

Dear all,

I have read this paper on the *Journal of Genocide Research* with great interest and while I am intrigued by the topic and see its relevance to the field, I have a few methodological comments I would like to make. For the sake of transparency, I mention that I also participated in the survey and was one of the 'accidental' second group of people who filled out the survey after its distribution on the listserv.

Besides the unnecessarily polemic and hostile language of the paper, I welcome that the issue of normative bias within academic scholarship on the topic of genocide studies is approached. However, I have three methodological critiques, the first two regarding an overinterpretation of the results (and thus a misled discussion of them), the other regarding the biases of the study.

First, as the respondent is allowed to give multiple answers to each question, the non-selection of an item suggests a non-endorsement of this particular item (with the option to skip the question if one has no opinion or to state that none of the above are correct). What I mean is that the result of 33% of respondents judging that the journal is anti-Semitic means that 67% do not think that it is anti-Semitic. Thus, of the expert opinions collected on this item, two-thirds of respondents, do not agree with this characterisation which Israel Charny subsequently takes as demonstrated. This lack of discussion of what the results actually mean, fundamentally undermines the paper and makes one feel the author is biased. With percentages under 50%, the author should be discussing why a majority feel that the statement is not judged as such, rather than stating that expert opinions see it as anti-Semitic. This critique can be levelled at other items.

Second, the survey was not clear on what it meant by the 'minimization of the Holocaust'. The author interprets minimisation as the minimisation of the *significance* of the Holocaust, as a re-interpretation of the Holocaust as not as terrible as the evidence irrevocably has shown us that it is and puts it in line with denials of the Holocaust. However, this was not made transparent in the survey, and other interpretations of minimisation are possible, most obviously in the context of the debate on the uniqueness of the Holocaust. Without any explanation in the survey, this category of minimisation can easily be taken to mean that the articles in question minimise the role of the Holocaust *in genocide studies*, vis-à-vis the genocide of other victim groups besides the Jews by the Nazis or other genocides before or after the Holocaust of the Jews. In this sense, minimisation means relativism of uniqueness without relativizing the horror of the Holocaust. Thus, the author's characterisation of minimisation as a dismissal of the "powerful meaning of the Holocaust" (p. 22) and as insulting to the Jewish people and other victim groups, goes much too far in interpreting what the survey respondents deemed the articles to be doing. It is possible that Israel

Charny's interpretation of his respondent's views is correct, but we have absolutely no way of knowing this because the way the survey was created does not allow us to see these respondents' views.

Third, on the issues of bias, I fear that the author makes it a little too easy for himself by simply stating that the survey are biased towards his personal connections, the older generation and possibly towards Jewish participants. The first of these is particularly problematic, particularly as the respondents in this first wave of invites seemed to attribute a certain normative position to the author and the 'agenda' behind the survey, as evidenced in the final quote of the paper lauding the author's effort "taking on the anti-Israel, antisemitic leftists who have taken over editorship of the Journal of Genocide Research and have always been the leaders of INOGS" (p. 25). If a certain subset of experts who are in Israel Charny's network are the ones who are being primarily asked, then a bias could be quite severe (if one assumes that people typically associate with others who have fundamentally the same view of the world, if not in specific details).

Furthermore, the second wave of respondents who were not hand-picked are portrayed as less diligent and having an agenda of trying to save the reputation of the journal, strengthening my impression that the first group of respondents were expected to probably have a more critical stance towards JGR and were selected as such. In the end, any survey is only as good as the data it creates and biases in who is asked and in which context, play an enormous part in this. In terms of biases introduced by the survey itself, the wording of the author-summarised parts of the excerpts could have been put in more neutral language, and I could imagine that the statements provoked a certain bias in responses. Also, the fact that the author "sent out [many of the invitations] individually often with personal comments added to the standard draft" makes it difficult for us to know what bias this introduced at the outset of these specific respondent's survey results. It should be noted that these two points are important but are significantly smaller than those on respondent selection bias.

My critique of Israel Charny's new paper does not mean that his interpretation of the JGR articles is necessarily wrong, what it does mean, however, is that his interpretation of the experts' survey responses and the implications of these does not hold up; that we thus simply cannot know whether or not his interpretations of these articles as anti-Semitic, anti-Israel or Holocaust-minimising actually represents the opinions of the wider genocide studies community.

In a small aside, I was not able to find the data generated in this survey on the journal homepage. I would like to encourage the *Journal for the Study of Antisemitism* to publish the dataset with all responses (incl. non-responses) of each respondent to each item, so that others can use this data for their own

research. This would be in accordance with common practices of survey research.

I look forward to further interaction on this topic of normative biases within Holocaust and genocide research, and hope that the quality of an evidence-based debate will meet the high standards 21st century academia is now accustomed to.

Best wishes
Tim Williams