtual Library, <http://berlin.wolf.ox.ac.uk/lists/nachlass/achiezio.pdf>.

to senior local politicians and colonial British administrators. As a woman she was uniquely able to visit and converse with traditional Arab women closeted in their homes in a way in which no Western male was allowed. As regards Mandate Palestine, her official instructions from the Foreign Office in 1943 before embarking on her US tour observed that her “reputation in the United States is markedly pro-Arab.”⁹ Her private correspondence shows her to be at times “at the very least . . . derogatory to Jews and Judaism.”¹⁰

Several historians have documented the wider context within which Berlin operated in Washington. Cull has explained Berlin’s role in the British effort to bring the US into the war;¹¹ Calder has put Berlin’s activities into context as one of many other British writers assisting the British government at the time;¹² Brewer has tracked the British attempts to use public diplomacy to build an equal relationship with America during the war years, including Berlin’s place in this project.¹³

It is equally well known that Berlin’s Zionism was sharply tested in Washington, where he was a British government employee at the embassy. Ignatieff’s biography devotes two chapters to Berlin’s time in America, commenting that between Whitehall and Weizmann, “a conflict of loyalties was inevitable.”¹⁴ We now know that Berlin waited until the end of his life to admit to Ignatieff his own role in leaking to Zionists the news of an impending Anglo-American declaration on Palestine, thereby defeating it.¹⁵ Intellectual histories of Berlin’s thought discuss the general dynamics of this tension to varying degrees, including Crowder,¹⁶ Galipeau,¹⁷ Avineri,¹⁸ Cherniss¹⁹ and particularly Dubnov.²⁰

There was no reticence on Stark’s part as regards her US speaking tour, let

⁹ FO 371/35039, 27 Sept. 1943. FO = Foreign Office files, National Archives, Kew, London.

¹⁰ Efraim Karsh and Rory Miller, “Freya Stark in America: Orientalism, Anti-Semitism and Political Propaganda”, *Journal of Contemporary History* 39, no. 3 (July 2004): 326.

¹¹ Nicholas Cull, *Selling War: The British Propaganda Campaign against American “Neutrality” in World War II* (Oxford University Press, 1995).

¹² Robert Calder, *Beware the British Serpent: The Role of Writers in British Propaganda in the United States, 1939–1945* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2004).

¹³ Susan Brewer, *To Win the Peace: British Propaganda in the United States during World War II* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1997).

¹⁴ Ignatieff, *Berlin*, 106.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 118, and LI, 443.

¹⁶ George Crowder, *Isaiah Berlin: Liberty and Pluralism* (Cambridge: Polity, 2004).

¹⁷ Claude Galipeau, *Isaiah Berlin’s Liberalism* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994).

¹⁸ Shlomo Avineri, “A Jew and a Gentleman”, in *The One and the Many*, ed. George Crowder and Henry Hardy (Amherst, NY: Prometheus, 2007), 73–94.

¹⁹ Joshua L. Cherniss, *A Mind and its Time: The Development of Isaiah Berlin’s Political Thought* (Oxford University Press, 2013).

²⁰ Arie M. Dubnov, *Isaiah Berlin: The Journey of a Jewish Liberal* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012).

alone her biographers or subsequent academic commentary. Two memoirs by Stark cover this period,²¹ plus her collected letters²² and three biographies,²³ all of which touch on this episode in her life. Rory Miller has devoted considerable, if critical, scholarly attention to her activities, highlighting the extent of official British efforts to combat Zionism and her sustained role within that movement.²⁴

However, other than one isolated footnote,²⁵ Berlin has never previously been identified as the source of Stark's invitation. It is generally ascribed to the British Embassy in Washington or the Ministry of Information in London.²⁶ This is understandable, as the relevant official memoranda (sent out in the name of Lord Halifax [1881–1959], the British ambassador in Washington in 1941–46) never disclosed which particular individual drafted the initial suggestion. However, rather than some unknown functionary in Washington or London, the idea for Stark's tour originated in Isaiah Berlin's fertile imagination. This only emerges if one instead proceeds from Berlin's unpublished and neglected "bootleg correspondence" with his colleague H. G. Nicholas (1911–1998) at the Ministry of Information in London, which included "gossip 'found too dazzling by the twilight denizens of Whitehall.'"²⁷ This correspondence is distinct from the official weekly political despatches which made Berlin famous in London, many of which

²¹ Freya Stark, *East is West* (London: John Murray, 1945); idem, *Dust in the Lion's Paw: Autobiography 1939–1946* (London: John Murray, 1961).

²² Freya Stark, *Letters: Vol. 4, Bridge of the Levant, 1940–43; Letters: Vol. 5, New Worlds for Old, 1943–46*, ed. Lucy Moorehead (Norwich: Michael Russell, 1977, 1978).

²³ Caroline Moorehead, *Freya Stark* (London: Viking Press, 1985); Molly Izzard, *Freya Stark: A Biography* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1993); Jane Fletcher Geniesse, *Passionate Nomad: The Life of Freya Stark* (London: Pimlico Press, 2000).

²⁴ Rory Miller, *Divided Against Zion: Anti-Zionist Opposition to the Creation of a Jewish State in Palestine, 1945–1948* (London: Frank Cass, 2000); idem, "The Rhetoric of Reaction: British Arabists, Jewish Refugees and the Palestine Question in the Final Mandatory Era", *Israel Affairs* 14, no. 3 (July 2008): 467–85; idem, "The Other Side of the Coin: Arab Propaganda and the Battle against Zionism in London, 1937–1948", *Israel Affairs* 5, no. 4 (Summer 1999): 198–228; Karsh and Miller, "Freya Stark in America", 315–32.

²⁵ LI, 442 n. 4, to Angus Malcolm, 9 Aug. 1943: "It had been IB's idea to invite her to the US."

²⁶ Ronald Zweig, *Britain and Palestine during the Second World War* (London: Boydell Press and Royal Historical Society, 1986), 155. By contrast, citing Berlin's "Zionist zeal," according to Peter Clarke, "that Zionist propaganda went unchecked in wartime Washington was as much Berlin's own doing as that of anyone who featured in his imaginative reports"; Peter Clarke, *The Last Thousand Days of the British Empire: Churchill, Roosevelt, and the Birth of the Pax Americana* (New York: Bloomsbury Press, 2008), 93.

²⁷ Ignatieff, *Berlin*, 113. Herbert George Nicholas, Oxford academic, in the Ministry of Information's wartime American Division, acted as Berlin's main contact for his official weekly despatches and recipient of the "bootleg correspondence", with brief postings in 1943 and 1946 to Washington. Editor of *Washington Despatches 1941–45: Weekly Political Reports from the British Embassy*, intro. Isaiah Berlin (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1981; hereafter, *WD*).

Nicholas published in 1981.²⁸ Further confirmation appears in Berlin's papers at the Bodleian Library in Oxford²⁹ and the National Archives at Kew.

This discovery sheds important new light on both Berlin's and Stark's lives. Given the wartime controversy surrounding the tour, in his lifetime Berlin was careful never to acknowledge publicly his role in "instigating" Stark's visit, as he admitted in the "bootleg correspondence".³⁰ In books, lectures and interviews in subsequent decades, he ensured that only his "authorised version" of events appeared, including in Stark's own wartime memoirs. Berlin's correspondence with Stark extended into the 1970s, but there is apparently no written evidence that Berlin ever disclosed to Stark his role in "instigating" her US tour. When Berlin addressed his Jerusalem audience in 1972, he acknowledged certain "errors" and "mistakes"³¹ but defended his Weizmannite line and certainly did not mention his connections with Stark in front of the assembled dignitaries, including the Israeli president, Golda Meir (1898–1978, the fourth Prime Minister of Israel), cabinet members, Supreme Court justices, Hebrew University faculty members, reporters and other guests. Such discretion did not prevent Berlin from being denounced at length by an opponent in the Israeli newspaper *Ha'aretz*, which led to a heated exchange of letters. His sensitivity extended to interviews with Ignatieff and Stark's biographer Geniesse in 1989, which did not reflect the full historical record.

In addition, the full story of the Stark tour illustrates the British government's policy incoherence at the highest levels. An isolated pro-Zionist voice in the wartime coalition cabinet, Churchill (1874–1965, the Prime Minister in 1940–45) strongly rejected both Halifax's support for Stark's views on Mandate Palestine, and the anti-Zionist Foreign Office bureaucracy, which predictably deemed Stark's tour a tremendous success. Stark's own correspondence highlighted the "unfortunate" and "regrettable"³² effects on American Zionists who were encouraged by Churchill's own long-standing Zionism,³³ which she called "sabotaging of one's own side".³⁴

²⁸ *WD*, which does not mention Stark.

²⁹ Isaiah Berlin Papers, Bodleian Library, Oxford (hereafter, MSB). Accessible online: <http://www.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/dept/scwmss/wmss/online/modern/berlin/berlin.html>

³⁰ MSB 111/95, to Paul Scott-Rankine, 20 Oct. 1943, and 111/100, 26 Oct. 1943. Scott-Rankine (1909–1983), civil servant and diplomat, in 1939–45 with BIS in New York and Washington, then head of Reuters in Washington.

³¹ LI, ZP, 666, 674, 687, 691.

³² FO 371/35042, Stark diary, 24 Nov. 1943.

