Book Review/Compte rendu

Y. Michal Bodemann, ed., *New German Jewry and the European Context: The Return of the European Jewish Diaspora*. New Perspectives in German Studies. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008, 288 pp. $US 85.00 hardcover (978-0-230-52107-0)

New German Jewry and the European Context is not only about Jews, Judaism, and contemporary German-Jewish relations, but also about more general issues connected to migration, ethnic and ethnoreligious categories and identifications, imperial and national diasporas, collective memory, and European history. The volume also deals with Germans and the German state, the demographic and social characteristics of Russian-speaking Jews and Turks living in Germany, and Islam. One fascinating chapter discusses the proliferation and main characteristics of Jewish Studies in Germany. Unlike their North American counterpart, German Jewish Studies serve mainly Gentile clients. Another interesting chapter reviews Jewish themes in the works of the recently deceased German British novelist W.G. Sebald, who was not Jewish but who wrote on many Jewish themes such as exile and the ruined spaces of Europe. Similar analyses of Jewish themes in the works of Turko-German novelists Zafer Senoçak, Maxim Biller, and Yadé Kara are included in Chapters 3 and 4, while Chapter 9 incorporates discussion of novels by Jewish Russian German authors Wladimir Kaminer, Anna Sokhrina, Vladimir Vertlib, and Lena Gorelik.

Diana Pinto's opening chapter, "Can One Reconcile the Jewish World and Europe?" challenges the typical Jewish-American and Israeli descriptions of Europe as eternally anti-Semitic, and suggests instead that Jewish existence in Europe has a bright future provided that the "Jewish World in Europe" is reconciled with all of its pasts. In her view, this involves overcoming such obstacles as the politically motivated fossilization and hijacking of memory of the Holocaust, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and the fear of the demographic strength of the new Muslim minorities across Europe — a formidable task. Unfortunately, the article reads more as a journalistic opinion piece than an empirically grounded sociological study. The authors of the three articles on the new German Jewry (now largely Russian-speaking) in Part IV of the collection offer little empirical support for Pinto's optimism.

A more promising approach is the re-reading of European history from the Jewish fringes by Dan Diner. As he convincingly argues, the Jewish "trans-territorial and somewhat pre-modern diasporic existence never fit well into the world of European nation-states" (p. 49). In contrast to multinational empires, nation states are by definition homogenizing entities, and while they may grant individual civic rights to all citizens, they generally do not favour genuine self-governance and corporate autonomy of specific ethnic minorities. Diner brings this re-reading to the role of the European Union. Instead of seeing it as "an enlarged nation-state, even comparable to a unitary body politic like the USA," he sees the EU as embodying "an integration based on softer incorporations and more flexible institutions. I detect institutional patterns, which point rather to the experience of formerly existing, pre-modern empires, and less at the hard modes characteristic of nation-states" (p. 34). Evidence in Part IV of the volume, on transnationalist practices of Russian speaking Jews in Germany and their lack of identification with the German state, also supports Diner's contention that the modern system of nation states is highly problematic for transnational diasporas.

Two informative articles in Part II, "The New Diasporic Field," discuss interethnic and interfaith relations between Judaism and Islam, and between German Jews and German Turks. Sander Gilman examines ways in which the historical experience of Judaism can serve as a model for Islam in contemporary multicultural Europe, particularly in Germany. While acknowledging the vast differences between European Jews in the 18th and 19th centuries and European Muslims today, Gilman suggests that similarities are both striking and significant. These include the gradual erosion of the ethnonational differences, and the eventual accommodation to secularization, multiculturalism, and hybridity.

Michal Bodemann and Gökçe Yurdakul pursue similar themes in their more narrowly focused study of how German Turks, in making claims on the German state, are learning from Jewish diasporic narratives on religious practice, communal organization, and the Holocaust. The two authors urge social scientists to enlarge their specific investigations of how immigrant groups succeed or fail in integrating within mainstream societies by also examining how "immigrants and minorities model themselves on other minority and immigrant groups" (p. 89).

As Bodemann argues in the Introduction, "no book on contemporary German Jewry could avoid addressing the Russian-speaking migration to Germany" (p. 7). Three chapters in Part IV cover this topic well, albeit making it clear how elusive it is. For example, nobody knows how many Russian–speaking Jews currently live in Germany, owing to the large number of non-Jewish spouses and dependants who are either not

eligible or not interested in being registered in local Jewish communities. Probably 200,000–220,000 Russian-speaking Jews have immigrated to Germany since the collapse of the Soviet Union. However, due to the high proportion of the elderly among the migrants (35 percent over 60 years of age) and high rates of remigration of younger ones, the number of Jews in Germany will in any case decline. What will happen to "partial" Jews and their descendants, i.e., those who do not meet the Orthodox Jewish *halachic* definition of who is a Jew, is even less certain.

Moreover, these Russian-speaking migrants have not integrated well, as evidenced by high rates of unemployment and dependence on welfare. Add to this their strong transnational orientation, the existence of a sizeable Russian ethnic economy in Berlin (where the majority have settled), few contacts with native-born Germans, and communal rifts between German- and Russian-speaking Jews. The prospects for the "new German Jewry" thus do not look good. In fact, Judith Kessler, in her amusingly titled article "Homo Sovieticus in Disneyland: The Jewish Communities in Germany Today," explicitly questions Diana Pinto's optimism about the contribution immigrants from the former Soviet Union have made to German and European Jewry. In her view, they "often want to be neither 'Russian' nor 'German', and partially not even 'Jewish'… they are — apart from a few exceptions — far from being 'assets' in the political and religious discourse" (p. 141).

This conclusion is echoed by Schoeps and Glöckner who observe that the new German Jewry, demographically dominated by Russian speakers, "has almost nothing in common with the pre-war Jewry of Einstein, Liebermann or Baeck," and "seems to be in closer touch with the Russian transnational Diaspora than with German society" (p. 154). In a similar vein, Bodemann and Bagno argue that "Russian Jews were brought to Germany to boost the Jewish numbers," but "with their different concerns, [their presence] subverts the very reason why they seemed to be useful to Germany in the first place" (pp. 173–4). However, Russian-speaking Jewish immigrants are not without agency. Their parallel institutions — "particularly in the cultural arena, from chess clubs and theatre, study circles, dance and sewing, to seniors' and young people's groups" (p. 164) — point to substantial organizational energy. Bodemann and Bagno regard this rich immigrant institutional structure as temporary, however, and expect it to "disappear with the first generation of immigrants" (p. 164).

This is an interesting collection. The individual articles are well written, free of jargon, and relatively short, ranging from 9–24 pages. The volume is of particular interest to scholars interested in German and

European Jewry, but should appeal as well to students of migration, ethnicity, and religion.

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