ETHNIC VIOLENCE IN ROMAN ALEXANDRIA:
A COMPARATIVE APPROACH

Richard Alston
Royal Holloway, University of London

ABSTRACT

The aim of this article is to offer a new approach to the study of the riots in Alexandria in 38 CE. This riot is one of the better attested outbreaks of mass urban violence from antiquity. Yet, in spite of the weight of scholarship, the rioting remains a puzzle. The article argues that rather than seeing the riots as a function of deep-seated hostility between Greek and Jewish communities or as a dispute over citizenship rights, we need to see the riot as embedded within the urban sociology of Alexandria. A close reading of the literary accounts points to the importance of associations in the organisation of the riots. The article argues that the associations were integrated with the Alexandrian political elite through large social networks, to which the Jews had limited access. Alexandrian politics centred on competing networks. These networks allowed a community of interest to develop between elites and lower class members of the network. In explaining how that competition might have encouraged extreme violence, the article deploys a range of comparative examples concerning the operation of such networks and extreme civil violence. In a similar fashion to several of the referenced cases, I argue that the Alexandrian violence resulted from a political crisis which allowed both elite and street-level political agents to mobilise violent support in pursuance of their individual interests. The result was to polarise the city and set the conditions for the subsequent decades of violence.

KEYWORDS: Roman history, Philo, Alexandria, riots, comparative approach, Jews, community relations

Introduction

My aim in this article is to offer a new approach to the study of the riots in Alexandria in 38 CE. Philo's *In Flacc.* and *Leg.* together with Claudius' 'Letter to the Alexandrians' (*P. Lond.* 1912) and the *Acta Alexandrinorum* mean that it is one of the better attested outbreaks of mass urban violence from antiquity.[1] Yet, in spite of the weight of scholarship, the rioting remains a puzzle and its proximate and underlying causes are a matter of debate.

The outbreaks of large-scale inter-communal violence in Alexandria from 38 CE onwards demand an explanation rooted in the sociology of the city. Our problem, one common to historians of antiquity, is the paucity of data from which we can reconstruct that urban sociology. As a result, we are bound to turn to comparative data. In a recent article, Atkinson (2006) drew on parallels from 'The Troubles' in Northern Ireland and football violence to explore an urban sociology of violence. I utilise a different set of paradigms drawn from a range of studies of modern inter-communal ethnic conflicts. I regard these instances as a 'better fit' largely because the Alexandrian violence was evidently closely connected to state politics. These instances stress the importance of competition between members of differentiated large socio-economic networks. Such networks wished to gain access to and control of the benefits provided by state institutions and became violent in that competition.

The advantages of such a model are various. In the first instance, it embeds our understanding of Alexandrian violence within the operation of social networks for which we have some corroborating evidence and which would have had an immediate and everyday claim on the loyalty of the urban population. By contrast, explanations that emphasise ethnic motivations have to establish why such factors would have had motivating force for the urban population when ethnic conflict does not seem to have been a substantial element in urban violence in other ancient communities. Secondly, my approach renders secondary the difficult issues of Alexandrian citizenship with which much of the scholarship has wrestled.[2] The problem that such explanations face

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[1] For texts and editions of the *Acta*, see Harker 2008:179–211.
[2] Compare Kerkeslager 2006.

is whether people would really slaughter their neighbours over a lack of clarity in the law. It seems sensible to assume that there was an underlying issue.

We can also avoid a drift into an 'essentialist' position which would see cities of mixed ethnicities as inherently divided and combustible.[3] An 'essentialist' model of ethnic conflict fails to explain why the situation in Alexandrian worsened in the mid first century CE or why ethnic conflict is not such a notable feature in the sociology of other Roman imperial cities. A network approach allows for the attested ethnic prejudice against Jews without postulating a vitriolic antisemitism familiar from modernity.

Viewing the conflict as one between competitive networks allows us to identify the relationship to the Roman state and its representatives as the element which raised stakes in the competition and thereby encouraged its manifestation in large-scale violence. In my view, such an approach brings us closer to Philo's narrative of the violence in which he represents the violence as emerging in the everyday circumstances of the city and in a failure of the Roman authorities.

I begin by treating traditional approaches to the violence which see it as manifestation of ethnic tension or a legal-constitutional crisis. I read these approaches against Philo's account, which reports the legal issues not as a cause of the violence but as an element through which the persecution of the Jews was manifested. In the second section, I engage in a close examination of Philo's narrative. Philo is, of course, an engaged reporter of these events, whose friends and family likely suffered in the violence. One would no more expect an objective account from Philo than one would of other victims of ethnic violence. Philo's account has polemical elements and is complex in its literary forms: it conforms to a Jewish tradition of historical-religious writing in which a narrative arc of

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[3] Haas 1997:1–14 provides a nuanced view of the competition between groups and how that might spill over into violence. In the older view of Tcherikover 1957:5, separation is natural and paralleled by modern instances.

persecution, redemption, and the repentance of the persecutor is followed.[4]

Philo depicts the attack on the Jews as an irrational act. Yet the sequence of events hints at a political logic and a sociological basis for the violence, particularly in relation to the importance of associations. We may be sceptical of his interpretations and attitudes, but even if it is unlikely that opponents would have agreed with his account, Philo's portrayal was likely a plausible, if tendentious, representation of Alexandrian society.

In the third section, I engage in a comparative study. The purpose is to provide historical instances of the circumstances in which competing socio-political networks developed strong ethnic identities and deployed extreme violence. I consider 'pathways' by which societies which have at their political centre large social networks move from competition between networks to ethnic violence and how ethnicity can become central to the operation of the state. These models help us re-imagine the processes by which Roman Alexandria moved from ethnic divisions and tensions to ethnic violence.

In the final section, I return to a narrative of the violence of 38 CE to explore the link between elite political crisis and street-level politics. I argue that an identity of interest emerged between elements of the Alexandrian political elite and elements of the Alexandria populace which encouraged that populace to violence, partly as a means of securing victory in their localised competition and partly as an exercise in reinforcing their identity and control in the city. Such violence is as much about generating a communal group as it is about destroying a group perceived as oppositional.