³³ Martin Gilbert, *Churchill and the Jews: A Lifelong Friendship* (New York: Henry Holt, 2007); Michael Makovsky, *Churchill's Promised Land: Zionism and Statecraft* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2007).

³⁴ Quoted in FO 371/40129, E. Monroe to R. Hankey, 4 Feb. 1944. Elizabeth Monroe (1905–1986), married name Mrs Humphrey Neame, was the wartime director of the Ministry of Information's Middle East Division, and the confidante and friend in Whitehall of Freya Stark. She was also

Finally, Berlin's own Weizmannite approach to Mandate Palestine illustrates the splits in pre-state Zionism, pitting "moderate" and "radical" Zionists in the Diaspora and the Yishuv³⁵ against each other. As Berlin noted in 1972, his camp lost, with David Ben-Gurion (1886–1973³⁶) pushing aside Weizmann and adopting a radically different approach to cultivating American Jewish opinion from the grassroots upwards, rather than the top down, as Berlin had argued. Berlin's "instigation" of Stark's tour must be seen in that light, as well as Berlin's own complicated and ambivalent attitudes towards Zionism and his fellow Jews, as explored by Dubnov. Seen in its proper light, Berlin's role as regards Stark's US tour therefore illustrates the seemingly "incommensurable" rival claims on his identity and loyalty which he faced as a Zionist sympathizer in British government service.³⁷ In later life, as a prominent Anglo-Jewish intellectual, perhaps understandably, he chose not to reveal the full story about these wartime tensions. This study therefore seeks to lift that veil, as much as the evidence permits.

Wartime events

On their own, the British government files do not reveal the "instigator" of Stark's tour. However, evidence that Berlin proposed Stark's tour is scattered across the "bootleg correspondence". In 1943, Nicholas recalled that Berlin had "first . . . suggested [Stark's] visit . . . to present some other viewpoint on the Palestinian question beside that of the Zionists."³⁸ Berlin's "Foreign Office cable back in 1942, suggesting a visit by Bertram Thomas or Freya ha[d] at last brought forth its fruit." Nicholas added: "And to think that you

the diplomatic correspondent for *The Observer* in 1944 and on *The Economist* staff from 1945 to 1958. Robert Hankey (1905–1996) was a diplomat and in February 1944 the director of the FO's Middle East Division.

³⁵ The Hebrew term (meaning "settlement") referring to the body of Jewish residents in Palestine, before the establishment of the State of Israel. It came into use in the 1880s and continued to be used until 1948. It now denotes the pre-state Jewish residents in Palestine.

³⁶ Chairman of the Zionist Executive from 1935 and head of the Jewish Agency for Palestine; first Prime Minister of Israel, 1948.

³⁷ As Malachi HaCohen puts it, "Berlin's wartime service . . . presented him with conflicting British and Jewish loyalties. He found himself in the thick of US Zionist politics . . . He was exposed to Zionist designs to put pressure on Britain to reverse its anti-Zionist stand and, conversely, to British designs to frustrate Zionist hopes. Whose eyes and ears was he – His Majesty's or the Jewish people's? He negotiated artfully and inconsistently between the two, feeling the burden of 'dual loyalty'." See Malachi Haim HaCohen, "Berlin and Popper between nation and empire: diaspora, cosmopolitanism and Jewish life", *Jewish Historical Studies: Transactions of the Jewish Historical Society of England* 44 (2012): 65.

³⁸ MSB 272/41, 16 July 1943.

started all this!”³⁹ Berlin told his Washington colleagues that “I only instigated her coming.”⁴⁰ The proposal may have been jointly drafted with his colleague Angus Malcolm, who wrote to Berlin that “I see, in particular, that a year after you and I suggested it in a Savingram [cable], Freya Stark is being sent to the US.”⁴¹

The relevant Foreign Office cable is dated 2 July 1942 and sent out in Halifax’s name. It does not mention Berlin and only the “bootleg correspondence” reveals that he personally drafted it. The cable gives nine separate reasons for American Jewish hostility to British policy, especially after 800 Jewish refugees drowned on the *Struma*. It argued that in the US, the “Moslem case therefore goes by default” and suggested lecture tours by Bertram Thomas and Freya Stark.⁴² The Foreign Office warmly received these suggestions. The handwritten minutes of a senior official, Harold Caccia, recorded Berlin’s personal advocacy of Stark’s tour to Caccia and rejection of the more cautious line taken by Professor Gibb, an academic specialising in Arabia.⁴³

Further, Berlin’s 1972 research notes clearly indicate Berlin’s own role in drafting the cable, though he disclaims some responsibility for its “recommendations”, despite personally advocating Stark’s tour to Caccia in 1942: “31379, 1942 emphasises real cause of Jewish indignation with HMG (9 points) & callousness, *appeasement* of Arabs, who anyway hate British, Mufti etc. ‘Moslem case goes by default.’ I supplied *material* for this, but *not* recommendations! (Arab case needs stating etc). Freya Stark, Gibb etc.”⁴⁴

Stark finally arrived in America in late 1943 with instructions to put the Arab case and “break down the American inclination to see only the standpoint of persecuted Jewry and to point to Palestine as its only refuge.” She was instructed to (somehow) “avoid all possible political controversy and confine yourself as far as possible to a recital of fact.” Nevile Butler, another senior official, directed Stark in his minutes to “consult Isaiah Berlin on the Jewish audience”,⁴⁵ while “not stirring up a Zionist

³⁹ MSB 272/89, 28 Sept. 1943. Bertram Thomas (1892–1950), British civil servant, Middle Eastern expert, traveller and writer; British Information Officer in Bahrain, 1942–3; Director of the Middle East Centre for Arab Studies, Palestine, 1943–6.

⁴⁰ MSB 111/95 and 100, 20 and 26 Oct. 1943.

⁴¹ MSB 110/207, 4 June 1943. Angus Malcolm (1908–1971), British diplomat in Washington, DC, 1938–42; North American Department, FO, London, in 1942–44. Postwar head of the Foreign Office’s Information Policy Department (IPD).

⁴² FO 371/31379, 2 July 1942.

⁴³ FO 371/31379, 1 Sept. 1942. Harold Caccia (1905–1990), UK FO. Professor H. A. R. Gibb (1895–1971), Scottish historian of Orientalism, professor of Arabic at St John’s College, Oxford, from 1937.

⁴⁴ MSB 512/165; original emphasis. “31379” refers to the official file number, “1942” is the date, the “9 points” are in the cable.

⁴⁵ FO 371/5039, 27 Sept. 1943. Nevile Butler (1893–1973), head of the North American Department, FO, London, 1941–44.

controversy”.⁴⁶ The line which Stark actually delivered was that the British had indeed fulfilled both parts of the Balfour Declaration, namely creating space in Mandate Palestine for a Jewish homeland, while not prejudicing the civil and religious rights of the existing non-Jewish communities. Stark constantly argued that, out of fairness to the majority Arab population, the British could not allow further Jewish immigration without the consent of the former (which would of course never be forthcoming). Given the international refugee situation and Jewish American public opinion, the result was that on reaching Chicago in January 1944, Stark had already received “letters from Zionists almost inarticulate with fury”.⁴⁷

However, in their “bootleg correspondence”, Nicholas and Berlin vied with each other to denigrate Stark, predicting the controversy that resulted. Nicholas was particularly concerned that Zionist protests were “capable of doing us a great deal of harm”.⁴⁸ In October 1943, Berlin “disowned responsibility” for Stark, handing over to his colleagues Paul Scott-Rankine and Michael Wright.⁴⁹ Berlin understood that Stark was “very fanatical and might get into a scrape”.⁵⁰

By the new year, Berlin had met Stark. Despite complaints from others of her “anti-Semitism”, Berlin wrote that “I, unfortunately, get on excellently with her” and sought to downplay her activities, “provided she does not sound off in public and give the Zionists an opportunity of flaying her.” By that stage of her tour, Berlin did “not think that we stand to lose much either way (or gain, for that matter).”⁵¹

Unlike the Foreign Office, it is clear that at the Ministry of Information, Brendan Bracken (1901–1958, the Minister of Information in 1941–45) was not impressed. Bracken reportedly rejected Stark’s memoranda on British propaganda about the Middle East in America, commenting that Stark’s arguments were “unlikely to cool the enraged Zionists”. Bracken’s position was that the British government should simply reiterate that “military necessities require no changes in Palestine in war-time.”⁵² Nicholas was left asking why the British had sent Stark to the US in the first place.

One Foreign Office file from March 1944 tellingly reveals their strategy behind Stark’s US tour. It was originally headed “Pro-Arab propaganda by Miss Freya Stark in United States.” The typewritten sub-heading reads: “she

⁴⁶ FO 371/35039, N. Butler to E. Monroe, Ministry of Information (MOI), 27 Sept. 1943.

⁴⁷ Geniesse, *Passionate Nomad*, 310, and Stark, *Dust*, 190.

⁴⁸ MSB 272/89, 28 Sept. 1943.

⁴⁹ MSB 111/95 and 100, 20 and 26 Oct. 1943. Michael Wright (1901–1976), UK diplomat, at Washington embassy in 1943–46.

⁵⁰ MSB 272/135, 20 Dec. 1943.

⁵¹ MSB 272/143, 12 Jan. 1944.

