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Barbara Lorenskowski. *Sounds of Ethnicity: Listening to German North America, 1850-1914.* Studies in Immigration and Culture Series. Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2010. xiii + 295 pp. \$34.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-88755-716-3; \$55.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-88755-188-8.



Reviewed by Stan M. Landry (University of Arizona)

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Commissioned by Catherine Baker (University of Hull)

During the mid-nineteenth century, increasing numbers of Germans left their homeland for the fertile fields of the Canadian and American heartlands. German immigrants brought their language, literature, folk music, and fondest memories of home, or *Heimat*. In *Sounds of Ethnicity*, Barbara Lorenskowski examines how German immigrant communities in the Great Lakes regions of Canada and the United States maintained their ethnic and cultural identities and recreated *Heimat*, from the height of German immigration to North America until the Great War âsilencedâ German language, song, and music in the public sphere. Lorenskowski, professor of history at Concordia University in Montreal, argues that German immigrants in rural Ontario and industrial Buffalo created a distinctively German-North American identity by âperformingâ their ethnicity through the colloquial use of language, folk song, and popular festivals. But the *Heimat* that immigrants created in North America was no mere reconstruction of home. Instead, immigrantsâ memories of home and nostalgia for *Heimat* were mediated by their experiences in the Canadian-American borderlands.

Part 1 of *Sounds of Ethnicity* considers how German immigrants in the Great Lakes regions used language to maintain their ethnic and cultural identities. Language

announced oneâs membership in a particular ethnic community and recalled the German homeland, but it also served as a space in which immigrant Germans negotiated a transcultural identity. Immigrant leaders taught that remaining fluent in an idealized âpureâ German afforded speakers continuity with the German homeland and helped to preserve German cultural norms and traditions in their adopted homes. Ignoring the differing regional dialects of the migrants, as well as the hybrid German-English pidgin used in immigrant communities, German language advocates sought to enforce cultural purity by promoting linguistic purity in the German-language press and by encouraging German instruction in schools. This desire to retain linguistic purity occurred within the context of increasing German adoption of English, the use of hybrid German-English idioms, and uncertainty over the utility of German-language purism in an Anglophobe society. As the German immigrant community was increasingly assimilated, this linguistic purism waned. In response, the rhetorical strategies of German-language advocates evolved. No longer conceived as an ethnic language that might preserve cultural purity, German was reimagined as a âmodernâ language whose study was as an end in itself.

Along with the use of the German language, the per-

formance of German song and music helped immigrants to both define themselves and introduce themselves to their adopted communities. Part 2 of *Sounds of Ethnicity* recounts the folk music and sentimental German songs that invoked *Heimat* and served as forms of cultural production and exchange. As German immigrants to Canada and the United States performed their ethnic identities through language, song, and music, they carved out the boundaries of ethnic identity between themselves, Canadians, and Americans. But song also functioned as a performance of identity and represented a means by which German immigrants immersed themselves into their new communities and invited their neighbors to celebrate with them. Canadians and Americans were cheerfully invited to attend German festivals, and just as surely as we are all Irish on St. Patrick's Day, celebrants of the festivals were welcomed as fellow Germans. The programs for German singers' festivals were composed in both German and English, inviting non-Germans to attend. And rousing performances of Deutschland über Alles alongside God Save the Queen illustrated the transnational political loyalties of the German participants. Indeed, Lorenzkowski deftly recounts how German song and music evolved from an ethnic novelty to a form of expression with which both Canadians and Americans could identify. Indeed, through these performances, German song lost its distinct ethnic identity and became mainstream, dissolving into American high and low culture. At the same time, Anglos increasingly identified Germans as normatively Canadian and American. Thus, the performance of German ethnicity facilitated German cultural assimilation.

Sounds of Ethnicity is a valuable contribution to the established scholarship on the relationship of language and music to ethnic and national identity. Its novelty lies in the fact that it recounts how identity was performed by immigrants in transcultural spaces and in border regions. As such, *Sounds of Ethnicity* is more than a story of how German immigrants in Canada and the United

States were assimilated but is also a story of how transcultural Germans in the Canadian and American borderlands preserved their ethnic identities by creating distinctive German-American identities. Rather than recreating a German *Heimat* in the Canadian and American heartlands, German immigrants constructed a hybrid *Heimat* in the Great Lakes regions that combined norms and customs borrowed from their German homeland, Canada, and the United States. Moreover, by tracing the evolution of the performance of German ethnic identity in language and song from the earliest period of their arrival through the early twentieth century when German communities had become assimilated and established, Lorenzkowski underlines the fact that the creation and negotiation of identity is a lived and performative process rather than a static phenomenon.

Of particular interest to readers interested in memory studies is that *Sounds of Ethnicity* points to how the audible word in language and in song functioned as forms of memory. Language and song were not merely ethnic signifiers but also constituted acts of memory themselves. Perhaps Lorenzkowski's most notable contribution to the theory and study of memory is to suggest that memory is not only mediated by membership in a collective or social group but also by place. In this case, the Canadian-American borderlands mediated German immigrants' memories of home and nostalgia for *Heimat*, which lent themselves to the formation of that distinctly hybrid identity of the German immigrant communities in North America. Lorenzkowski herself is a first-generation German North American, which begs the questions: Does she recognize her research as an effort to construct her own transcultural *Heimat*? Is her work an attempt to bridge the divides between Germany, North America, and a transcultural German North America in her own memory and person? Her case is at least as interesting, if set not in the Canadian-American borderlands of the Great Lakes region but in the equally bi-cultural city of Montreal.

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