Ethnicity and Constitutionalism

Modern scholars writing about the events of 38 CE are willing to use terms such as 'pogrom' or 'antisemitism', usually with caution and aware of the specific historical associations of the terms. It is a tendency that dates to at least the first decade of the twentieth

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[4] See below and Alston 1997 for a comparison with 3 *Maccabees*.

century.[5] Tcherikover and Fuks (1959:25) reference the '"Jewish question" in the modern sense of the term' as emerging in the early imperial period. Van der Horst's commentary on the *In Flacc.* describes the events as 'the first pogrom', but also states (2003:19) that 'the pogroms are entirely different from what happened in Alexandria'. Schäfer's (1997) study of anti-Jewish statements in Classical writers employs 'Judeophobia', though he writes (6–7) that 'I have no reservation about using the term "anti-semitism" despite its obvious anachronism'.[6]

Classical consciousness of ethnic difference and consequent prejudice is not unique to the Jewish-Greek-Roman encounter, but the relative absence of ethnic conflict makes tempting a reliance on Jewish 'exceptionality' as an explanation.[7] Kasher (1985) points to the slightness of the evidence (essentially Claudius' 'Letter to the Alexandrians' and a fragmentary draft petition *C.P.Jud.* 2.151) that could be read as suggesting any Jewish desire for assimilation. Jewish difference was established by a separate *politeia* of the Jews and some cultural and spatial differentiation, in particular with regard to the treatment of women.[8] That separation has been seen as sparking xenophobic and violent reactions.[9]

All expressions of ethnic identity involve a measure of separation and differentiation. Yet, even as Philo's writings represent and reinforce Jewish separation and adherence to different customs and laws, they, especially in his allegorical reading of Biblical texts, show a deep familiarity with Greek culture and philosophy and a commitment to Judaism as a form of universal learning.[10] His family

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[5] Wilcken 1909; Staehelin 1905; Bell 1941; cf. Tcherikover 1957.

[6] See also Sevenster 1975; Feldman 1993. I prefer here to use 'anti-Jewish' to avoid assimilation of this episode to outbreaks of violence in later periods which were underpinned by the varied ideologies of antisemitism. I also avoid using 'Greek' to describe the perpetrators of the violence since this seems to prejudge the divisions as primarily ethnic.

[7] Simon 1986:286; Tcherikover 1979; Fraser 1972:57–58.

[8] Philo, *Special Laws* 3.173–75; *Quaestiones in Genesim* 4.15; *In Flacc.* 86–91; Alston 1997; Sly 1990.

[9] For Philo's separateness, see Mendelson 1988 and discussion below.

[10] The bibliography for this question is enormous. See, for example, Birnbaum 1996 for Philo as a universalist and the balanced account in

are an obvious example of a successful Jewish engagement with the gentile world.[11] The documentary record of the Roman period and the difficult of confidently identifying Jews within it suggest that the cultural boundaries that separated Jews from their fellow Alexandrians were frequently crossed.[12]

The core question is not, however, one of the degree of separation, but how any difference was politicised and rendered violent. Such violence can be explained as a performance of racial ideologies through which a racial-ethnic identity for the community is asserted and enforced. Philip Gourevitch (1988) talking of the violence in Rwanda observed that 'genocide, after all, is an exercise in community building' and Arjan Appadurai (2006:7), focused on South Asia, argues that modern ethnic violence 'may be seen as part of an emerging repertoire of efforts to produce previously unrequired levels of certainty about social identity, values, survival and dignity'. For Late Antique Alexandria, Christopher Haas (1997:12) offers a similar model in which competition between pagans and Jews, Jews and Christians, pagans and Christians, and Christians and Christians escalated into civic violence as 'a means of reasserting some threatened aspect of the traditional social, political and religious order' which was perceived as essential to the hegemony of a particular community. But although one could plausibly see the Christian violence of the fourth century as 'community-building' and a response to a theological need for homogeneity, a more complex explanation is needed for a

Termini 2009. On the literary/philosophical discussions, see, *exempli gratia*, the essays collected in Runia and Sterling 1997 and Lévy 1998; Winter 2002; Birnbaum 2001. Dyck 2002 sees Philo's philosophical method as an assimilation to Greek culture that replicated his socio-cultural and political assimilation.

[11] See the discussion and further references in Turner 1954, Schwartz 2009 and Sly 1996. See also Honigman 1997.

[12] See the discussion in Bohak 2002, who argues that Jewish settlers in the Hellenistic disapora quickly assimilated, and Baslez 2017 for community celebrations in Alexandria that crossed the ethnic divide. See Honigman 2009 for Jewish strategies of differentiation and assimilation in various communities of Ptolemaic Egypt. More generally, see Gruen 2009 for Jewish exogamy and the survey in Rajak 1992.

perception of threat that might spark the anti-Jewish violence of the first century.

That further element has been found in the relationship between Alexandria and Rome. This has been discussed extensively, with attention focusing on two key issues, the lack of traditional political institutions in Roman Alexandria and Alexandrian citizenship.[13] Bell (1941) argued influentially that Alexandrian anti-Jewish feeling was, in fact, a cover for anti-Roman feeling.[14]

This view depends heavily on texts of the *Acta Alexandrinorum* which link attacks on the emperor with anti-Jewish statements, some of which reference Jewish Alexandrian citizenship.[15] Harker (2008:179-211) lists 73 likely texts of *Acta* found across Egypt. Most of those fragments make no mention of Jews. The *Acta*, which focus on conflict between Alexandrian community leaders and tyrannical Romans, are unusual literary representations of the relationship between Rome and a provincial city. Harker argues that they should be seen as widely dispersed dissident literary works which, whatever their underlying historical context, were largely fictional.[16] Tcherikover also read the *Acta* as fictional and supported the contemporary academic consensus that the antisemitism of the texts was secondary to their dissident nature.[17] Yet it remains unclear why in 38 CE anti-Roman feeling would manifest as anti-

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[13] Delia 1991; Kasher 1985.

[14] Compare the summary in Smallwood 1976:224–50.

[15] Most importantly, *C.P. Jud.* 2.155, which references a foreigner receiving citizenship; *C.P. Jud.* 2. 156, an account of the trial of Isidoros before Claudius which in (b) relates antisemitic insults levied by Isidoros against Agrippa and Claudius, and (c) brings up the tax status of Jews and their supposed difference from Alexandrians (see the new edition in Magnani 2009); *C.P. Jud* 2. 157 in which an interview with Trajan about the Jews turns into an attack on the supposed Jews in his council; *C. P. Jud.* 2.158

[16] Gambetti 2008 argues that some of the texts may have been genuine accounts of trials.

[17] Tcherikover and Fuks 1959:57–59, with further references.