⁵² Quoted in MSB 272/145, 14 Jan. 1944, Nicholas to Berlin. See also MSB 272/140–150, 5 Feb. 1944, Nicholas to Berlin.

is still pursuing useful course and causing about the right amount of provocation.” However, the typewriting has been crossed out and now reads “Lectures by Miss Freya Stark in United States”.⁵³

By then the gulf between the Ministry of Information and the Foreign Office was clear. From the top down, the Foreign Office correspondence mirrors Stark’s own self-satisfaction. In January 1944, Halifax reported to London that Stark was “doing valuable work through personal contacts”.⁵⁴ Hankey informed Monroe at the Ministry of Information that he and his Foreign Office colleagues had read Stark’s diary with “the greatest delight”.⁵⁵ Michael Wright enthused over “the invaluable help of Freya Stark. I cannot speak too highly of the work she has done here.”⁵⁶ H. M. Eyres minuted that she had done “excellent & effective work”.⁵⁷ Neville Butler was in “no doubt” that Stark’s tour had done good, since “the wrath of the Zionists over her is evidence that her small keen personality with a fresh point of view has made a mark.”⁵⁸ Angus Malcolm wrote of his “hope that E. Dept will see to it with M.O.I. that Miss Stark’s success is followed up, as occasion offers, with articles suitable for the US press. There should be a good market for her wares and they should be pushed.”⁵⁹

However, this self-satisfaction did not disguise the incoherence of British policy. Stark herself complained about Churchill “sabotaging” Britain’s declared White Paper policy and reassured her American colleague Colonel Hoskins that “in our history it is usually the Civil Service that wins versus the Cabinet in the long run”.⁶⁰ Nevertheless, by January 1944 the cabinet was secretly discussing the partition of Palestine, leaving Stark’s political interventions out of time and derided by Anthony Eden (1897–1977, the Foreign Secretary in 1940–45).⁶¹

Stark’s efforts suffered a far greater and more embarrassing defeat in January 1944 when Halifax sought firmer instructions from London concerning a renewed defence in America of the controversial anti-immigration 1939 White Paper against the sustained attacks of American Zionists.⁶² Telegram

⁵³ FO 371/40130, March 1944 (E 1639/67/31).

⁵⁴ FO 371/40133, 8 Jan. 1944.

⁵⁵ FO 371/40130, 21 March 1944.

⁵⁶ FO 371/40131, 15 May 1944.

⁵⁷ FO 371/40130, 17 March 1944. Eyres was in the Eastern Department, FO, London.

⁵⁸ FO 371/40130, 8 May 1944.

⁵⁹ FO 371/40131, 31 May 1944.

⁶⁰ FO 371/40129, E. Monroe to R. Hankey, FO, 4 Feb. 1944. Colonel Harold B. Hoskins, US Army, Beirut-born businessman, adviser to President Roosevelt on the Middle East and presidential emissary to Ibn Saud.

⁶¹ FO 371/40129, 11 Feb. 1944.

⁶² As regards the anti-British tone of many American Zionists at the time, see Dollinger, *Quest for Inclusion: Jews and Liberalism in Modern America* (Princeton University Press, 2000), on the increasingly rightwards orientation of the movement in contrast to otherwise liberal Jewish perspectives.

No. 114 of 8 January 1944 included Stark's suggestion "that if we are to defend the White Paper it should be on lines of a memorandum by her [Stark] contained in my immediately following telegram."⁶³

Churchill responded swiftly with a brutal telegram to Attlee and Eden, directly referring to Halifax and Stark's telegram:

See Washington telegram No. 114 of January 8. This raises very serious issues. I have always considered the White Paper a disastrous policy and a breach of an undertaking for which I was prominently responsible. Surely we are not going to make trouble for ourselves in America and hamper the President's chances of re-election for the sake of this low-grade gasp of a defeatist hour. The Arabs have done nothing for us during this war, except for the rebellion in Iraq. We must bring matters to an issue in the Cabinet when I return. Meanwhile we must not commit ourselves to any new defence of the White Paper. Some form of partition is the only solution.⁶⁴

Churchill's eruption forced Eden to tell Halifax that "although I appreciate your difficulties, I can hold out no hope whatever that any new decision of major importance regarding Palestine policy will be announced in the near future."⁶⁵

As regards Stark's own memorandum, Eden wrote in the margins: "I must see Dept.'s answer – clearly we can't start defending White Paper now."⁶⁶ He told Halifax: "Personal for Ambassador. Your telegrams No. 114 and 115. I think I should warn you at once that there is no possibility of this line being followed. Full instructions will be sent to you in due course."⁶⁷

Clearly, Stark was only in a position to send such messages to London because Berlin had "instigated" her tour. The policy incoherence shows how inaccurate Berlin's "authorised version" of events subsequently became, letting him play down his role. Quite how sensitive and controversial the tour became can be seen in the American reaction to it and the subsequent destruction of many Foreign Office files. Thus we know that there were files concerning a US government request for information concerning Stark's activities in the US,⁶⁸ Stark's proposed book on Arabs and its publication in the US;⁶⁹

⁶³ FO 371/40133, 8 Jan. 1944.

⁶⁴ FO 371/40133, Telegram "Frozen No. 1256" – Prime Minister to Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Secretary, 12 Jan. 1944. See also Makovsky, *Churchill's Promised Land*, 185; Gilbert, *Churchill and the Jews*, 206. Clement Attlee (1883–1967), Lord Privy Seal, 1940–42; Deputy Prime Minister, 1942–45; Prime Minister, 1945–51.

⁶⁵ FO 371/40133, 29 Jan. 1944.

⁶⁶ FO 371/40133, 18 Jan. 1944.

⁶⁷ FO 371/40133, 19 Jan. 1944.

⁶⁸ E1145/1145/65 (file).

⁶⁹ E1065/1065/65.

Zionist complaints regarding Stark's activities in Canada;⁷⁰ a parliamentary question regarding the purpose of her visit to America and if it was sponsored by the British government;⁷¹ the reply to a letter from Rabbi Wise to the Washington Embassy, protesting at Stark's pro-Arab activity in America;⁷² and Stark's suggestion that a Middle East expert be employed on the Ministry of Information's staff there.⁷³ None of these survive.

Within the Foreign Office, those on the ground had a sharper sense of reality than their London superiors. Nevile Butler wrote that "our Consul-General in Chicago is doubtful whether Miss Stark has done more good than harm, but I have no doubt that it is the former."⁷⁴ In January 1944 the British Consul-General in New York reported the alarm of the United States Office of War Information (OWI) from a key state in an election year: "They urge particularly that Freya Stark should avoid appearing as a pro-Arab propagandist which would start violent controversy."⁷⁵ This note crossed with some perfunctory concern from London about Stark's tour, which she blithely ignored.⁷⁶

A rising sense of anger among American Zionists at Stark's activities managed to unite their leadership, with the perennial rivals Rabbis Wise and Silver jointly protesting to Halifax: "two Rabbis . . . asked for my removal."⁷⁷ This was brushed aside – "the Rabbis' attack here, Lord Halifax told me, has been dealt with in the 'easy' way and sent to London for burial".⁷⁸ Stark also alleged that "Rabbis Wise and Silver misquote me in a letter to Lord Halifax. They accuse me of saying things I have particularly avoided saying".⁷⁹ Stark then drafted a letter to the *New York Times* denying charges of antisemitism

⁷⁰ E2510/1065/65.

⁷¹ E2587/1065/65.

⁷² E2859/1065/65.

⁷³ E3362/1065/65.

⁷⁴ FO 371/40130, 8 May 1944.

⁷⁵ FO 371/40129, 8 Jan. 1944. The OWI was a wartime government agency created to consolidate government information services, operating domestically and overseas from June 1942 to Sept. 1945.

⁷⁶ FO 371/40129, 6 Jan. 1944, diary entry.

⁷⁷ Stark, *Dust*, 211. While both Reform rabbis, their egos, the generational gap between them and their respective alignment with the Democrats and Republicans usually managed to distance them, "Silver largely ignored Wise's advice and scorned his influence with Roosevelt; Wise, in response, became bitter and jealous." See Marc Lee Raphael, *Abba Hillel Silver: A Profile in American Judaism* (New York: Holmes & Meier, 1989), 127. Rabbi Stephen Wise (1874–1949), Reform rabbi, social reformer, Zionist leader, President of the American Jewish Congress 1925–49, Founder President of the World Jewish Congress, 1936, wartime co-chair of the American Zionist Emergency Council. Rabbi Abba Hillel Silver (1893–1963), Reform rabbi, prominent Zionist, member of the American Emergency Committee for Zionist Affairs and from autumn 1943 its co-chairman and chairman of its executive committee, strident orator and writer.

⁷⁸ Stark, *Dust*, 216.

