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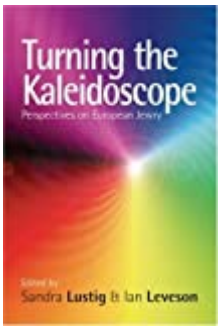

Sandra Lustig, Ian Leveson, eds. *Turning the Kaleidoscope: Perspectives on European Jewry.* New York: Berghahn Books, 2006. x + 239 pp. $80.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-1-84545-076-2.

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Towards a "New European" Jewish Identity

To many people, it is surprising that Europe retained an active Jewish community after two-thirds of European Jewry was murdered in the Holocaust. Jewish life continued in Europe after 1945 and has even flourished since the end of the Cold War. Approximately two million Jews live in Europe today and increasing manifestations of Jewish life are visible in eastern Germany, Poland, Hungary, the Czech Republic and other formerly communist lands. Many European Jews feel, however, that American and Israeli Jewry maintain a negative stance towards European Jewry or ignore it.

This new volume, largely stemming from a conference held in Berlin in December 1998, provides a pithy introduction to the many questions of identity facing Jews in Europe in recent years. Its fundamental premise is that European Jewry should form the third pillar of the world Jewish community, alongside Israel and North America. But if it is to occupy this position, what is the nature of Jewry and Judaism in Europe? Questions asked by this volume include: is there a distinct European Jewish identity today? How do European Jews relate to non-Jews, including other European minority groups? What does the Shoah mean to contemporary European Jews and what is their relationship to Israel?

Most of the eleven constituent essays cover European Jewry as a whole or several countries at once, while few focus solely on any single country. Diana Pinto argues that a specific set of challenges and responsibilities confront European Jews today. Post-1990 engagement with democratic pluralism and human rights impacts both treatment of xenophobia within Europe and relations with Israel. Meanwhile, the period has witnessed an intensification of Christian-Jewish dialogue, increased public commemoration of the Holocaust and a reexamination of national identities through the lens of wartime actions. Pinto sees a role for European Jews, who can use the so-called Jewish Space for reconciliation and dialogue on a variety of issues, including democracy, discrimination, inter-confessional relations and Israel.

Clive Lawton argues that American Jewish identity focuses on the private individual and that Israeli Jewish identity is defined by the state, while European Jewish identity is centered on the community, which itself is frequently contested. The long-held assumption by official

Jewish community organs in Europe has been that the community must be Orthodox, but a significant minority adheres to Reform-style Judaism. A lack of rabbis born and trained in Europe threatens old, indigenous Jewish traditions in places such as Italy. Each country's Jewry has its own pattern of relations to the state.

Michael Galchinksy argues that American Jews have consciously ignored or even denied the existence of other diasporas (Turkish, Kurdish, Afro-Caribbean, Filipino and so on) and that European Jews might engage in a dialogue of diasporas. Lars Dencik discusses how Jews encounter globalization specifically as Jews. Using Sweden as a case study, he argues that most Jews possess several different elective Jewish identities that mesh on a person-by-person basis with several different elective national identities. Y. Michal Bodemann contributes an essay on the Jewish renaissance in Germany in the 1990s and GÃ¶ran Rosenberg addresses contemporary European Jewish identity and ties to Israel.

Two sections of the book deal with women, family issues and alternative Jewish groupings in post-1945 communities. One is a long report, written by Lara Daemming and Elisa Klapheck, on a conference for women rabbis, cantors and scholars, held in 1999. The second is the transcript of an international panel discussion and question session from the Second Conference of European Female Rabbis, Cantors, Jewish Activists and Scholars, held in 2001. Both vividly illustrate the changes taking place within European Judaism and movements to create a uniquely European Jewish women's space.