Jewish violence and further why the Roman authorities failed to understand that connection.[18]

One explanation is to view the violence as defending the exclusivity of Alexandrian citizenship from Jews' attempts to claim equality or citizenship. Sandra Gambetti (2009) relates the violence to issues of citizenship and status:

> The Greeks attacked … either the enfranchised Jews, because they did not want the Jews to share in their full political privileges, or the Jews seeking citizenship, because they did not want the Jews to acquire it. (Gambetti 2009:9)

She argues that the concern was given prominence by a census held by Flaccus which raised questions about Jewish privileges.[19]

Debates over access to citizenship and related privileges might entail a need for the 'previously unrequired levels of certainty about social identity, values, survival and dignity' identified by Appadurai (2006:7) as a cause for ethnic violence. It is also evident that the citizenship status of the Jews became an issue of a polemic, to which Josephus, *Contra Apionem*, is our best insight.

Nevertheless, although citizenship became a crux in a debate about Jewish status, citizenship disputes do not appear to have been the primary cause of the ethnic violence in 38 CE. In Claudius' 'Letter to the Alexandrians' (*P.Lond.* 1912 = *C.P.Jud.* 153), the emperor writes round the issues of conflict, perhaps characteristically (Griffin 1990). He fails to tell us what the Alexandrian ambassadors, and especially Dionysios of Theon (lines 74-76), actually said. The most explicit statements relate to the preservation of rights established by Augustus (lines 86-87), attendance at gymnasial games (lines 93-94), the enjoyment of social 'goods' in 'a foreign city' (line 95), and an injunction not to bring more Jews from Syria or Egypt. Claudius asserts that the Jews of the city do not belong there, but that the existing community had

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[18] See Smallwood 1976:233–34, who sees the attack on the Jews not as anti-semitism but a covert attack on Rome, but fails to explain why the Romans failed to defend their 'protégés'.

[19] Gambetti 2008:11–12 wishes to differentiate her analysis from essentialist views which would see the conflict as inherent to a multi-ethnic city.

rights which should be protected. He makes no explicit mention of citizenship.

Discussion of citizenship features in the *Legatio ad Gaium*, but only as a secondary issue. In Philo's report of the ambassadors' interview, Gaius centres the discussion on Jewish religious customs, particularly in relation to the difficulties the Jews had with the imperial cult. Towards the end of the audience, he asks the ambassadors about their citizenship (363). The phrasing does not suggest any attempt of the Jews to claim Alexandrian citizenship, rather a defence of their traditional rights and privileges. The discussion fails to progress and is brought to an end by Gaius (367).

In the same work, Philo discusses citizenship in relation to Augustus' treatment of the Jews in Rome. He claims that Augustus saw no incompatibility between their Roman and Jewish citizenship (157). What is meant by '*politeia*' in this context is open to debate. It seems likely that some of the discussion related to manumitted Jewish slaves who likely had Roman citizenship. But if their Roman citizenship can be understood, it is not clear what is meant by 'Jewish' citizenship. In the immediate context, the exercise of 'citizenship' is related to rights of peaceful residence in Rome, adherence to native customs, maintenance of synagogues, the holding of the Sabbath, education in (Jewish) philosophy, and the sending of money to Jerusalem (155-56). Philo's description cannot be reduced to legal formality and seems closer to 'community membership' than any specified legal identity. His rhetorical point was to draw a parallel between the rights of the Jews in Rome under Augustus and the violation of parallel rights in Alexandria.

The *Legatio* sets the references to citizenship in two specific contexts: the relationship with Roman imperial power, which in these dramatic circumstances centred on the institution of a statue of Gaius into the Temple, and the situation of the Jews in Alexandria and their violent exclusion from the spaces of the city.[20] Although one imagines that legal issues formed part of the ambassadorial brief, the *Legatio* is not making that case. The argument is about the capacity of the Jewish community to remain loyal to Rome and their long-recognised rights to peaceful enjoyment of privileges of

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[20] For the spatial aspects of the violence, see Alston 1997.

residence and to follow their traditional religious and cultural customs.

In this regard, the *Legatio* is similar to the fuller discussion of the issues in the *In Flaccum*. In that work, there are just three passages which directly reference the issue of citizenship. The *In Flaccum* opens seemingly following on from a narration of the anti-Jewish activities of Sejanus, which could hardly have been focused on Jewish citizenship in Alexandria.[21] It is not until 53-54, more than a quarter of the way through, that the issue of citizenship is raised in reporting an edict that declared the Jews 'foreigners and immigrants'. That edict came after the procession mocking Agrippa (36-39) and the desecration of the synagogues (40-41). The edict is understood as signalling official approval of anti-Jewish violence and it encouraged an intensification of that violence in the confining of the community to the Delta quarter and the looting of Jewish workshops and houses (55-57). In chapters 78-80, the leaders of the Jewish community are beaten after the manner of Egyptians. One might see this as a reference to the issue of citizenship, but it is treated as a dishonour and an act of violence in parallel to the subsequent invasion of Jewish houses (86-91) and abuse of Jewish women (95-96). Finally, Philo gives Flaccus a confessional in which he regrets his decision to declare the Jews foreign when in reality they were settlers with rights (αὐτοῖς ἐπιτίμοις οὖσι κατοίκοις), words which one imagines were carefully chosen (172). This is but one of many instances of Flaccus' regret. Philo expresses these instances in language compatible with the legal and institutional separation of the Jewish Alexandrian community from Alexandrian (Greek) citizens and with a narrative in which the Jewish community were attempting to maintain rights which were different to those of Alexandrian citizens.

To see the argument in 38 CE as being primarily about citizenship requires a radical departure from Philo's accounts,

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[21] Eusebius *HE* 2.5 attests five Philonic books dealing with the persecution of the Jews under Gaius. The attestation does not require us to imagine a single coherent work. One could postulate a sequence of different works concerned with the events. Other than the opening connective sentence, the *In Flacc.* appears to be self-contained.

which one could only explain on the presumption that Philo was being deliberately obfuscatory. In the absence of plausible evidence for Jewish infringement of Alexandrian citizenship rights, it is difficult to imagine, even in the deeply irrational world of ethnic violence, that the riots were sparked by a need to establish a clearer legal separation between Jewish Alexandrians and Alexandrian citizens. The status and rights of Jewish Alexandrians played their part in the rhetoric of violence in 38 CE, but they seem consequent on that violence, not its cause. Both accounts focus on Jews' rights to peacefully enjoy the social 'goods' in their communities, which include adherence to their own traditional customs, such as the maintenance of synagogues and the honouring of the Temple. Philo shows repeatedly that such enjoyments had in the past been seen as entirely compatible with loyalty to or membership of the Roman political community. The assault on legal rights should be taken as subsidiary to the issues that drove the conflict.