⁷⁹ FO 371/40131, 8 April 1944.

and trotting out the hackneyed line that some of her “best friends” were Jewish.⁸⁰

Matters did not rest there. The embassy had been hearing the “mutterings of an approaching storm” which “finally broke” in Congress,⁸¹ where the Democrat Emanuel Celler (1888–1981) of Brooklyn, New York, twice denounced Stark’s activities in the most colourful terms, condemning her defence of the 1939 White Paper and demanding her removal.⁸²

The Foreign Office did not take Celler seriously: in August 1943, Michael Wright judged that Celler was “not a man of much influence”⁸³ whose speech “attracted little or no attention in the Press.”⁸⁴ In London, Eyres wrote that “I don’t think this sort of speech cuts much ice.”⁸⁵ Berlin discounted the risks, since “nobody has asked us or the Department of Justice actually to stop her.”⁸⁶ However, since early February 1944 Stark had been asked to “hand in the detailed summaries of all [her] speeches to be preserved, strangely enough, by the Department of Justice.”⁸⁷

In April 1944, Sir Geoffrey Mander MP (1882–1962) sought assurances in the House of Commons that “there is no foundation for the statement that Miss Stark has gone out to spread pro-Arab propaganda.” Bracken responded that: “Miss Stark is a distinguished scholar, who has been followed throughout the United States by a number of persons anxious to traduce her. I wish to put it on record that her visit has nothing to do with Arab propaganda or anyone else.”⁸⁸

Since the Foreign Office’s own files referred to Stark’s “pro-Arab propaganda” and Stark referred to herself as a “propagandist” in her own letters and memoirs,⁸⁹ Bracken’s reassurance carries little weight. There are strong

⁸⁰ Stark, *Letters: Vol. V*, 80–81.

⁸¹ FO 371/40130, 16 Feb. 1944.

⁸² Washington, DC, Library of Congress, 90 Congressional Record (hereafter, Cong. Rec.) A538 1944, 2 Feb. 1944; 90 Cong. Rec. 3254 1944 and 90 Cong. Rec. 3262 1944, 29 March 1944. Emanuel Celler, lawyer, Congressman 1923–73.

⁸³ FO 371/35038, 25 Aug. 1943.

⁸⁴ FO 371/40130, 16 Feb. 1944.

⁸⁵ FO 371/40130, 1 March 1944.

⁸⁶ MSB 272/155, 17 Feb. 1944.

⁸⁷ Stark, *Dust*, 196. See US National Archives & Records Administration (NARA), College Park, MD, Record Group 60, General Records of the Department of Justice, Classified Subject Files, 1930–1987, Entry 110, Class 149 – Litigation Case Files, File 149–636 (re. Foreign Agents Registration Act), March 6, 1944, “Freya Stark: Foreign agent and representative of the British Embassy, engaged in lecturing in U.S.”

⁸⁸ Hansard, accessible at <http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/commons/1944/apr/26/>

⁸⁹ miss-freya-stark#S5CVO399Po_19440426_HOC_117; *The Times*, 27 April 1944, 8. Sir Geoffrey Mander, Midlands industrialist, Liberal MP for Wolverhampton East, 1929–45; reputation in Parliament for his determined use of parliamentary questions.

⁸⁹ Stark, *Dust*, 176, quoting her letter of 25 Nov. 1943.

grounds to argue that Bracken misled Parliament. The London *Zionist Review* was unconvinced: “one can hardly escape the impression that, being an official of the Ministry of Information and paid by the British taxpayer, she [Stark] is trying her best to help the Arab nationalists and to besmirch the Zionist cause. If her speeches are not pro-Arab propaganda, then what is?”⁹⁰

Stark was “amused” by Mander’s questions⁹¹ and thanked Bracken for defending her “reputation in the House”,⁹² although the “bootleg correspondence” suggests that Bracken was unimpressed with Stark’s tour in the first place.

Worse still, Stark’s visit threatened to trigger the US Foreign Agent Registration Act (FARA). Originally passed in 1938, partly to expose pro-German or Soviet agents in America, it fed on “American paranoia about propagandists” and “required the registration of anyone who was in the pay of a foreign government or who spoke or wrote in the United States with its assistance.” For the British, this “precluded sending official government agents. Indeed, any lecture by a foreigner on the political questions of the war invited suspicion and criticism.”⁹³ By 1942, the act was due for renewal, so Congress proposed that all political propaganda published by foreign agents be labelled as such and that the Justice Department should inspect it. This “might well have put the British propagandists out of business early in 1942.”⁹⁴ When Roosevelt vetoed the resulting Congressional bill in February 1942, this prompted a political crisis. Halifax resented any association between Britain and propaganda. The legislation was revised, with certain exemptions for the British and was passed in April 1942.⁹⁵

Stark had never visited America before and was inexperienced in these issues. Nicholas and Berlin debated them in their “bootleg correspondence”. In December 1943, after receiving legal advice, Nicholas rejected “the attempts which the indefatigable Bathurst [1913–2004] makes to enrol all these people under the F.A.R.A.”⁹⁶ In contrast, Berlin fully understood the strategic issues: “As for Miss Stark . . . what B.I.S. is worried about is that the sleeping dog of F.A.R.A. has now been woken, and the Department of Justice . . . now looks like proposing to scan every speech by every British speaker with a view to determining whether it is likely to upset the political balance in this country.”⁹⁷

⁹⁰ *Zionist Review*, 19 May 1944.

⁹¹ Stark, *Dust*, 216.

⁹² Stark, *Letters: Vol. V*, 91, 5 May 1944.

⁹³ Calder, *Beware the British Serpent*, 56.

⁹⁴ Cull, *Selling War*, 201.

⁹⁵ Brewer, *To Win the Peace*, 60–63; Cull, *Selling War*, 174–5, 190–91.

⁹⁶ MSB 272/138–139, 20 Dec. 1943. Maurice Bathurst, international lawyer, legal adviser to BIS 1941–43 and to the British Embassy, Washington, 1943–46; legal member of the UK delegation to the UN, 1946–48.

⁹⁷ MSB 272/155, 17 Feb. 1944.

However, Berlin played down the risk of the Attorney-General, Francis Biddle (1886–1968) reacting: “yet I think it will take him a long time to get around to doing this and fundamentally the thing may be a nuisance but will not boil up to anything of consequence, so I shouldn’t get too worried yet.”⁹⁸

It is not clear whether Berlin knew that the Department of Justice had opened a file under the FARA on Stark in early March 1944 (whose contents are now lost) and if so, whether he would have been less relaxed about her tour as a result.⁹⁹

Despite the Foreign Office’s insouciance, by “instigating” Stark’s tour, Berlin’s suggestions had exposed the incoherence of British policy; enraged key elements of Roosevelt’s Democratic coalition in an election year; generated decidedly mixed coverage in the US press;¹⁰⁰ triggered the OWI’s alarm, unwanted attention from the Department of Justice, a sharp denunciation on the floor of the House of Representatives; and a ministerial response in Parliament which bore little relationship with reality. While Stark implausibly claimed that her “propaganda has been quite surprisingly successful”, she described the sequence of attacks on her as “melancholy”.¹⁰¹ Worse still for the Foreign Office, Stark’s tour brought together otherwise competing American Zionist leaders in a joint protest, reinforcing their anti-British sentiments, who after the war formed part of the strident Zionist coalition encouraging President Truman (1884–1972) to turn against Attlee and Bevin’s (1881–1951) policy towards Mandate Palestine.¹⁰²

With the end of the war, both Berlin and Stark returned to civilian life. In 1945 Stark published her first book addressing her wartime propaganda,¹⁰³ including her views on Mandate Palestine. The story continued to reverberate through the decades, though not necessarily in ways that either Berlin or Stark may have intended.

Postwar legacy

Berlin and Stark corresponded socially from the 1940s to the 1970s. In late 1960 Stark wrote to Berlin as she finalized her wartime memoirs, *Dust in the Lion’s Paw*, seeking permission to publish a letter from him dated June 1944

⁹⁸ Ibid. Francis Biddle, US lawyer, Chairman, National Labor Relations Board, 1934–35; judge, US Court of Appeals for the Third Circuit, 1939–40; US Solicitor-General, 1940; US Attorney-General, 1941–45; US member, International Military Tribunal (Nuremberg trials), 1945–46.

⁹⁹ See n. 87 above.

¹⁰⁰ Stark, *Dust*, 190; *Letters: Vol. V*, 46, 21 Jan. 1944.

¹⁰¹ Stark, *Letters: Vol. V*, 89–90, 2 May 1944.

¹⁰² Ernest Bevin, Minister of Labour, 1940–45, Foreign Secretary 1945–1951. Harry S. Truman, Democrat, 33rd President, 1945–53.

¹⁰³ Stark, *East is West*.

in which he expressed his yearning for Oxford and disillusionment with Zionist issues.¹⁰⁴ Stark's book "deal[t] with the years 1939–46 & incidentally has an American diary of which large chunks have had to be excised, but a few paragraphs about you are left in & a letter of yours which gave me so much pleasure. I hope you don't want any more of it taken away: I have cut out the worst bit about Palestine!"¹⁰⁵

Berlin responded by correcting a point of detail and objecting to an unfavourable comparison between Americans and Europeans: "you must *please* cut out the last sentence about the dear Americans – they are so *wound-able* – & so nice – & I don't want to spend the rest of my life explaining what exactly I meant & why – & the value of those words (as indeed of the rest of my letter) either now or ever, is too small to make it worth preserving at the cost of hurting the feelings of so many by words so few. So *do* please erase them!"¹⁰⁶

He also confirmed that he had not "intended to work for the Zionists from within or without the government & civil service".¹⁰⁷ Stark then sent Berlin "the authorised version, & only a few dots left for the imagination!"¹⁰⁸

This exchange is highly revealing – for what it hid. Stark had already removed "the worst bit about Palestine". Berlin stressed his discretion and unwillingness to explain himself. Nor did he use this correspondence to admit his "instigation" of Stark's tour. This point did not therefore appear in Stark's memoirs, which simply refer to the Ministry of Information sending her to America.¹⁰⁹ Instead, her memoirs include highly complimentary references to Berlin's conversation as being "beguiling" and him as the "best talker".¹¹⁰ Berlin's final comments highlight his wartime distance from the Zionists and the perception others had of his divided loyalties.

