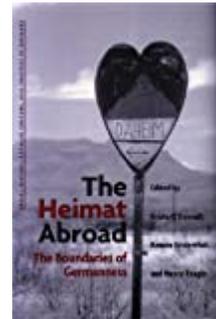




Krista O'Donnell, Renate Bridenthal, Nancy Reagin, eds. *The Heimat Abroad: The Boundaries of Germanness.* Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2005. 336 pp. \$29.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-472-03067-5.



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The Values of Germanness

This highly useful book gives an in-depth treatment of the concept of being German from a number of perspectives, including sociological, political, and—to an extent—psychological. The book is divided into three sections: “The Legal and Ideological Context of Diasporic Nationalism,” “Bonds of Trade and Culture,” and “Islands of Germanness.” The model of German identity followed in this collection of essays is based more on the *Kulturnation* concept than on that of the nation-state. Given the relative youth of Germany as a nation-state, that model is appropriate and one that Germans have relied upon in the past and to an extent still do.

The first section, on diasporic nationalism, opens with a study by Howard Sargent on the role of German citizens abroad and German citizenship laws. German emigration in the 1880s was seen as important as an expansion of German territory and influence. The concept of *Volk* or German descent as criterion for citizenship was codified as more significant than that of *Staat*. The study reviews the various permutations of citizenship laws in light of this priority down to the present, including the

complexities that the *lex sanguinis* brings as the basis of being German. Krista O'Donnell continues the discussion based on German colonialism, under which citizens abroad and indigenous peoples provided difficult questions for citizenship law. The National Socialist period is treated by Norbert Goetz. The Nazis broke with prior law and tradition by applying their concept of the *Volksgemeinschaft* based on Nazi racial concepts. As both Goetz and O'Donnell note, the Nazi period constituted a caesura in the ongoing problematics of German citizenship law.

The second section, on trade and culture, provides four articles on specific areas: Brazil, Mexico, and the United States. Germans who emigrated to Mexico in the early 1800s were heavily engaged in trade, according to Jürgen Buchenau. They did not, however, tend to serve German business interests and tended to adopt Mexican norms, eventually becoming part of the Mexican elite. In his article on German Jewish immigrants to Brazil during the exile period of Nazism, Jeffrey Lesser notes these migrants also adapted to the business world there and

became part of the (white) elite. He describes their difficulty in maintaining ethnic identity as well, especially as they achieved success as part of the elite. In his contribution, Tobias Brinkmann discusses the problematic of the identity of German Jews in nineteenth-century America. Although German Jewish immigrants generally saw themselves as a separate ethnic group, they tended to be active in German American organizations, as indicated by their activities in New York and Chicago, for example. In the Civil War, they formed their own company in the larger German American regiment raised by Friedrich Hecker. They often felt more in tune with the concept of *Bildung*, which they shared with German American progressives, than with the Jewishness of the eastern European Jews who entered the United States in a later wave of immigration. Ultimately, American patriotism proved a unifying force for the various groups. Thomas Lekan's article provides a very good overview of how German Americans affected both the cultural and geographical landscape of the Midwest in particular. He argues that ethnicity was not lost on the frontier, but that the frontier easily embraced the educational values, arts appreciation, and sociability that gave German Americans a "distinct presence in practice in America" (p. 144). He cites the recreation of the organic connection to the homeland as a basis for the strong interest German Americans had in conservation. The integration of German Americans as well as other groups is a pluralistic one. German Americans supported ethnic identity as a contribution to American republicanism, rather than racial exclusiveness.

The third and longest section of the collection covers Germans in various parts of the world, including Germans from Russia, Habsburg east-central Europe, eastern Europe generally, and southwest Africa. Here the discussion focuses especially on the German-language islands of eastern Europe, including early settlements in southwest Russia and the lost areas of the Hapsburg and German empires. The relationship between these peoples and Germany became very problematic, and never more so than during the National Socialist and postwar period. The legacies of these groups persisted in West German displaced persons' associations. Renate Bridenthal discusses the political network of the "double diaspora" Germans from Russia, which was established by a number of individuals over the years of constant migration. Bridenthal provides a useful overview of this migration generally and of the individuals and associations that created a kind of cohesion in this group in particular. In his essay, Pieter Judson asks for a reconsideration of terms "diasporic" and "German," based on the self-understanding of German-speakers in Habsburg

east-central Europe. Their religious, cultural, and national variations, as well as their relationship to German national entities, necessitate this rethinking. Interestingly, Judson argues that relations with Germany were rarely an important issue for these groups.

More so than the others, this section makes clear the disciplining aspects of the concepts around Germanness. In her contribution, Nancy Reagan treats the increasing interest in and perception of *Auslandsdeutsche* in southwest Africa and eastern Europe. A considerable body of literature appeared regarding these people in the later Wilhelmine and Weimar periods. The Germanness of such groups became measured in terms of their adherence to the middle-class German values of domesticity, such as painstaking cleanliness and household order. Even academic works, like the *Handwörterbuch des Grenz- und Auslandsdeutschtums* (1933-35), used such cultural markers to define the continuity of Germanness in both the African and east European contexts. The Nazis also made use of such interwar perceptions in their racially based reorganization of eastern Europe and for the determination of who was indeed German. One might add, indeed, that the commonplace understanding of cultural markers identifying Germanness includes domesticity. This essay leads into Doris Bergen's study of eastern European *Volksdeutsche* and their involvement in Nazi ethnic cleansing and genocide. The very existence of Germans in the East was exploited for militaristic action in this theater of the Second World War. Ethnic Germans, while sometimes benefiting from the material goods and property appropriated from other ethnic groups, were at the same time coerced into following the Nazi scheme, despite occasional resistance. The appropriately final article by Stefan Wolff discusses the postwar politics of *Heimat* in West Germany. The essay gives an overview of West Germany's governmental relationships with exile organizations and east European governments. The FRG basically followed the wise goal of stabilization of democratic systems and the development of a market economy in its external and internal political development. This goal was to be achieved within a European community where reconciliation was to replace confrontation.

If any criticism can be leveled at this well-edited book, it would be the usual one made of collections of essays; namely, that the thematic coverage is somewhat disjointed. Overall and in light of Germany's problematic current role as a net immigrant nation, however, this treatment of Germanness is appropriate and timely. The collection provides more material for possible future studies of the theme.

If there is additional discussion of this review, you may access it through the network, at:

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