Yet, if we decide that the antipathies that led to the riot of 38 CE were not embedded in conflict over citizenship nor anti-Roman feeling nor in a primordial ethnic hostility, we are left without plausible motivation. Philo also avoids providing us with a motive. Instead, he attributes the violence to an irrational mob. Atkinson's (2006) response to this *aporia* is to focus on proximate causes, suggesting that the 'precious little' that sparked the violence was Agrippa's visit to the city, which is in keeping with Philo's accounts. We are familiar with sudden outbreaks of inter-communal violence from multiple modern instances and these are also often attributed to irrational mobs. But when such outbreaks are investigated they can be shown to have a sociological basis and a political logic. There is every reason to believe that the Alexandrian riots would have been similar. If Philo does not give us the political rationality, his narrative provides clues as to the sociological basis of the violence.

Philo's narrative, urban sociology and the associations of Roman Alexandria

In this section, I begin with a summary of the narrative in the *In Flaccum*. I use this analysis to identify the crucial role played in that narrative by the Alexandrian associations. The section then focuses

on those associations and their place within Alexandrian culture. I see the associations as linking the Alexandrian population with elite groups and city institutions, such as the gymnasium and the Temple of Sarapis. They functioned as institutional elements in social networks from which, for a variety of reasons, Jews were likely excluded. I argue that the violence should be understood as being between social networks within Alexandria which was propelled by conflicts in the highest political echelons, with which Philo's narrative begins.

According to the *In Flaccum*, after the loss of patrons in Rome, Flaccus, a previously efficient governor, was corrupted (1-19): 'the ruler became the governed, and the governed became governors' (19). Three leaders of the Alexandrians, Dionysios, Lampo, and Isidoros offered to use their influence to intercede on Flaccus' behalf with the emperor (20-23). Their price was the Jews. Rather than rejecting their overtures as promising civil war, Flaccus covertly supported them by favouring non-Jews in legal cases (24). Jewish celebrations on the visit of Agrippa (25-32) provoked a counter demonstration (33-34), which Flaccus did not suppress (35). A further demonstration followed, starting in the gymnasium, in which Karabas was given the role of Agrippa (36-39). Once more Flaccus did not act (40). The crowd then called upon Flaccus to install the imperial image in synagogues (41-42), which Flaccus allowed (43). This crime receives extended treatment (45-52). At this point Flaccus revoked the rights of the Jewish community (53-54).

Following the decree, attacks on Jewish property began (54) and the Jews were driven into one part of one of the quarters of the city (55-57). Jews were robbed, starved, and sometimes murdered (57-71). Jewish sympathizers, described as 'friends and relations' (φίλοι καὶ συγγενεῖς), were also punished and imprisoned (72).[22] Flaccus

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[22] The same non-Jewish sympathisers are identified in 64 as sources of food and protection, which echoes a reference in 60 to 'friends and relations' who might ransom captives. Their presence in the narrative shows that there was a porous social boundary between the Jewish community and others in the city and that ties across that boundary survived the inter-communal violence.

returns to the story with his order for the arrest of members of the *gerousia*, three of whom Flaccus attempted to reconcile before submitting the entire *gerousia* to beatings (73-80). Other punishments, including crucifixions, were inflicted on members of the community (81-85). Flaccus sent soldiers into Jewish houses to search for arms (86-91). Jewish women were attacked and humiliated in the theatre (95-96). Then, Flaccus was arrested and removed from the city (108).

In spite of a clearly fictional account that Philo gives us of a conspiracy between Flaccus and Isidoros, Lampo, and Dionysios, two of whom, Lampo and Isidoros, were to be instrumental in the eventual condemnation of Flaccus (128-45), there was no obvious leadership in the initial stages of the violence.[23] In fact, it seems likely that Isidoros, whom Philo seems to identify as the main source of hatred, was in Rome at the time.[24] But rather than weakening Philo's argument, his absence reinforces Philo's claim that the violence stemmed from an 'innate' Egyptian hatred of Jews and from malice or envy (29).[25] It was the 'mob' that led the demonstrations against Agrippa (33, 35) and later campaigned for the introduction of images into the synagogues (41). The violent domination of the city is described as ochlocracy (65).

Yet, Philo envisages a social organisation of that mob. Early in the text (4), Flaccus is praised for banning the *hetaireiai* and *sunodoi* (ἑταιρείας καὶ συνόδους) which seem to have been religious feasting clubs.[26] Towards the conclusion of the work, Philo returns to such groups in his condemnation of Isidoros. Isidoros is described as a 'man of the mob' (ἄνθρωπος ὀχλικός), an enemy of 'peace and tranquillity' and a fomenter of riots and civil disturbances (135) who kept close to him a disorderly mob, which he ordered into an equivalence of military divisions. There is an obvious discrepancy in Philo's description of the mob as being disordered and having a quasi-military organisation. He offers an analysis of the associations (θίασοι). He denies that these are

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[23] See Sherwin White 1972.
[24] As pointed out by Kerkeslager 2005.
[25] There is a textual corruption at this point but the meaning seems clear.
[26] See Arnauotoglou 2005 on Flaccus and the Roman ban on such groups.

primarily religious organisations, seeing them as drinking societies. They are called *sunodoi* and *klinai* (σύνοδοι καὶ κλῖναι) (136). Isidoros had, according to Philo, a leadership position in many of these groups and Philo accords him the titles of sumposiarch, klinarch, and Frightener of the City (ὁ συμποσίαρχος, ὁ κλινάρχης, ὁ ταραξίπολις) (137).

Such groups are well-attested in Roman Egypt. They operated as trade groups and religious associations and are identified through a diversity of vocabulary which probably reflects their heterogeneity.[27] We have a number of 'constitutions' of village trade guilds from the Fayum villages.[28] These groups feasted regularly, creating social bonds alongside their trade relations that integrated village traders with their metropolitan counterparts. The feasts were conducted under the auspices of the village or city temple which provided dining facilities.[29] Such associations combined religious and social functions and it seems entirely credible that their gatherings might involve excessive alcohol consumption.