Berlin continued to polish his "authorised version" of events in October 1972 before his eminent Jerusalem audience. In preparation, he headed to the British national archives, which had just opened their 1942 files under the thirty-year rule. He made extensive research notes and ordered dozens of files for review,¹¹¹ indicating his determination to put across his views before others had got to the same material.

Berlin told the editor of the London *Jewish Chronicle* that he would "give some ill-remembered personal reminiscences of Washington 1942–45 or so,

¹⁰⁴ LI, 494–495, 12 June 1944; MSB 111/253.

¹⁰⁵ MSB 161/135–136, Stark to IB, 31 Oct. 1960.

¹⁰⁶ Freya Stark Papers, Harry Ransom Center, Austin, Texas, Box 9.7 – Berlin, Berlin to Stark, 9 Nov. 1960; original emphases.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁸ MSB 161/216, Stark to IB, 13 Nov. 1960.

¹⁰⁹ Stark, *Dust*, 138.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 187 and 182.

¹¹¹ MSB 512, June 1972.

in connection with the British – Zionist – American attitudes, and how some, at any rate, of the pre-suppositions on which eg Weizmann's, Goldmann's, and indeed my own views were founded were blown sky high by events in 1945–46".¹¹² Berlin's preference was to get this material "on record . . . and then, if possible, forget all about it."¹¹³ However, he foresaw that his audience "will be shocked by the sentiments. I do not know what I shall say yet, only that it will not go down terribly well."¹¹⁴

Given Berlin's detailed research, the absence of any public reference to Stark's tour was deliberate. It could not be put down to forgetfulness or the passage of time, for Berlin referred to Stark in his notes.¹¹⁵ The lecture itself is a fascinating account, but it clearly departs from the historical record:

- I had no executive functions in the Embassy, and my work there did not involve me in any kind of Zionist politics.¹¹⁶
- I do not wish to give the impression that I played any part in Anglo-Zionist relations at this, or any other, period. I did not.¹¹⁷
- A concerted anti-Zionist campaign would, in my view, serve no British purpose.¹¹⁸
- What the (on the whole) deeply anti-Zionist Foreign Office thought of it all, I have no notion – they appeared to be mainly concerned, as all Foreign Offices always are, with lowering temperatures, evading awkward issues, waiting for Cabinet decisions that did not come, and in the mean time preventing indiscretions or, if they did not succeed in this, trying to dissipate their consequences.¹¹⁹
- American Zionists had little to fear from the anti-Zionist faction in America, a collection of feeble mice trying to bell the huge Zionist cat.¹²⁰

None of this squares with Berlin's role in "instigating" Stark's visit, designed to put the Arab case and appeal to "moderate" anti-Zionist American Jews as against pro-Zionist American Jews, on behalf of the British government. Berlin knew full well his colleagues' views, both in London and Washington. Halifax and Stark strongly pushed their own line to the cabinet, only to be met by Churchill's furious response. The Foreign Office swung its full support behind the project, aiming to "draw just the right amount of fire" in

¹¹² MSB 360/93, 12 July 1972. Nachum Goldmann (1895–1982), New York representative of the Jewish Agency.

¹¹³ MSB 360/98, 29 July 1972.

¹¹⁴ MSB 360/102, 29 July 1972.

¹¹⁵ MSB 512/165. "I supplied *material* for this, but *not* recommendations!"; original emphases.

¹¹⁶ ZP, 667.

¹¹⁷ ZP, 683.

¹¹⁸ ZP, 680.

¹¹⁹ ZP, 677.

¹²⁰ ZP, 679.

provoking a Zionist reaction, rather than lowering the temperature. American Zionists found themselves up against a state-sponsored intervention in domestic US politics and addressed their protests accordingly to Halifax. Berlin's cartoonish "Tom and Jerry" imagery simply did not fit the facts.

Such discrepancies did not escape Berlin's audience at the time. Shortly after the lecture was delivered, the Israeli newspaper *Ha'aretz* published a lengthy article by Natan Yellin-Mor (1913–1980) entitled "The Apologetic Account of a Sceptic". Yellin-Mor was sharply critical of Berlin as a loyal servant of the British government which cruelly denied Jews the right to seek refuge in Mandate Palestine, prevented the establishment of a Jewish army to fight the Axis powers and resisted Israeli independence. He praised the killers of Lord Moyne (1880–1944) in Cairo and characterized Berlin's wartime mission as designed to "choke" the pro-Zionist agitation of American Jews. Yellin-Mor attacked Weizmann's preference for quiet diplomacy and concluded that only force had led to Israeli independence. Finally, Yellin-Mor speculated about Berlin's "psychological need [to] relieve himself of an oppressive burden."¹²¹

While he wrote from an angry, extremist perspective, Yellin-Mor was closer to the historical record than he might have thought. The purpose of Stark's American tour was not simply to put the Arab case but also to counterbalance the rising pro-Zionist agitation of American Jews. As Angus Malcolm wrote to Berlin in June 1943, welcoming Stark's tour, "the belief still lingers here that if we *really* tried we could persuade Hull and Welles not merely to lay off encouraging the US Zionists, but actively to discourage or even disown them."¹²² Clearly, had the Foreign Office been able to "choke" this agitation, they would have been delighted to do so.

Berlin's response was immediate, sending a stream of letters to *Ha'aretz* strongly disputing Yellin-Mor's suggestions.¹²³ He rejected Yellin-Mor as a "terrorist", stressed that he was a lifelong Zionist and argued that "at no point did I, or was I in a position to, attempt to curb even the most extreme Zionist propaganda."¹²⁴ However, this hardly accords with the purpose of Stark's tour, let alone Berlin's role in "instigating" it.

¹²¹ MSB 513/183–197; N. Yellin-Mor, "The Apologetic Account of a Sceptic", *Ha'aretz*, 20 Oct. 1972. Natan Yellin-Mor, Revisionist Zionist activist, militant Lehi group leader and Israeli politician, part of Lehi/Stern Gang planning team behind Lord Moyne's assassination. Walter Guinness, Lord Moyne, Anglo-Irish politician and businessman, British minister of state in the Middle East until Nov. 1944, when he was assassinated by the Lehi group.

¹²² MSB 110/207, 4 June 1943; original emphasis. Sumner Welles (1892–1961), US diplomat, Assistant Secretary of State, 1933–37; Under-Secretary of State, 1937–43. Cordell Hull (1871–1955), US lawyer and Secretary of State, 1933–44.

¹²³ MSB 513/200, 234 (30 Oct. 1972), 249, 250, 259. For the controversy and the resulting correspondence, see generally Isaiah Berlin, *Building: Letters 1960–1975* (hereafter, L3), eds. Henry Hardy and Mark Pottle (London: Chatto & Windus, 2013), 503–22.

¹²⁴ MSB 513/250.

Berlin recognized that his “lecture stirred up a hornet’s nest”¹²⁵ and he set about a damage-limitation exercise, telling Ronald Sanders, the editor of *Midstream*, the American Zionist monthly journal, that his lecture “provoked controversy in Israel (as I expected) & will only, it seems to me, reopen some ancient wounds & involve me in polemics which would not be profitable to anyone.”¹²⁶ Berlin therefore declined to engage in any further correspondence with Yellin-Mor but took care to leave the best possible impression with *Ha’arets*’s editor Gershom Schocken, dropping heavy hints about his role in the leaking of a putative Anglo-American declaration on Mandate Palestine – something he waited until the end of his life finally to tell his biographer Ignatieff.¹²⁷

Berlin continued to defend himself and Weizmann’s legacy before an Israeli audience. He told the leading American Zionist Meyer Weisgal (1894–1977) that he was content for them both to be “regarded as old fuddy-duddy loyalists, nice enough in our own way but rooted, with our mentor, in a world that has passed away.”¹²⁸ Had that audience been aware of Berlin’s full record, in particular as regards Stark’s tour, they might not have simply seen him as an “old fuddy-duddy” and Berlin might have risked further vituperative attacks, beyond that of the isolated Yellin-Mor.

Well into his retirement, Berlin continued to polish this aspect of his “authorised version”. In 1989, he both met Stark’s biographer Jane Fletcher Geniesse and spoke to Ignatieff on the subject. He told Geniesse that he had “concealed” from Stark the fact that the cabinet committee concerning Mandate Palestine had changed its policy in favour of partition. The two had “got on extremely well. [However] Our views could not have been more different. She wanted the Zionist movement suppressed; I wanted it to succeed. I said nothing. It was not my business.” Berlin maintained that Stark’s tour “had been doomed from the start: in both London and Washington the momentum generated by pro-Zionist forces had become irresistible.”¹²⁹ Berlin’s account did not mention his role in ‘instigating’ Stark’s tour or indeed his ambivalent, Weizmannite interpretation of the Zionist movement.

Nor was it entirely the case that the tour was doomed from the start: the

¹²⁵ MSB 513/315, 11 Jan. 1973, to Robert Murphy (1894–1978), US intelligence officer, Roosevelt’s political representative in North Africa, 1941–43.

¹²⁶ MSB 513/291, 28 Nov. 1972. Ronald Sanders (1932–1991), writer specializing in Jewish history.

¹²⁷ MSB 513/260, 13 Nov. 1972. Gershom Schocken (1912–1990), Israeli journalist and politician, the editor of the leading Israeli newspaper *Ha’arets* for more than 50 years, Progressive Party member of the Knesset, 1955–59.

