

AIDAN BEATTY AND DAN O'BRIEN, EDS. *Irish Questions and Jewish Questions: Crossovers in Culture*. Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2018, Pp. 270.

This collection of twelve articles on Irish Jewish history, politics, and culture constitutes a much-needed revision and correction of earlier studies of Irish-Jewish relations that white-washed Antisemitism and created a nostalgic account of the past. As Natalie Wynn points out in her programmatic contribution, former studies tended to perpetuate the “myth... that Ireland is the only country in the world where Jews have never been persecuted” (65), a notion that famously appears in James Joyce’s *Ulysses* and is followed by the explanation, “Because she never let them in” (Bornstein, *ibid.* 127). The book chapters present a critical analysis of the alleged Irish-Jewish symbiosis. At the same time, they indicate analogies and commonalities between Jewish and Irish subjects of British colonialism, “two of the classic outliers of modern Europe” (6), who were considered “racially inferior” (7) by the majority populations and strove for political sovereignty.

In their introduction, Aidan Beatty and Dan O’Brien point to the close connection between the fate of Jews in England and Ireland before the creation of the Irish state. Jews in Ireland “would have been a satellite of the English Jewish community” (2). When Jews were expelled from England, they were expelled from Ireland as well. Until the Eastern European Jewish immigration at the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth century, the number of Jews who lived in Ireland would have been tiny and consisted mostly of a few Sephardic Jewish families from Spain. By the turn of the century, the descendants of these early immigrants would constitute the established “English” Jews who distinguished

themselves from the newcomers from the East. Since 1945, the Irish Jewish community has been “in slow decline” (5), counting less than two thousand individuals nowadays. This vanishing of Irish Jews stands in contrast to the increasing number of studies on them, to which this volume contributes. The declared goal of this volume is to adopt a “transnational turn” (210), “placing Ireland in broader global currents” (211): “The study of the Jews in Ireland and the diasporas of Jews and Irish throughout the world can help readers reflect on today’s global issues of increasing immigration and growing intolerance” (215).

Some of the contributions address the practice of drawing analogies between Jews and the Irish in terms of past suffering and eventual political liberation. Abby Bender shows that both the Irish and British identified with biblical Israelites and their Exodus experience until the turn of the century, when real Jews from Eastern Europe arrived at their shores. The “Irish-as-Jew” motif had already become a cliché at the time of *Ulysses*. By the middle of the twentieth century, when the Irish Jewish community was well established, the Irish found it harder to see themselves as the “chosen people” and Ireland as the “promised land” (18). Peter Hession argues that the backside of the Irish self-identification with Jews was antisemitism in Irish religious and political discourse. Dublin’s “Little Jerusalem” south of the Liffy stood at the “physical margins of urban life” (49). Its spatial location and the antisemitic attacks directed at its population revealed Irish Jews as the quintessential “insider-outsiders” (49). The “foreign” Yiddish-speaking immigrants were seen as “bloodsuckers,” destructive to Irish society. This image was part of “a wider biological and racialized rendering of Jewish space” (55). It is also evident amongst Irish nationalists who managed to combine admiration for the Zionist struggle for political sovereignty with “classically antisemitic tropes” (59). Natalie Wynn indicates how such “negative stereotypes of Jews have shaped aspects of traditional Irish-Jewish ‘historiography’” (61) and perpetuated a distorting narrative. Sander L. Gilman examines the notion of “Hebrewphobia” or

“Judeophobia” in the proto-Zionist discourse of Leon Pinsker. When this phenomenon is viewed as incurable madness, Jewish nationalism appears as the only viable solution.

Several chapters address issues of Irish-Jewish identity. George Bornstein examines evidence of “hybrid identities” in the writings of David Marcus and Stanley Price. Heather Miller Rubens points to the controversy between the short-lived Judeo-Irish Home Rule Association, which expressed support for Irish nationalist aspirations, and British Jews in Dublin and London, who were vehemently opposed to any Irish Jewish engagement in Irish politics. It seems that the Irish struggle for independence from Britain did not only split the Irish but created different affiliations amongst Irish and British Jews as well. Eventually, British Jews called upon their co-religionists to limit their public engagement to religious issues only. From the Irish perspective, Jewish immigrants with special skills proved to be useful in the fashion and hat industry, as Trisha Oakley Kessler shows. In the 1930s, Fianna Fail decided to give work permits to skilled refugees who could contribute to the Irish economy. The marketing of the products as Irish was paired with a clear disregard for the refugee workers’ lives. They failed to receive support in getting visas for family members persecuted elsewhere in Europe.

The remaining chapters deal with similarities as well as differences in Irish and Jewish nation-building efforts. A shared aspect was the call for individual donations. Dan Lainer-Vos argues that gift-giving was linked to the process of creating the notion of a nation as a “surpassing entity” (141), to which individuals voluntarily contributed part of their own property. Muiris O’Laoire compares attempts to revitalize Hebrew and Irish (Gaeilge) as national vernacular languages. While Hebrew became the national language of the State of Israel, however, the use of Irish did not become widespread in Ireland outside of the Gaeltacht. O’Laoire suggests that the lack of mass-engagement with Gaelic may have been the reason for this difference: “the language and culture-agenda proposed by middle class

enthusiasts had little to engage the imagination and needs of the masses” (189). Gaelic has become a mere “cultural symbol” (191) outside the Gaeltacht. An additional reason may have been the Irish familiarity with English, in contrast to the various languages which the Jewish immigrants brought with them to Israel, where the revival of Hebrew was not only a cultural symbol but also a requirement for communication. Irish policemen’s encounter with Zionists in the British Mandate period is the topic of Sean William Gannon’s final contribution. He argues that “the great majority of Irish policemen were anti-Jewish” and pro-Arab in outlook (198), reflecting their British-born colleagues’ views. They maintained such attitudes after their service: as army veterans they promoted the Palestinian cause.

This excellent volume succeeds in correcting long-held views about the unproblematic nature of Irish-Jewish relations. With its focus on attitudes toward and treatments of Jewish migrants and the Jewish minority’s hybrid identity the book’s significance surpasses its subject matters and contributes to current discourses on migration, intolerance toward immigrants, and integration.

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