Sofia Torallas Tovar (2017) links the Alexandrian associations to the worship of Dionysos, pointing out that in *3 Maccabees* the conflict in the Alexandrian community is imagined as being one between the worshippers of Dionysos and the Jews. Tovar argues that the Jews regarded themselves as being in competition with a mystery cult, which partially explains the oddity of the conflict being constructed in terms of competing monotheistic groups. She connects the crucial role of drunkenness in the narrative to Dionysos. Additionally, in an Alexandrian context Dionysos is to be identified with Sarapis, the city god of Alexandria who was also associated with the Ptolemaic dynasty. *3 Maccabees* thus narrates a conflict between the followers of the Jewish god and of the patron god of Alexandria and the Ptolemies. Since worship of Dionysos-Sarapis could be construed as a performance of loyalty to the regime

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[27] For Egyptian associations, see San Nicolo 1972; for elsewhere in the East, see Van Nijf 1997.

[28] *P.Mich.* 5. 243–248, on which see Boak 1937.

[29] See Youtie 1948 and Montserrat 1992 for invitations to dine at the temple. For more detailed discussion of the relationship between public dining and the temple, see Alston 2002:208–14.

and city, the Jews' inability to participate in such rituals was susceptible to hostile interpretation.

The link with Sarapis can also be seen in a fictional account of a tense meeting between Isidoros, Theon, Flaccus, a mysterious 'old man', and an Aphrodisia in the Temple of Sarapis (*P.Oxy.* 8.1089 = *CPapJud* 2.154) in which a considerable amount of money exchanged hands. The location of the interchange evidently had political and religious resonances which are difficult to reconstruct.

If, as seems likely, the associations of Alexandria dined in worship of Sarapis, it would have been difficult for a devout Jew to participate in those meals. It is thus no surprise that, as Baslez (2017) notes, the reconciliation of Jews and Alexandrians in *3 Maccabees* centres on communal feasting, which brings Jew and Alexandrian together away from the Temple. Philo's attack on the associations was not just an assault on drunkenness and lower-class disorder, but on social institutions which likely excluded Jews and hence contributed to community polarisation. Yet, since the worship of Sarapis appears likely to have functioned symbolically and socially to unite (elements of) the urban population, elite and non-elite, the *sunodoi* and *klinai* could be seen, contrary to Philo, as community-building institutions. In such an interpretation, the Jews' exclusion from such associations becomes more significant.

Philo's description of the associations does not lead him to a discussion of anti-Jewish sentiment, but to an account of an earlier demonstration held in the gymnasium against Flaccus (138-45). Flaccus' subsequent investigation produced 'evidence' that the demonstrators were paid, which is seen as the only plausible reason why the poor of Alexandria might be mobilised against their prefect and this may provide the context for the ban mentioned in *In Flaccum* 4. Philo's inclusion of this story, out of chronological sequence, argues for Isidoros and his associations being a danger to the city since the 'mob' could be mobilised against the city's political hierarchy, including its Roman elements.

We need not accept Philo's characterisation of the rioters as a drunken mob of what the Victorians would have call 'the undeserving poor'. The involvement of the associations suggests a class of persons at least sufficiently wealthy to pay the association fees, though one would expect that the membership included

categories of persons significantly poorer than the elite. Similarly, there is no evidence to assess how far up the social and economic scale membership would stretch, nor what proportion of the population would have been members of such groups: how many people does it take to riot? The associations provided an institutionalised network that would allow the political integration of different socio-economic groups within the city. Through the associations the membership was connected both to the city temple and, in Philo's narrative, to the gymnasium. One might imagine (and we have little other than imagination to work with) that in a city like Alexandria, the membership of the associations gave voice to political agents from outside the elite.

The direct political and financial benefits for the lower classes in engaging with Isidoros and his ilk are not stated. This may be because Philo, like other aristocratic authors, did not concern himself with the political rationality or interests of the lower orders. Membership of the mob might have provided a sense of belonging to a wider community; it is possible that Isidoros or other prominent Alexandrians directly subsidised the associations, as Philo suggests. It is likely that the social network provided the connections and social knowledge that enabled the everyday processes of living and trading in the city and the access to higher level political players which was essential in the resolution of disputes and administrative difficulties (see the next section). Such networks provide a possible link through which we can understand an identity of interest between the Alexandrian lower orders and city-level political players.

The upper echelons of these hierarchic networks were connected to Rome. The currency of such connections was status. The Alexandrians were expected to recognise and respect Roman status hierarchies. Romans, both in Egypt and Rome itself, were expected to recognise and honour Alexandrian status markers. The long list of ambassadors in Claudius' *Letter to the* Alexandrians (*P.Lond.* 1912) can be seen as a recognition of status and a reflection of an important political exchange. The *Acta Isidori* (*CPapJud.* 156), by contrast, shows the failure of such an exchange when in the Cairo recension (156d), Isidoros is made to respond to a Claudian insult by proclaiming himself the 'gymnasiarch of the glorious city of

Alexandria' before impugning the parentage of emperor.[30] Gymnasial office in Alexandria is understood to generate status sufficient to demand recognition at the imperial court. The mutual failure to recognise status entails a breakdown of political relations. The Isidoros of the text may seem to us startlingly unwise in insulting Claudius, but his was a response to Claudius' failure to honour his status and thus it was consequent on a collapse in normal political relations.

This connection between imperial and Alexandrian networks can also be illustrated from an inscription from the theatre area at Kom el-Dikka in Alexandria (*SEG* 50.1563) honouring Tiberius Claudius Geminus, also called Isidorus, the son of Tiberius Claudius Isidorus, gymnasiarch. It lists the younger man's offices as gymnasiarch, hypomnematographos, tribune, epistrategos of the Thebaid, and Arabarch. It seems likely that the elder gymasiarch was the Isidoros of the *In Flaccum* and the *Acta*.[31] The ability of the son to prosper after the fall of the father would suggest that political status in the city rested on more than Roman recognition. Even if the identification is not accepted, the inscription shows that status passed down the family line and that a gymnasiarch was able to transition between Alexandrian positions and equestrian posts within the administration of Roman Egypt.

The career of Tiberius Claudius Geminus is similar to the way in which members of Philo's own family transcended local politics, culminating in Tiberius Iulius Alexander becoming first Prefect of Egypt and then Praetorian Prefect.[32] Although one might demur from Lukaszewicz's (2000) assertion that the *Acta Isidori* were

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[30] For the *Acta* Isidori see the edition of Magnani 2009. For similar sentiments, see *CPapJud* 156b, II 42.

[31] The substantive issue in identifying the father with the gymnasiarch in 38 CE relates to the award of citizenship. Tiberius Claudius Isidorus was presumably awarded citizenship by Claudius after 41 CE. Harker 2008:14 regards it as implausible that Claudius could have awarded him citizenship, executed him (probably in the same year), and subsequently promoted his son. I am not persuaded that this is an implausible sequence.