¹²⁸ MSB 513/229, 18 Sept. 1972. Meyer Weisgal, writer, national secretary of Zionist Organisation of America, 1921–38; Secretary General of US section of Jewish Agency for Palestine, 1940–46; Organising Secretary of American Jewish Conference 1943; Weizmann’s personal US political representative.

¹²⁹ Geniesse, *Passionate Nomad*, 312.

Foreign Office decided that it was such a success that more speakers should tour America. In fact, Berlin himself wrote a lengthy memorandum in June 1944 arguing that the British should “prepar[e] the ground” for any change in British policy concerning Mandate Palestine by bringing round “eminent” American Jews with access to Roosevelt (for example, “Justices Rosenman, Frankfurter, a Warburg or two, Mr Eugene Meyer, Governor Lehman, Mr Morgenthau, etc”) and so “spli[t]” the Zionist “front”. Halifax was so impressed with this argument that he personally wrote to Eden requesting various speakers and “strongly urg[ing] that this suggestion be favourably considered.”¹³⁰

In April 1989, Berlin told Ignatieff that during his wartime experiences in Washington he had been “rather frightened of some sort of explosion in Palestine”. He therefore argued for some “moderate pro-Zionist Jews . . . to talk to moderate Americans who took some interest in Zionism like Morgenthau or Felix Frankfurter”, to “work out some kind of common platform which would be a tolerable platform of discussion.” Berlin saw this as a “soft line . . . of a wet kind”. This appears to refer to the June 1944 memorandum described immediately above. Berlin then said:

the result was that they sent Freya Stark, who was the most ferocious Arabist you can imagine, to make propaganda against Zionism in the United States, which she did to no effect whatever. And I met her, and we got on very well, and in her despatches back home (which I read afterwards in the Ministry of Information) to her friend [Elizabeth Monroe] she said, “I met Isaiah Berlin. His conversation was very beguiling.” . . . She said, well, she’d talked to a lot of Senators, who were immediately converted to her point of view – which turned out to be totally false. Maybe their motives were financial or corrupt, but all I can tell you is that they didn’t vote in the direction she desired. No, British anti-Israeli propaganda was quite real but totally ineffective.¹³¹

The chronology in this account does not work, since Berlin wrote his June 1944 memorandum as Stark returned to London – it did not “result” in Stark’s tour. “They” did not simply “send” Stark to meet a passive Berlin,

¹³⁰ FO 371/40131, 9 June 1944. Samuel Irving Rosenman (1896–1973), justice of the New York Supreme Court, 1932–43; confidential adviser and speechwriter to Presidents Roosevelt and Truman. Felix Frankfurter (1882–1965), US Supreme Court Justice, Zionist, friend of President Roosevelt and of Isaiah Berlin. Warburg family, prominent German Jewish banking family, with roots in Hamburg, London and New York. Eugene Meyer (1875–1959), financier, public official and publisher of the *Washington Post*; Chairman of the Federal Reserve, 1930–33; first President of the World Bank Group. Herbert H. Lehman (1878–1963), Democrat politician from New York, 45th Governor of New York, 1933–42; first Director General of the UN Relief and Rehabilitation Administration, 1943–46. Henry Morgenthau Jr. (1891–1967), 52nd Secretary of the Treasury, 1934–45; active in rescue of Jewish refugees, author of Morgenthau plan for postwar Germany.

¹³¹ Transcript of Michael Ignatieff Tape 18, 5 April 1989 (hereafter, MI 18).

since he had “instigated” her visit in 1942. Her tour most certainly had an effect, though perhaps not what was originally intended. While certain senators may have misrepresented their views to Stark, she certainly had a sympathetic hearing from pro-Arab State Department officials. Stark’s views were genuine and deep-seated¹³² so, at least on her part, there was nothing “financial or corrupt” about her motives, especially as she was an employee of the British government which covered the costs of her tour. The “British anti-Israeli propaganda” was not just real but quite effective, at least in the Foreign Office’s opinion, and certainly produced a counter-reaction among American Zionists.

By giving Ignatieff this flawed account, Berlin ensured that his “instigation” of Stark’s tour did not appear in the 1998 authorized biography. In fact, her name does not appear anywhere in the book. The only published reference to Berlin’s role appears in a letter to Angus Malcolm in August 1943: “meanwhile we have at last secured an invitation for Freya Stark.” A footnote reads: “It had been IB’s idea to invite her to the US.”¹³³ Berlin’s reference to “we” rather than “I” only serves to disguise his personal role in the invitation.

This episode in Berlin’s life does not feature in Dubnov’s work,¹³⁴ whose thesis is that Berlin’s formative years, including his wartime service, strongly inform the postwar liberal thought for which Berlin was later acclaimed.¹³⁵ Cherniss maintains that Berlin simply “functioned as a conduit between the British and the Zionist leadership. Each side sought to make use of him for their own purposes. He was generally able to navigate this difficult position without working for either side against the other.”¹³⁶ We then read about Berlin deliberately leaking news of the Anglo-American declaration to the Zionists but there is no mention of Stark.

The “authorised version” handed down to us does not include a key aspect of Berlin’s wartime experiences. Instead, we know of those instances where Berlin chose to indulge his Zionism and went against the British interest, either by leaking news of a joint Anglo-American declaration or, earlier in the 1930s, when Berlin leaked the names of the Peel Commission’s members to his uncle Yitzhak Samunov in Mandate Palestine.¹³⁷ This study therefore

¹³² Stark, *Dust*, 166: “I had felt strongly on this subject for many years.”

¹³³ LI, 442, 9 Aug. 1943.

¹³⁴ Dubnov, *Jewish Liberal*; Berlin’s June 1944 letter to Stark is quoted on 177; see also 252, n. 76. On this book, see Aileen Kelly’s rather harsh review, “Getting Isaiah Berlin Wrong”, *New York Review of Books*, 20 June 2013, and correspondence between Dubnov and Kelly at www.nybooks.com/articles/archives/2013/sep/26/isaiah-berlin-wrong/?utm_source=feedburner&utm_medium=feed&utm_campaign=Feed%3A+nybooks+%28The+New+York+Review+of+Books+529; accessed 9 Sept. 2013.

¹³⁵ Dubnov, *Jewish Liberal*, 201, 202.

¹³⁶ Cherniss, *Mind and its Time*, 56.

¹³⁷ Dubnov, *Jewish Liberal*, 150 and 115, 116.

updates “the fullest account yet of Berlin’s tortuous navigation between the demands of his Zionist commitments and his role as a diplomat in America during World War II.”¹³⁸

Gap or glory?

The available evidence (sketched here) suggests that a combination of Berlin’s complicated wartime attitude to pre-state Zionism and his “anxiety to please” his Foreign Office colleagues may be a plausible explanation for why, as an apparently lifelong Zionist, Berlin admired such a fierce critic of Zionism as Freya Stark. Given the passage of time, reconstructing anyone’s thinking remains inherently tentative. Berlin’s own written statements and the latest secondary literature both assist. We know that their meeting was a social success (while there is certainly no evidence of a romance): in February 1944, Berlin wrote of “Miss Freya Stark . . . with whom I get on well on the principle of incompatibles”.¹³⁹ Earlier that same month, in a letter to Angus Malcolm, Berlin referred to “poor charming Miss Stark, whom I think the world of”.¹⁴⁰ In the “bootleg correspondence”, Berlin told Nicholas: “I, unfortunately, get on excellently with her.”¹⁴¹ In June 1944, when Stark left America, Berlin regretted that “I am not to see you before you leave for England”, would “most gladly” arrange to be in New York to see her off and referred to her “house in Venezia”, to which she invited him.¹⁴²

The admiration was clearly mutual, with Stark referring to Berlin’s “beguiling” conversation, classing him as the “best talker” and “delightful”.¹⁴³ On her return to London, she told Berlin that “it would be a great pleasure to hear from you now and then.”¹⁴⁴ She clearly appreciated their contact, maintained a regular series of postcards and invitations to stay with her in Italy. In 1960, she told Berlin that his wartime letter “gave me so much pleasure”¹⁴⁵ and then stayed with the Berlins in Oxford.¹⁴⁶

¹³⁸ Joshua Cherniss, “It’s Complicated”, *Jewish Review of Books* 11 (Fall 2012), accessible at <http://www.jewishreviewofbooks.com/publications/detail/its-complicated>

¹³⁹ LI, 483, to Joseph Alsop, 11 Feb. 1944. Alsop (1910–1989), US journalist and friend of IB.

¹⁴⁰ MSB 111/177–178, 1 Feb. 1944. In the British context, both Berlin and Stark had somewhat exotic early lives, polyglot, foreign-born and with physical deformities, which may have caused some degree of instinctive sympathy for each other. (Berlin had a damaged arm from the forceps used by the doctor attending his mother’s labour. Stark suffered a childhood industrial accident which damaged one side of her face which she disguised with ever more elaborate hats).

¹⁴¹ MSB 272/143, 12 Jan. 1944.

¹⁴² LI, 494–5, 12 June 1944.

¹⁴³ Stark, *Letters: Vol. V*, 42, 6 Jan. 1944.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 107, 21 July 1944.

¹⁴⁵ MSB 161/135–136, Stark to IB, 31 Oct. 1960.

¹⁴⁶ MSB 164/36, to Stark, 23 Jan. 1961.

