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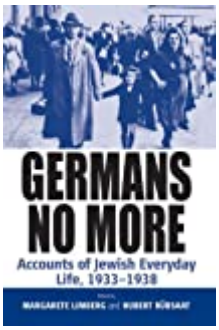

Margarete Limberg, Hubert RÃ¼bsaat, eds. *Germans No More: Accounts of Jewish Everyday Life, 1933-1938.* New York: Berghahn Books, 2006. 198 pp. $50.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-1-84545-084-7.

Reviewed by Simone Gigliotti (History Programme, Victoria University of Wellington)

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Ruined Lives

Exile, estrangement and homelessness are only a few of the innumerable, despairing consequences of the early waves of Nazi terror against Germany's Jews. Other effects were disturbingly ample and relentlessly enforced: material deprivations, racial stigmatization and outcasting, restrictions on participating in Germany's social, cultural and economic life. The victims' history of Nazi persecution's insult, inconvenience and demoralization receives a timely voicing in this volume, a documentary collection of personal accounts written in the wake of flight from Germany after the *Reichskristallnacht* pogrom of November 9 and 10, 1938.

Desperation and outrage dominate the accounts in this volume, as do incredulous reactions to economic deprivation and social rejection. The painful realism of the narratives might not have been possible if not for the quasi-anthropological motivation of Harvard University to sponsor a competition in the spring of 1940 to solicit contributions from German refugees on their "life in Germany before and after January 30, 1933" (p. vii). The texts were to be used to assess the "social and psychological effect of National Socialism on German society and the German people" (p. vii). The contest received 260 entries from refugees around the world, an archive of displacement that reflected their occupational profile, namely the bourgeois middle class including lawyers, physicians, teachers and merchants, as well as cattle and wine dealers, filmmakers, housewives, mothers, children and rabbis. These testimonies are sampled in this volume and the editors have supplemented them with selections from the memoir collection at the Leo Baeck Institute.

The book's arrangement details reactions from the onset of the Nazi regime to forced departures from it. The editors foreground each of the book's sections with a brief introduction to the historical context and then include corresponding testimonies. Quite often the editors insist that faith, optimism and resilience shone through in Jewish reactions to persecution, but this positive spin is regularly undermined in the accounts collated in the following nine sections: "Boycott – Don't buy from Jews!", "The First Victims: Doctors and Lawyers," "Plundering and Ruined Livelihoods," "Friends Become Strangers," "Through the Eyes of Children," "German Culture is Verboten," "Self-help–Self-assertion–Self-

discovery," "The Beginning of the End–the Reich Pogrom Night" and "Farewell to Germany."

The contributions of the collection are wide-ranging. The accounts in "Plundering and Ruined Livelihoods," for example, enrich the historical literature on Aryanization. In 1933, the editors report around 100,000 companies in Jewish hands throughout the German Reich, from small business operators, to department stores and large-scale operations. Friedrich Weil's "The End of a Wine Merchant's Business" reports the demise of the family business and his eventual emigration to the United States after a brief incarceration in a concentration camp, while David GrÃ¼nspecht's "A Livestock Dealer Gives Up" gives voice to the nasty violence that occurred in rural areas.

The accounts in "Friends Become Strangers" detail the regime's intrusion into personal relationships and the spaces in which they were sustained or were under constant threat of surveillance. Fear was successfully cultivated as a distancing mechanism and became a prime reason many individuals justified inaction, opportunism and the end of personal and professional associations. Fear also provided alibis if one chose to act in ways characterized as normal for the time, becoming informants and denouncers of so-called race defilers, such as in Hans Kosterlitz's report. The writer Martin Gumpert's following sentiment of grief as a visceral loss is not unlike the mournful tone of other accounts: "In the end, my life under Hitler brought only a boundless sadness, a sadness that could not be grasped by the mind, which was more or less an instinctive defense against the physical and psychological destruction awaiting us in this country. I had found a meaning to my existence: to survive the end of the tyranny. That was all. I had no hope for the future, nothing bound me to a world that was dying, even if it seemed not to realize it. I had only one great need, which was to see this earth liberated from the degradation around me, and to witness retribution for all the crimes that were committed" (p. 73).

The accounts in "German Culture is Verboten!" focus on the communal response to exclusion from German cultural life. Formed in June 1933, the Jewish *Kulturbund* operated under state supervision and censorship and advanced Nazi initiatives to impose a so-called cultural ghetto on the Jews. It also, however, contributed to a "new Jewish consciousness and a new Jewish identity" (p. 112). This glowing claim of the editors is undermined in several accounts, particularly those of the music critic, Ludwig Misch and the playwright, Fritz Goldberg.

The desperate need for occupational re-invention in preparation for emigration and also for those who remained in Germany is highlighted in the collection's most interesting section, on "Self-help, Self-assertion, Self-discovery." The frustrations and successes of retraining programs for many of Germany's aging, urban and unemployed civil servants, lawyers and physicians are the main themes in these accounts. If reorientation for youth out of school was already difficult, it was even more complicated for adult professionals. Reorientation courses included photography, bookbinding, auto mechanics, ceramics, chemical industry, shop window decoration, kindergarten work, nursing, cosmetics, dress design, industrial cooking, weaving and leather working, among others. The sheer diversity of these "reorientation" occupations reflected not only the wide-ranging ambition of the *Wirtschaftshilfe*, the Economic Assistance Network, to broaden the skills base of employable and emigrating Jews, but also anticipated a new threat that these Jewish "re-orientees" posed if they stayed in Germany. The concluding section "Farewell to Germany" includes accounts of violent abuses during the *Kristallnacht* as well as perspectives on the heated debate among Zionists about emigration to Palestine.

The purpose of this collection is to foreground everyday life stories of Jews living in Germany before and during the Nazi regime. Perhaps the most interesting intervention of this volume is not, as the editors claim, to recuperate history's tangibility in the form of eyewitness accounts. In the recuperation of the victim's voice, the collection betrays a restlessness and distinct insecurity about what it meant to express Jewishness and Germanness in public and private space. The accounts are not especially introspective. Rather, they are chronicles of the daily intrusions, administrative inconveniences and emotional grief that Nazi racial policy imposed. They are also a biographical comment on the experience of a secular Jewish ethnicity in crisis and re-generation and, as such, display ambivalence about seemingly pervasive anti-Semitism as endemic to the German population. While thousands of ordinary Germans were beneficiaries of National Socialist racial policy against the Jews, the various contributors demystify the often too-convenient use of the word "anti-Semitic" to describe their experiences, in terms of the range of reactions of friends, neighbors and business associates to the policy of persecution.

In sum, the collection is a welcome complement to historians' accounts of Jewish reactions to Nazi persecution before 1939. It richly maps the spatial, emotional and psychological effects of social abandonment, propa-

ganda and the atomization of everyday life that made many Jews come to feel what National Socialist policy had always intended–that they were Germans no more.

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