[32] For Iulius Alexander, see Turner 1954. One can compare the distinguished careers of those who were Alexandrian ambassadors to Claudius in 41. See Kayser 2003 and the summary in Harker 2008:19–21.

'based on genuine documents', the depiction of a gymnasiarch operating within the highest political echelons of Rome was in itself realistic.

Such connections evidently brought political power to the individual from which would flow the ability to benefit one's friends and harm one's enemies. Indeed, the *In Flaccum* embeds this political principle within the plot since Flaccus was left vulnerable by the fall of his friends in Rome and consequently reliant on figures in the Alexandrian aristocracy to deliver support and protection (16-23). Kushnir-Stein (2000) argues that the conflict was sparked by the fear that Agrippa was acting as intermediary for the Jews at the imperial court and thereby marginalising Flaccus. Agrippa offered the Jewish groups, perhaps largely excluded from the social networks headed up by Isidoros and friends, possible access to imperial power, but also potentially isolated Isidoros and the network associated with him. We can understand the demonstrations and counter-demonstrations that followed Agrippa's arrival in the city fresh from the imperial court (28-35) as competition between networks, both of which wished to advertise their connections to Rome.

Philo's narrative of an underlying conspiracy between Flaccus and the Alexandrians, whatever its historicity, makes sense in the context of the importance of political networks that could secure benefits and on which Flaccus himself relied. In such an understanding, the struggle revolves not around any ideology of antisemitism nor on issues of citizenship, but on securing a connection to the imperial court and the social and political benefits that flowed from that connection.

A comparative account

The aim of the prior sections has been to reconstruct a plausible sociology behind the violence in Alexandria. This sociology makes a connection between seemingly leaderless crowds and court politics. And yet, it is an enormous step from social and political competition and division to killing one's neighbours. We lack detailed ethnographic material which would allow us to examine that transition, but we can employ comparative material.

In this section, I survey a range of work on social networks and civil violence, mostly drawn from African studies. I show first the importance of such networks in everyday life in some urban communities. These networks were linked to state-level actors who were able to use such networks as a mechanism of political control. I then discuss how these networks under certain circumstances deployed extreme violence. Further, although the networks may have had limited overlap with ethnic groups in a polity, in crises ethnicity has frequently been an element in social mobilisation. The instrumental use of ethnicity allows oppressors access to a justificatory language of ethnic exclusivity, writes violence into a normally false history of age-old ethnic hostility, and obscures immediate causal and motivational factors. This analysis provides us with an understanding of a possible pathway from often loose and overlapping social networks to extremes of ethnic violence.

The choice of African comparators is potentially contentious. The examples cited are from societies which have significant cultural, historical, and economic differences and I reject any suggestion of an 'African' social form.[33] One could, I suspect, draw on the literature of South Asian communal violence.[34] Yet, my choice of examples can be excused in part because of that rich variety of African political experiences: parallels can be drawn from a wide range of states and historical situations. Further, we have a significant number of historical examples in which large social networks at first guaranteed power for a political group and then, in their breakdown, encouraged ethnic violence. There are also certain broad and recognised similarities, far from unique to African states, that make such states attractive as possible models. Several states shared a colonial legacy that influenced state formation. They operated with relative weak institutional structures independent of the state; 'informal' political and economic structures were often pervasive and a source of considerable social power. The relative poverty of the population made the populations more dependent on benefactions than, for instance, in Western European states. Finally, the colonial legacy often meant that states did not derive their

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[33] See the discussion in Chabal 1996.
[34] For an example, see the influential Appadurai 2006.

legitimacy from the consent of their citizens.[35] This allowed some states to maintain predatory and violent institutions. Such conditions combined to generate what Mbembe (2001) named the postcolony, which he sees as a feature of sub-Saharan Africa.

In several societies, sociologists have identified extensive social networks that operated to distribute social and economic benefits and to mobilise support. In the absence of a strongly-defined class basis for political organisation, such 'patrimonial networks' cement political power and, in certain circumstances, have organised violence.[36] Individuals may have a high level of dependency on such networks for access to social, economic, and political resources. Importantly for our purposes, those networks operated well beyond a narrow political class and could build loyalties that allowed status and power to pass from generation to generation. I suggest that such large social networks were probably common across several historical societies, including those of antiquity. Further, the use of violence in the Roman imperial state and the concentration of power on the representatives of that state also make the parallels instructive for our Alexandrian instance.[37] This is an issue which is further explored in the final section.

The relationship between state and community networks is far from straightforward and requires that we make allowance for political agency and negotiation at all levels of the network. The importance of the socio-political network in everyday life is brought out in Salwa Ismail's (2006) study of Bulaq al-Dakur, Cairo. She argues that in contrast to modern European political philosophy, which assumes a separation of authorities in state and society, in Bulaq al-Dakur governance is embedded within informal and local structures of social power. This 'everyday' government is pervasive and closely tied to state-level authorities who maintain an often vestigial but always predatory presence (xxxiii). Informal and

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[35] Whatever the parallels with the post-partition Indian states, democracy has been fundamental to state building in India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Sri Lanka, though all have had problems.

[36] Discussions in Bayart 1993; Chabal and Vidal 2007; Nugent 1995.

[37] Alston 2015 argues that such networks were crucial in establishing Augustan power.

formal structures operate alongside each other. Problems are solved through the intervention of 'notables' (19-40). Individuals survive by networks, which allow everyday needs to be met and pressures to be managed. But such networks also create problems. Individuals negotiate and compete within the networks and there is always the possibility of social fissures if negotiations fail to reach a consensual settlement. The predatory state exercises a measure of control through institutions such as the unlamented Gamal Mubarak's 'charities', and by repression of those groups which are or are seen as oppositional, such as the Islamicists (100-102).

Francis de Boeck (1996) paints a similar picture of life in Kinshasa where the network has replaced the state as the hegemonic political and social structure. He argues that Western privileging of formal economic and political structures over informal networks is a fantasy. People rely on local and informal relations. Immigrants depend heavily on their pre-existing social connections which leads to clusters of people of the same origin in areas of the city. The complexity of the city means that:

> The concept of the state should be problematized and redefined in terms of a great number of political strategies... which aim at the creation of networks and spaces of contact, palaver, (asymmetric) exchange, solidarity and complicity, enabling the circulation of commodities, money and wealth. (De Boeck 1996:98).