In a second contribution, Diana Pinto argues that private Jewishness or "Jewish Space" has become a public phenomenon in Europe since the 1980s. Official and private groups have worked to commemorate and even restore a sort of Jewish element to their societies nearly two generations after its eradication or radical diminution. While Jewish Space was once about commemorating Jewish absence and remembering a Jewish past, Pinto argues that it has evolved "into a space in which to celebrate [contemporary] Jewish presence" (p. 182). This state of affairs offers an opportunity for the Jewish community, as she argued in her earlier essay. Sandra Lustig and Ian Leveson reply to Pinto that Jewish Space is not merely a matter of civil society. It has an important cultural side to it, which must remain under Jewish "ownership" (p. 202).[1] They also contend that many Jews remain uncomfortable melding into the larger European civil society or bringing non-Jews into the Jewish Space because many non-Jewish members of European civil society do not "acknowledge Jews' entitlement to a distinct place in [civil society], and that appropriate respect is lacking, since the perpetrator's side has not yet come to terms with their deeds" (p. 201). Lustig takes the argument even further in her own contribution on the Walser-Buber debate of 1998-99. She argues that non-Jewish Europeans are often unwilling to give the Jews' voice a special position in discourse on the Holocaust. Author Martin Walser spoke about forced memory and memorialization of the Holocaust in a manner rife with resentment, but without mentioning the words "Jew" or "Jewish." His vagueness allowed others to project their own (antisemitic) feelings onto him or to use his words for their own ends, while allowing him a rhetorical escape route. Walser refused to acknowledge that he had done anything wrong or that his words might be misused, and he viciously attacked his critics. He also turned around the question of victimhood and cast himself and his fellow Germans as the true victims of the Second World War. The mainstream political establishment declined to condemn Walser.[2] Engaging in such debates both demoralizes European Jewry and diverts time and resources from other matters of concern, such as building communal institutions.

In recent years, much has been said about an emerging New European Jewish identity. It is clear that the editors and contributors to this volume posit that such an identity is an increasing reality. With enormous disparities between European countries, in terms of sociopolitical development, economic conditions, experience of the Holocaust and relations with non-Jewish compatriots, forging a clearly discernible identity will be no easy feat–but the editors argue that diversity is the defining characteristic of European Jewish identity. In the meantime, it is interesting and refreshing to see scholarship on contemporary Jewish life in individual European countries, especially other than Germany, which has received a disproportionate share of journalistic and scholarly attention since 1990.[3] Indeed, I wish there had been more single-country case studies leading up to arguments about pan-European trends. Finally, if one may speak of a larger absence in this book, it is the Jewish elephant in the room: religion. The writers advocate for Europe to provide a counterweight to Israel and America in Jewish matters social, cultural and political, but actual Jewish theology and related fields, religious scholarship and philosophy, are missing. It would have been interesting to include opinions on whether European Jewry will ever again play an important role in that arena of Judaism and Jewish life.

Although the book purports to offer answers to its many questions, it can only offer possibilities. For many years yet, the jury will still be out on the New European Jewry. For readers and scholars specifically interested in today's European Jewish community, this volume offers a number of short essays to guide discussion and debate.

Notes

[1]. These issues are discussed on an extended basis by Ruth Ellen Gruber in, *Virtually Jewish: Reinventing Jewish Culture in Europe* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002).

[2]. For more on Martin Walser's comments and the ensuing controversy, see Frank Schirrmacher, ed., *Die Walser-Bubis-Debatte. Eine Dokumentation* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 2002); Johannes Klotz and Gerd Wiegel, *Geistige Brandstiftung. Die neue Sprache der Berliner Republik* (Berlin: Aufbau, 2002).

[3]. It is a literature that is increasingly crowded, controversial and uneven in terms of quality. Sociologist Y. Michal Bodemann, who contributed to this volume, has published profusely on Jews in contemporary Germany. His recent book on the topic is *A Jewish Family in Germany Today: An Intimate Portrait* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004). A more comprehensive analysis is Jeffrey Peck, *Being Jewish in the New Germany* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2005). Other English-language books on the subject include Charlotte Kahn, *The Resurgence of Jewish Life in Germany* (Westport: Praeger, 2005); Henryk Broder, *A Jew in the New Germany*, ed. Sander L. Gilman and Lilian M. Friedberg (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2004); Peter Laufer, *Exodus to Berlin: The Return of the Jews to Germany* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2003); Ruth Gay, *Safe Among the Germans: Liberated Jews after World War II* (New Haven/London: Yale University Press, 2002), chapter 6; Sander L. Gilman, *Jews in Today's German Culture* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995); Susan Stern, ed., *Speaking out: Jewish Voices from United Germany* (Chicago: Edition Q, 1995); Uri R. Kaufmann, ed., *Jewish Life in Germany Today* (Bonn: Inter Nationes, 1994); Sander L. Gilman and Karen Remmler, ed., *Reemerging Jewish Culture in Germany: Life and Literature Since 1989* (New York: New York University Press, 1994).

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