Berlin was not naïve about his contacts with Stark: he told Nicholas that “hideous accusations are levelled against me by the Zionists of conniving at her nefarious activities which I laugh off as best I can.”¹⁴⁷ For a time, he was able to use his influence to calm some Zionist protests about her visit, by referring them to “the ‘important conversations in London’ which they say are going on in London at this time, and how it would upset the nice calculations of statesmen, their friend the Prime Minister”.¹⁴⁸

Most importantly, Berlin makes clear in the “bootleg correspondence” why he “instigated” Stark’s visit: “I shall not regret my action even if she does go haywire (the Zionists would certainly tear me limb from limb if they knew my complicity) since the present onesidedness of information about Arabs is doing great harm – I had evidence of it for the wild Jewish Army talk in Hollywood and pro-Arabs are wanted to redress.”¹⁴⁹ He repeated this point to Nicholas, predicting that “doubtless in the end [I shall] be torn limb from limb by furious Zionists when my complicity is discovered.”¹⁵⁰ However, over many decades, Berlin ensured that his “complicity” remained unknown.

In his original July 1942 memorandum advocating Stark’s visit, Berlin noted that “the Jewish position in America is very strong. There is no one to answer them, for nobody cares to risk being called ‘anti-Semite’ (if a Gentile) and ‘appeaser’ (if a Jew) when there are neither votes nor fame to be gained thereby.” Berlin reasoned that as “limited remedial action”, Stark’s visit might help to emphasize the “difficulties of mass post-war immigration into Palestine.”¹⁵¹ Quite where this suggestion placed Berlin in relation to the wider Zionist movement, including the moderate, pro-British line which Berlin ostensibly shared with Weizmann, is clear from Stark’s diary: “[Colonel] Gerald de Gaury [1897–1984] . . . tells me that Weizmann described me as ‘doing a lot of harm,’ when he met him in London the other day.”¹⁵²

Weizmann told Bracken that Stark’s US activities on behalf of the Ministry of Information were causing his American colleagues “complications” and raised this with Bracken over lunch in February 1944.¹⁵³ Nor was Weizmann under any illusions about Stark’s activities, telling Morgenthau that Stark was “definitely anti-Zionist” and against whose activities “we have no

¹⁴⁷ MSB 272/155, 17 Feb. 1944.

¹⁴⁸ MSB 272/147, 19 Jan. 1944.

¹⁴⁹ MSB 111/95, to Paul Scott-Rankine, 20 Oct. 1943; MSB 111/100, 26 Oct. 1943.

¹⁵⁰ MSB 272/92, 9, 10, 11 Nov. 1943.

¹⁵¹ FO 371/31379, 2 July 1942.

¹⁵² FO 371/40131, diary entry, 15 April 1944. Gerald de Gaury, military officer, Arabist, explorer, historian and diplomat.

¹⁵³ *The Letters and Papers of Chaim Weizmann*, Series A Letters, vol. 21, January 1943–May 1945, ed. Barnet Litvinoff (Rutgers University: Transaction Books, and Jerusalem: Israel Universities Press, 1979), 126, letter of 10 Feb. 1944.

redress”.¹⁵⁴ Weizmann had previously entertained high hopes for Berlin, observing in 1940 that “Mr Berlin was a good Zionist” and believing that “Mr Berlin could be very useful.”¹⁵⁵

Rory Miller has underlined the gap between the objectives of even the most moderate, pro-British Weizmannites and Stark’s American tour. “British officials conceived and organised Stark’s tour at the height of the destruction of European Jewry, when the fate of many of Europe’s Jews was already known.”¹⁵⁶ We have long known that Berlin suffered “inner turbulence” and “personal value conflict”¹⁵⁷ as a result of dual allegiances to Britain and Zionism. Berlin told Ignatieff: “one of my reasons for not remaining in the Foreign Office was (a) that I didn’t want to live two lives, and (b) the fact that I was a Jew and a Zionist. This was bound to create some conflict, by which the Foreign Office’s policy would be bound to be something which I would feel very strongly about, and this would trouble me, and make them suspicious.”¹⁵⁸ In Shlomo Avineri’s sensitive account: “Berlin had to make a number of tough psychological choices . . . living in two worlds, striving to be ‘a Jew in private, and a human being in public.’ . . . This dichotomy obviously exacted its price – perhaps nowhere more apparent than during his service in Washington”.¹⁵⁹

Clive James referred to the risk of Berlin becoming “party to a crime”,¹⁶⁰ while Christopher Hitchens wrote of Berlin’s “agony”.¹⁶¹ In Ignatieff’s account of Berlin’s “conflict of loyalties”, “when he had to choose, he had chosen his Jewish loyalties over his British ones.”¹⁶² Rory Miller has stressed “the depth of indifference to Jewish suffering” among senior Foreign Office officials.¹⁶³ Given Berlin’s “instigation” of the tour, this serves as an important, practical example of a pro-British outcome to the “inner turbulence” from which Berlin suffered.

Nor was the Stark episode the only example of Berlin appearing to choose his British over his Zionist loyalties. In 1944, Jacob Landau, the head of the widely syndicated Jewish Telegraphic Agency, which served and could

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 147, to Henry Morgenthau Jr, 27 March 1944.

¹⁵⁵ *The Letters and Papers of Chaim Weizmann*, Series B Papers, vol. 2, December 1931–April 1952, ed. Barnet Litvinoff (Rutgers University: Transaction Books, and Jerusalem: Israel Universities Press, 1984), 407, 408.

¹⁵⁶ Karsh and Miller, “Freya Stark in America”, 330.

¹⁵⁷ Crowder, *Berlin*, 36, 136.

¹⁵⁸ MI 18, 5 April 1989.

¹⁵⁹ Avineri, “Jew and a Gentleman”, 89–90.

¹⁶⁰ Clive James, “Guest from the Future: Gaps and Glories in the Legacy of Isaiah Berlin”, *Times Literary Supplement*, 3 Sept. 2004, 3–8.

¹⁶¹ Christopher Hitchens, “Moderation or Death”, *London Review of Books* 20, no. 23, 26 Nov. 1998, 3–11.

¹⁶² Ignatieff, *Berlin*, 118.

¹⁶³ Karsh and Miller, “Freya Stark in America”, 331.

therefore influence many of the leading US newspapers – and by extension, US public opinion – sought permission from the Ministry of Information to visit London. Paul Gore-Booth wrote from the Washington Embassy to Angus Malcolm in London: “At Isaiah Berlin’s suggestion I am addressing you personally on the following matter . . . Landau is non-Zionist in persuasion and is always willing to damp down Zionist extravagancies: he has been consistently friendly to us and is, we feel, well worth a little friendly attention. In the coming battle with the Zionists he might well prove a valuable ally. . . . his interests are purely political and his value from our point of view is mainly as a damper on Zionist agitation.” Angus Malcolm responded: “I know little about Mr Landau personally. But Mr Berlin who saw a lot of him in NY always maintained that he was capable of being turned to us owing to his dislike – and fear – of corybantic Zionism.” The Ministry of Information obliged, with Major-General A. J. C. Pollock, the Director of its Middle East Division, writing: “The fact that the suggestion originated with anyone so well informed about the trends of Jewish opinion in the US as Isaiah Berlin, convinces us that it would be worth while to take some trouble with Landau”.¹⁶⁴

Accounting for Berlin’s admiration for Stark, beyond merely the “principle of incompatibles”, requires an understanding of his Zionism at this point. Dubnov refers to the “personal dilemmas, existential doubts and ideological queries he experienced in the 1940s, and especially those related to his Jewish identity and ambivalent love affair with Zionism.”¹⁶⁵ Berlin’s Zionism was coloured by scepticism, hesitation, critical distance and a tendency to remain a bystander rather than a direct participant. In 1937, Berlin foresaw a Jewish state as merely a “nation of Jewish hotel keepers & souvenir vendors”.¹⁶⁶ He told Ignatieff that his wartime view of a Jewish state was that: “I didn’t particularly want a Jewish State, any more than Weizmann did. Home Rule, yes, some kind of Jewish establishment, but State? I wasn’t very sure they would govern themselves very successfully.”¹⁶⁷

In 1972, Berlin made clear the personal distaste he had felt thirty years earlier for the more radical American Zionists:

The [Zionist] extremists, both of the right and of the left, who, out of bitterness or for temperamental reasons, advocated ruthless policies . . . seemed to put the satisfaction of their own emotional needs above the attainable goals of the cause

¹⁶⁴ FO 371/40131, 7 Aug. 1944, Paul Gore-Booth. FO 371/40131, 24 Aug. 1944, Angus Malcolm. FO 371/40132, 22 Sept. 1944, Maj.-Gen. A. J. C. Pollock.

¹⁶⁵ Dubnov, “What is Jewish (If Anything) about Isaiah Berlin’s Philosophy?”, *Religions* 3, no. 2 (2012), 289–319 (310).

¹⁶⁶ LI, 23 Aug. 1937, 248.

¹⁶⁷ MI 18, 5 April 1989.

which they supported . . . The politics of the extremists seemed to me politics of despair at a time when sanity could still prevail; their goals seemed to me utterly Utopian, their methods horrifying, and likely to lead to results which only fanatics could desire. I was, and remain . . . a convinced gradualist. The attractiveness to me, therefore, of Weizmann's outlook was obvious.¹⁶⁸

Berlin's attraction to Weizmann's gradualism, non-confrontation and belief in Churchill and the British connection also neatly sought to resolve the risk of 'dual loyalties' for someone in British diplomatic service.