In the context of a weak state, the networks take on vestigial state functions. Such networks depend on fluidity and porous boundaries to negotiate collective social benefits and the success of any negotiation reinforces the status of the leadership of the networks. Those leaderships are encouraged to do business with each other. Competition is often between loose networks, which are centred on the 'big-men'. Governments need to build political bases through alliances of networks while the 'big men' need access to governmental patronage and their peers within other networks so as to provide for their supporters and confirm their status.

In such a system, political change shuffles the pack of 'big-men', but retains the operational structures. In Ghana, Nkrumah's CPP brought down the 'big-men', but within a generation the 'Verandah

Boys' had become 'big-men' themselves, controllers of networks. Such links were institutionalised into old-boys associations and established broad and overlapping networks of privileged groups through which all aspects of state and business life could be manipulated.[38]

In a state with very few resources, the benefits of state capture may be limited. But in most modern states the state has sufficient resources to empower and reward. Patrick Chabal's (2007) discussion of Angola shows how oil contracts have been used by the MPLA to build a powerful patrimonial state. Christine Messiant (2007) argues that the primacy of the patrimonial state was such that the MPLA was able to negotiate the transition to multiparty politics without its hegemony being threatened. In such contexts, opposition entails exclusion from a state's redistributive network. It is a failure of negotiation that would mean that that the leadership would be unable to support and reward their followers. As a tactic, it becomes rational only if exclusion is already a feature of the political system or to mobilise disaffected elements towards state capture.[39] Such a system can generate long-term political stability: in Ghana it was only with the economic crisis in the 1970s, when the distributive networks contracted, that excluded groups came into being, in this case in universities and the army, which combined became sufficiently powerful to seize the state.[40]

Ethnic divisions have been one way of asserting inclusion and exclusion. Instrumentally, ethnic divisions can enhance solidarities. They may allow junior members of a network to lay claims on 'representative' power brokers and, similarly, allow powerful players to demand allegiance. [41] Lee Ann Fujii's (2009) study of the genocide in Rwanda shows that although Rwandan politics had been violent from the 1950s and there had been a hardening of ethnic boundaries, even on the eve of the genocide such boundaries were traversed by numerous social ties, including marriage (59-74). Social negotiation survived ethnic tensions. Even as the genocide took

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[38] Nugent 1995.
[39] See the essays in Chabal and Daloz 1999.
[40] Nugent 1995; cf Reno 2006.
[41] Glickman and Furia 1995; Mozaffier 1995.

hold, some resisted and defended neighbourhood Tutsi. Much of the violence was top-down, generated by a militant group who located their political base solely in the Hutu community. They sought to build a 'state' network around the Hutu (123–37), which excluded the Tutsi and their leadership. The rhetoric of state-level actors worked as a 'propulsion mechanism' for multiple instance of local violence (125–36; 166–78). That violence was deployed as a means of resolving local conflicts and securing local power. Its extremity forced people to commit to local genocidal leaders and provided opportunities for such individuals to establish dominance, which was reinforced by connections to the political centre (12–13; 136–78).[42] The Rwandan genocide can be seen as an attempt by a small elite to create a monopolistic hold for their group on a state through the elimination of rival networks and the polarisation of the community. The full horror of the genocide depended on local actors identifying with the genocidal cause and finding an interest in supporting and performing local killings. The killings destroyed rivals and established new networks of loyalty and shared benefit. It was networking that rendered the violence pervasive.

Paul Richards (1996) describes a similar dynamic in the vicious civil war in Sierra Leone. Sometimes read as a form of anti-modern tribalism (we might compare Philo's representation of the violence in Alexandria),[43] Richards (1996:8, 31–33) understands even the recruitment of child-soldiers as a strategy to break the power of established social networks operating in rural areas. The leaders of such established networks tended to exclude or exploit the young, leaving them vulnerable to the attractions of rebel networks with their own initiation rituals and 'dramaturgy' of membership.[44] Alongside building their own networks, the rebels sought to destroy traditional networks so as to deprive the local 'big-men' of their labour gangs.[45] Richards (1996:61–2) blames a highly educated elite

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[42] One can compare the similar dynamics of civil violence in Greece under Nazi occupation and in the subsequent civil war: see Kalyvas 2006.

[43] See, for example, the controversial narrative in Kaplan 2001.

[44] Richards 1996:68; 103–4; 55–59; 81–2. One can compare this process of network formation with the development of militias in Congo: see Vlassenroot 2006

[45] Richards 2006.

in the rebel RUF for a strategic and highly rational deployment of extreme violence.

Perhaps the most obvious example of ethnic instrumentalism in competition over a patrimonial network comes from Liberia. The pre-1980 Liberian state developed around a small Americo-Liberian elite. American multinational concessions enriched this elite, allowing it to extended redistributive networks into the indigenous communities, which were loosely grouped into villages and tribes. But as late as the 1970s tribal identity had little or no political importance.[46] After the military coup of April 1980, the country slid into civil war. By 1993 seven armed factions were competing for control. Samuel Doe centred his faction on his tribal group, the Krahn, and following his military victory he enriched his allies. Since many other groups were excluded by this new ethnic politics, the regime was chronically unstable, reliant upon violent suppression and lavish distribution of resources. The reaction inevitably took on an ethnic hue and the rebel NPFL looted and killed their way through Monrovia.[47] Ethnicity and the invention of ethnic markers were employed to shore up political and social networks and bind the members of those networks ever more closely to their leadership.[48]

These sociological studies provide examples of escalations from social competition to large scale violence. Patrimonial networks integrated state and local actors. Social competition between networks could be managed through negotiation and could, indeed, generate a stable political system. But such systems could also fail catastrophically. Our examples illustrate possible mechanisms by which elite-level crises transform into seemingly leaderless local 'mob' violence. In Rwanda, Sierra Leone, and Liberia, national level crises acted as propulsion mechanisms for local actors to exercise extreme violence in local disputes to both win those disputes and establish connections to the state-level actors that confirmed their local power. Ethnic markers served as a crude mechanism of exclusion or inclusion in a network and although there was

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[46] Ellis 1999:31–2.
[47] Ellis 1999:49–118.
[48] Ellis 1999:201–21.

opposition to the attacks on neighbours, certainly in Rwanda (and one can compare Alexandria), the extremity of violence often suppressed other loyalties. Membership of local gangs was reinforced by a dramaturgy of violence.[49] Public victimisation of those outside the dominant network reinforced their excluded status and increased the risk for those actively opposing the violence. Ethnicity was instrumental in these conflicts. There may have been pre-existing divisions, but in most cases there is no evidence of a significant ideology of racial or ethnic difference. In these cases, ethnic hostility was invented or enhanced to further the objectives of the political agents at both street and state level. As in our Alexandrian instance, extreme ethnic violence could develop without prior widespread racism.[50]

The modern examples suggest that in a functioning system of patrimonial networks those at the top of the system, the 'big-men', depend on a system of negotiation and co-operation by which to deliver social benefits to their supporters. Outright opposition to the state is futile and potentially endangers the network: it signifies the failure of the network's leadership. It also reflects a failure of the state to maintain balance. When negotiation breaks down, trouble begins since the options available to the leaderships become restricted. The breakdown might stem from any number of causes: the economic failure of the state or from a political failure. In an imperial situation, it might result from the imperial power becoming identified with one social element. In the final section, I return to Roman Alexandria to examine whether we can detect similar dynamics in that city.

