



Moshe Zimmermann. *Deutsche gegen Deutsche: Das Schicksal der Juden 1938-1945.* Berlin: Aufbau-Verlag, 2008. 320 pp. EUR 22.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-3-351-02670-7.



Reviewed by Leonid Rein (International Institute for Holocaust Research Yad Vashem)

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German Jews: The Last Chapter

In this slim volume, Moshe Zimmermann describes the agony of the Jewish community in Germany, the first community to bear the brunt of National Socialist persecution policies. Zimmermann is well known for his thought-provoking stances. The title of the book is certainly controversial. According to Zimmermann, National Socialist persecution of German Jews was not actually a persecution of one nation by another, but rather a persecution of one part of the German people by another. This stance seems almost guaranteed to cause an uproar among a certain segment of its readership. Overall, however, despite all of the provocations included in Zimmermann's book, it is a solid, easy-to-read study that represents his opinions on the most recent debates in Holocaust research to a German audience.

According to Zimmermann, no research has been directed explicitly at the German-Jewish Holocaust. He maintains that the history of Jews in Germany after 1938 fades into the general history of the European Shoah. In nine chapters, Zimmermann does his best to close this historiographical gap. He traces the destruction process

and also dedicates a chapter to the fates of those German Jews who found refuge in various countries throughout the world. Zimmermann begins with a discussion of the special meeting after the *Reichskristallnacht* at Hermann Göring's Reich Air Ministry on November 12, 1938. The author acknowledges that neither this meeting nor the pogrom of November 9, 1938 "introduced the beginning of the end of the German Jewry" (p. 23). Instead, he dates the beginning of the end of the German-Jewish community to either Adolf Hitler's 1933 seizure of power, or to the Nuremberg Laws of September 1935. For Zimmermann, the November 12 meeting was significant because it extinguished the last remaining hope German Jews might have had to live safely in Germany. He considers this meeting to be a continuation of the pogrom staged a couple of days earlier. The meeting demonstrated the victory of the "hard-liners" in Nazi ruling circles, those who wanted to oust Jews from Germany by every possible means, including violence.

The chapters of Zimmermann's book are organized in chronological order. The first three chapters are ded-

icated to Nazi anti-Jewish policies before the attack on the Soviet Union of June 22, 1941. The author singles out the period between this date and the earlier invasion of Poland on September 1, 1939. He names these two years “Schonfrist in Mausefalle.” He shows that Nazi anti-Jewish policies were not pursued with equal vigor throughout the entire existence of the regime. Thus, although in the period between the German onslaught against Poland and the beginning of deportations from Germany in October 1941, multiple anti-Jewish measures were adopted and several thousand Jews from Germany and Austria were deported to occupied Poland, generally German Jews themselves experienced these two years as a lull in the persecution process. At the same time, the author shows vividly the constant process of degradation and dehumanization of German Jews pursued by Nazi authorities. The aim of this process was to degrade Jews so that they would correspond to stereotypes about them and thus justify much harsher measures against them.

Chapters 4 through 6 treat the deportations of German Jews to Polish *Łódź*, the occupied Soviet territories, and Theresienstadt; the tragic fate of the deportees; and the means adopted to escape deportation. Zimmermann describes the course of the deportations, how German Jews found themselves at each of the major destinations (*Łódź*, Riga, Minsk, Theresienstadt), and the ways by which German Jews could legally (mixed marriages), quasi-legally (suicide), and “illegally” (hiding) avoid deportations. In this part of the book, Zimmermann raises interesting themes. One concerns the role of Jewish leadership in facilitating persecution and deportation. In the 1960s, 70s, and 80s, accusations of collaboration with the persecutors were made against this leadership.[1] Since then, however, historians have made significant progress in reassessing the role of Jewish leadership in Germany and other occupied countries.[2] Thus, Zimmermann’s vehement defense of the Jewish councils against such accusations seems dated. Zimmermann also raises the theme of relations between German Jews deported to the east and the Jews who already lived there. Zimmermann attributes the complexities of these relations mainly to deliberate policies aimed at enhancing “undoubtedly existing tensions” (p. 144) between the two groups, a conclusion confirmed by research that documents the long history of tension between *Westjuden* and *Ostjuden*. [3] Zimmermann also copes with two reproaches made against German Jews: reluctance to leave Germany while they were able to do so, and lack of resistance to repression. Quoting Victor Klemperer’s diary, Zimmermann shows that what prevented many German

Jews from emigrating was uncertainty about their ultimate fate and the bourgeois fear of “beggars’ lives” in emigration. Regarding the possibility of resistance, Zimmermann argues that it was absolutely pointless in the face of Nazi terror.