As for most American Jews, Berlin regarded them as either "the dignified dead, of German descent, dull benevolent, pompous, far from brave, unwilling to act, rich and not very generous [or] lively intriguers."¹⁶⁹ Berlin therefore saw "the American Zionists as a vocal minority among the deeply divided public of American Jewry, a group of propagandists and demagogues who were willing to risk the Anglo-American alliance for the sake of their own narrow particularistic cause."¹⁷⁰ In 1943, he told Angus Malcolm: "In my view the Zionists' tactic . . . is very dangerous . . . They must have irritated the State Department to a degree; I should imagine the President is really displeased and they are bound to pay for this sooner or later . . . The State Department hates them worse than communists now".¹⁷¹

Dubnov's thesis is that for Berlin, the problem with reports of the Holocaust was that they "were used and abused to apply pressure on the British government."¹⁷² By persisting with these views, Dubnov identified and connected in Berlin "two failings – recognizing the shift of power in Zionist politics in time and comprehending the magnitude of the Holocaust."¹⁷³ According to Dubnov, it was only in mid-1944 that Berlin "began to realize that Weizmannism as a pragmatic political approach was most likely a doomed project."¹⁷⁴

If Berlin began to change his views only very late in the day, when he initially suggested Stark's tour in 1942, it was shortly after the highly contentious Biltmore Resolution of May 1942. That had allied Ben-Gurion with Abba Hillel Silver and other active pro-Zionist, anti-White Paper American

¹⁶⁸ ZP, 667; see also 670–671, 684–687, 692.

¹⁶⁹ LI, 31 July 1941, 375.

¹⁷⁰ Arie M. Dubnov, "Between Liberalism and Jewish Nationalism: Young Isaiah Berlin on the Road towards Diaspora Zionism", *Modern Intellectual History* 4, issue 2 (Aug. 2007): 303–26 (313).

¹⁷¹ LI, 9 Aug. 1943, 441.

¹⁷² Dubnov, *Jewish Liberal*, 173. For Berlin's account of when, and the extent to which, he learned of the Holocaust during the war, see generally L3, 503–22.

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*, 167.

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 176.

Jews, thereby beginning the process which ultimately led to Weizmann losing the presidency of the World Zionist Organization in 1946. Between 1942 and 1944, Berlin would still have been convinced that such “agitation” was “counter-productive”, as he told the American Zionist leader Emanuel Neumann (1893–1980) in 1972.¹⁷⁵ Hence what Berlin described as “onesidedness” to his British colleagues in October 1943 and the need for pro-Arabs to “redress” the balance. In June 1944, Berlin was still urging Silver “in Parliamentary language that Dr Weizmann thought him a savage and begged him terrifically to desist from ruining himself and the Zionists by bringing motions in Congress and generally screaming.”¹⁷⁶ However, by the end of the war, Zionist politics and events had caught up with Berlin’s prolonged association with Weizmann, leading to their views being “blown sky high”.

Nevertheless, Berlin’s evident distaste for Silver and Bergson’s¹⁷⁷ anti-British “agitation” only goes so far in explaining his “instigation” of, and sustained involvement in Stark’s tour. Weizmann clearly felt that her tour had caused “a lot of harm.” This does not suggest that Berlin’s proposal was made out of loyalty to Weizmann. Nor is it sufficient to suggest that Berlin’s reference to “onesidedness” meant that he wanted the alternative view to be heard out of simple fairness. Berlin was only too aware of the political consequences of such naïveté.

Berlin’s “instigation” of Stark’s tour evidently went way beyond what even Weizmann or any of his followers sought, in 1942 or thereafter. While this may therefore seem out of character for Berlin, it is more understandable when one considers what even he regarded as his greatest character flaw – his “anxiety to please”.¹⁷⁸ When he wrote his original note in early July 1942, Berlin had only recently started his new job at the embassy in Washington, having moved down from the BIS in New York. The Biltmore Resolution had occurred two months beforehand, meaning that Berlin was freshly exposed to the full blast of Foreign Office hostility. Berlin’s personal distaste for such “agitation” may have combined with his sense of being an outsider and an “anxiety to please” his new employers, before he was fully able to see the consequences. This then snowballed into Zionist uproar, official American government concern, policy incoherence at the heart of Whitehall and an unrepentant Stark. Given the controversy, Berlin evidently believed that it was safer for his reputation not to disclose the full story of the Stark tour for the rest of his life. Only by adopting this study’s new approach as regards the

¹⁷⁵ MSB 513/253, 9 Nov. 1972. Emmanuel Neumann, lawyer and political representative of the Jewish Agency in Washington in the 1940s, serving with Rabbi Abba Hillel Silver as vice chairman of the American Zionist Emergency Council.

¹⁷⁶ MSB 111/258–260, to A. Malcolm, 20 June 1944.

¹⁷⁷ Peter Bergson (1915–2001), pseudonym of Hillel Kook, Revisionist Zionist activist, politician and prominent member of the Irgun.

available archival sources, starting with the “bootleg correspondence”, can one arrive at this new account, rooted in Berlin’s own views and personality.

As the introduction mentions, since the available evidence raises more questions than it could possibly answer, this study also considers a more speculative, byzantine possibility: that Berlin’s instigation of Stark’s tour was an elaborate double bluff to sabotage British policy from the inside. This is highly intriguing but, in the absence of any documentary evidence, remains pure conjecture. (Indeed, Berlin’s heartfelt, private language in the “bootleg correspondence” that he did not “regret” his action, even if the Zionists discovered his “complicity” and tore him “limb from limb” is difficult to reconcile with a double bluff, unless Berlin was prepared to risk duping his very closest colleagues). Two well-placed authorities have both suggested it separately and completely independently: firstly, Dr Henry Hardy, Berlin’s literary editor and close collaborator since the 1970s,¹⁷⁹ and secondly, Jane Fletcher Geniesse, Stark’s latest biographer.¹⁸⁰ Geniesse met Berlin in London on a number of occasions in 1989 and interviewed him at his London residence. It became very clear during those conversations that, however ostensibly polite relations had been in public between Berlin and Stark (with correspondence between them until the 1970s), in private, Geniesse understood that Berlin “loathed” and “despised” Stark. Geniesse clearly recalled the “vehemence” with which Berlin spoke of Stark as a “ferocious Arabist” and regretted not having stood up for his Zionist beliefs more strongly. Berlin’s “anger” at Stark (and possibly his younger, more hesitant, self) was so clear that he became increasingly wary of speaking to a biographer sympathetic to Stark.

Geniesse’s suggestion is that Berlin knew that the American public and opinion makers would not take to Stark, whereas many in the British élite admired her elegance and wit. Elements in both the State Department and the Foreign Office, principally the Arabists, did admire Stark. However, given what the American public already knew about the Nazi persecution of the Jews, the reaction to Stark in Congress, the US press and lobby groups was a “barrage” which “chastened” Stark. It was therefore “brilliant” of Berlin to suggest that an invitation be extended to Stark to tour America as he knew she would “bomb” there. Even though he was quite aware of her anti-Zionist views (leaving aside her wider views on Jews in general),¹⁸¹ Berlin would also

¹⁷⁸ Henry Hardy, ed., *The Book of Isaiah: Personal Impressions of Isaiah Berlin* (Woodbridge, Suffolk: Boydell Press, 2009), 18.

¹⁷⁹ Telephone interview, Sept. 2012.

¹⁸⁰ Telephone interview, 4 March 2013.

¹⁸¹ Moorehead, *Stark*, 84: “she was not, perhaps, the most obvious of choices for the task . . . More important, she has never been admiring of the Jews.” See also Karsh and Miller, “Freya Stark in America”, 327, referring to Stark’s “antipathy towards Jews”.

have known that Stark had powerful friends and he therefore cultivated her. The fact that Berlin and Stark maintained a private correspondence into the 1970s was simply to their mutual advantage. Geniesse's personal impression of Berlin in 1989 was of a "cunning" man and a "quiet but extremely effective manipulator" who was "a master at pleasing his interlocutors". Berlin would never have admitted to "setting up" Stark, for fear of causing a controversy about it in his or Stark's lifetime.

Be that as it may, in August 1943, Berlin facetiously invited Malcolm to "picture [Berlin's] indignation at being charged with the appalling crime of Zionism . . . and generally perjuring myself out of my pew in Paradise in an excess of pseudo-bureaucratic zeal."¹⁸²

Despite the sarcasm, this remark neatly captures the competing tensions at the heart of Berlin's wartime service. It also touches on Yellin-Mor's speculations about Berlin's "psychological need [to] relieve himself of an oppressive burden".¹⁸³ Given such "incommensurable" demands, it is hardly surprising that Berlin spent the rest of his days seeking to keep this part of the historical record out of his "authorised version" of events. There would not have been any space for this episode, which reflected Berlin's deep wartime scepticism and ambivalence about a Jewish state, even in what Dubnov has described as Berlin's "Diaspora Zionism" – as the 1972 controversy suggested. However, if this has to be seen as one of the "gaps" identified by Clive James, ultimately it does not detract from Berlin's wider intellectual "glories".

¹⁸² LI, 439, 2 Aug. 1943.

¹⁸³ MSB 513/183-197; Yellin-Mor, "Apologetic Account of a Sceptic".