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[49] Diouf 2003.

[50] This is, of course, why 'antisemitism' is a potentially misleading label in the Alexandrian case and why historical models derived from European racism may not apply.

Violent networks in Roman Alexandria

In Roman Alexandria, although some benefits flowed from the state to the people in terms of offices and positions, it is difficult to imagine that these benefits were of a scale similar to those that have come from the capture of modern states by kleptocratic regimes. Yet, rather than thinking primarily in terms of the delivery of social benefits, under an illiberal or imperial regime, a state might rule through a threat of social harms. Under a potentially predatory state, all are rendered precarious. Jewish attempts to shore up their position through an appeal to imperial precedent and to Augustan treatment of the Jews (see above) can be seen as a rhetorical strategy to bind those who wielded imperial power. But ultimately it was political influence that provided security. Flaccus' treatment of the Jews initially reminded them of their precarious status in the face of Roman power, but with the arrival of Agrippa, the Jews were presented with an alternative route to court, its power, influence, and security. The departure of Agrippa led to an intensification of the conflict. We can read that conflict as a brutal performance that demonstrated to the community their precarious status within the city and their dependence on the authorities, not for the provision of social benefits, but for the prevention of harms.

Philo's narrative points to a political crisis at the heart of Alexandria's problems. Flaccus is made responsible for the violence. This is in spite of his evident passivity in the early stages of the outbreak. Philo identified his problematic behaviour as stemming from his dependence on persons within the city. Flaccus' ensnaring by the Greeks meant that he failed in the traditional role of the Roman governor, which was to maintain impartiality, a role repeatedly represented in the rhetoric of Roman government.[51] Roman power guaranteed that no single local leadership group could establish a hegemony and worked to foster negotiation between subordinate groups. That negotiation was performed through the recognition of status. For the networks to function, leadership groups needed to recognise each other and to recognise and be recognised by Roman authority. This recognition was

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[51] Kelly 2011.

performed through symbolic exchanges of honours and the flow of offices and benefits. Philo's initial accusation against Flaccus, that he was hostile to the Jews in his decisions, is exactly the same as that made in the *Acta Isidori* in regard to the pro-Jewish bias of Claudius. Their different biases prevented them from acting impartially in a dispute between local networks and denied the legitimacy, expressed in terms of status, of one of those networks.

While Flaccus was Prefect and thus representative of Roman power, the Jews had few options. But with the arrival of Agrippa, a new connection to Rome was established. The demonstrations for Agrippa displayed Jewish access to the imperial court. Flaccus' actions delegitimised his rival, but also made those who supported him outsiders in the city. At the highest echelons, the dispute was over the networks that connected Alexandria to Rome.

The transfer of this dispute from the circles around the prefect into street violence was a result of an integration of local and state-level interests. Flaccus sought to shore up his political support by systematically weakening those he perceived as enemies. The crowds took to the streets to take collective and individual advantage. The branding of the Jews as oppositional likely functioned as a 'propulsion mechanism' for street violence in furtherance of local social and economic conflicts. Furthermore, both the demonstrations and the violence offered opportunities to one portion of the city to demonstrate their loyalty to Flaccus and to position themselves in relation to the Roman state. The violence was performative. It drew social and territorial boundaries;[52] it was opportunistic; it was not indiscriminate. The parallels identified above have shown that outbreaks of ethnic violence do not depend on developed racism within a society or a long history of ethnic conflict, but can arise instrumentally, as persons seek to benefit from social and political division.

Appadurai (2006: 10) notes that the violence of the Indian sub-continent in the 1990s was 'accompanied by a surplus of rage, an excess of hatred that produces untold forms of degradation and violation'. We could apply such descriptions to 38 CE. He attributes this rage to a desire to fix identity and power relations in a world

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[52] Alston 1997.

that is profoundly uncertain and ultimately beyond local control.[53] Similar uncertainties about their place in the empire, the way the power of that empire might be deployed in local politics, and the ability of local networks to influence and affect imperial power, were factors in Alexandria. We see them in the *Acta Alexandrinorum*, with their pervasive concern over status-recognition and relations with imperial power. The violence functioned as a means of fixing the city's politics, marginalising the Jewish group, and demonstrating a community of interests with the Roman prefect.

This analysis points to an urban sociology that would explain ethnic division in the city. I argue that small groups (associations), which probably were difficult for Jews to join, were integrated into larger political and social institutions and groups. These formed networks that incorporated the Alexandrian elite. We can trace the influence of such networks as far as the imperial court. Modern parallels suggest that such networks were important in everyday life, providing the social resources and political access necessary to negotiate the contingencies of the everyday. Even in modern instances, it is difficult to trace the flows of resources through such networks, since presumably both tangibles (financial resources) and intangibles (status, influence, and protection) were involved. The informality of such networks is crucial to their social and political functions.

Our modern examples illustrate the potential for such networks to break down. Political failure or even just political uncertainty could act as a propulsion mechanism to violence. In such instances, ethnicity might become a convenient marker of friends and enemies. Such an identification establishes a rationale for ethnic exclusion and a shared interest between elite and non-elite in the public and violent demonstration of such exclusion. Civil violence then becomes performative and instrumental in establishing and enforcing boundaries. Such a pathway to violence exploits pre-existing differences but uses ethnicity instrumentally.

People killed their neighbours not because of a dispute over citizenship nor because of a deep-seated ethnic hostility. It was a

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[53] Op. cit., p. 10

bid for power and resources consequential on a political breakdown in 38 CE. The violence gave members of the violent group political authority. Once the ethnic-political boundaries had been drawn, bringing the city back together became difficult and the scene was set for generations of ethnic violence.

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R.Alston@rhul.ac.uk