In chapter 7, Zimmermann deals with a question raised repeatedly in public and academic discourse in the last decades: what Germans knew about the fate of their Jewish neighbors, and their actual attitudes toward anti-Jewish policies.[4] Here, the author’s conclusions are hardly new or original. Zimmermann once again shows that Germans knew about the persecution of Jews inside Germany. However, according to Zimmermann, it is difficult to establish what Germans knew about the ultimate fates of the Jews deported to the east, or whether they showed interest in the fate of their former Jewish neighbors at all. Zimmermann provides a somewhat ambiguous picture. On the one hand, he more or less agrees with the conclusions of David Bankier that most Germans openly showed hatred of Jews. On the other, however, he rejects Goldhagen’s generalizations. He shows that agreement to various anti-Jewish measures on the part of majority of the German public was not automatic, but instead reached by the regime through representation of such measures as “defensive actions.” The Nazis, especially propaganda minister Josef Goebbels, promoted the idea that Jews sought to destroy Germany and all actions taken against them were intended to thwart their perfidious plans.

The last chapter of Zimmermann’s study is dedicated to Jews who left Germany between 1933 and 1939 and settled in various countries around the world. Zimmermann shows that German Jews tried hard to preserve their German identity and the way of life to which they had been accustomed wherever they ended up. Zimmermann also notes the contribution of German-Jewish immigrants to the various fields of the host countries. Himself a descendant of German-Jewish immigrants to Israel (Palestine), Zimmermann perhaps naturally dedicates a great deal of space to the cultural and academic achievements of returnees from the German-Jewish diaspora in Israel. Dealing with the contribution of “Yekkes” to Israeli political life, Zimmermann presents his own, largely post-Zionist views of the Middle East conflict and projects them onto the entire German-Jewish diaspora in Palestine, claiming that the majority of German Jews felt an aversion to what he calls “Zionist politics fixed upon the conflict with Arabs” (p. 247). Fashionable as it is to blame the lack of peace in the Middle East upon “militant Zionism,” the roots of this conflict are much more complex.[5]

In my opinion, the largest problem with the work remains that starting an analysis of the Holocaust as directed against German Jews from the notion of “Germans against Germans” exaggerates the degree of assimilation of German Jews and their integration in German society. It thus represents an antithesis to Daniel Goldhagen’s view of Germans’ “eliminationist antisemitism.” [6] Zimmermann’s work gives the impression that until 1933, the history of German-Jewish relations was unblemished and that National Socialist anti-Jewish policies were a historical accident. This impression is strengthened by lack of reference in the work to the quality of German-Jewish relations before the Nazi rise to power or to National Socialist anti-Jewish policies before the November 1938 pogrom. Even if we do not accept Goldhagen’s view of the Germans’ inherent urge to exterminate Jews, scholarly research has made enough progress to show that even before January 30, 1933, German-Jewish relations were not rosy, and antisemitism in German society was quite rampant. [7]

Notes

[1]. Raul Hilberg, *The Destruction of the European Jews* (New York: Holmes and Meier Publishers, 1985), 1030-1044; and Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil* (New York: Penguin, 1965), 115-118.

[2]. Dan Diner, “Beyond the Conceivable: The *Judenrat* as Borderline Experience,” in *Beyond the Conceivable: Studies on Germany, Nazism and Holocaust* (Berke-

ley: University of California Press, 2000), 117-129; and Dan Michman, *Holocaust Historiography: A Jewish Perspective* (London: Vallentine Mitchell, 2003), 159-175.

[3]. Steven Aschheim’s older study still remains the best study on the relations between *West-* and *Ostjuden*: Steven Aschheim, *Brothers and Strangers: The East European Jew in German and German Jewish Consciousness, 1800-1923* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1982).

[4]. David Bankier, *The Germans and the Final Solution: Public Opinion under Nazism* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 1992); Otto Dov Kulka and Eberhard Jäckel, eds., *Die Juden in den geheimen NS-Stimmungsberichten 1933-1945* (Düsseldorf: Droste, 2004); and Peter Longerich, “*Davon haben wir nichts gewußt!*” *Die Deutschen und die Judenverfolgung 1933-1945* (Munich: Siedler Verlag, 2006).

[5]. See, for example: Klaus-Michael Mallmann and Martin Čáppers, *Halbmond und Hakenkreuz: Das Dritte Reich, die Araber und Palästina* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2007).

[6]. Daniel Jonah Goldhagen, *Hitler’s Willing Executioners: Ordinary Germans and the Holocaust* (New York: Vintage Press, 1996).

[7]. See, for example, Dirk Walter, *Antisemitische Kriminalität und Gewalt: Judenfeindschaft in der Weimarer Republik* (Bonn: Dietz, 1999).

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