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Zvi Gitelman. *A Century of Ambivalence: The Jews of Russia and the Soviet Union, 1881 to the Present.* Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001. xiii + 297 pp. $24.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-253-21418-8; $49.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-253-33811-2.

Reviewed by Michael C. Hickey (Bloomsburg Universty)
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Russia's Vanishing Jews?

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This outstanding brief history of Jewish life in modern Russia is a very welcome update of Gitelman's 1988 classic *A Century of Ambivalence: The Jews of Russia and the Soviet Union, 1881 to the Present* (New York: Schocken, 1988). The 2001 edition presents a light revision of sections covering Imperial Russia and the USSR and two new chapters on the Post-Soviet decade. It is available in paperback, which should allow Gitelman's text to take its rightful place in required reading lists for courses on Russian and Jewish history. (Although the first edition contained nearly twice the number of photographs, it appeared only in an expensive over-sized hardcover printing un-assignable in undergraduate courses.)

A Century of Ambivalence contains photographs documenting Jewish life in Russia, but it far transcends the genre of "coffee table" photographic histories. Rather than discuss the book's images, this review shall concentrate on Gitelman's text, which expertly weaves together matters of economic, social, political, cultural, and diplomatic history.

Gitelman's first chapter, "Creativity versus Repression," describes Jewish life between the pogroms of 1881-82 and the 1917 Revolutions. Gitelman presents material on the economic and demographic conditions of the Empire's 5.2 million Jews, the vast majority of whom Tsarist regulations confined to a "Pale of Settlement" in the Western provinces. The emphasis, however, is on the complexity of Jewish responses to repression. Nearly a million Jews chose to emigrate during this period, most to the USA. Among those who could or would not leave, a broad range of political responses to anti-Semitism emerged. These included assimilationist narodniki, for whom all Jewish issues were subordinate to the struggle for general liberation from Tsarist oppression; Bundists who fused the Marxist cause of proletarian revolution with a call for Jewish "national-cultural autonomy"; and Zionists who argued that the Jewish nation could thrive only once it had established its own homeland. Gitelman observes that each treated Jews as a problem to be solved, assuming (as did the regime) that Jews must change or be changed "to be like other peoples" (pp. 18-19). Of special note is Gitleman's succinct survey of the communal, religious, and educational institutions that helped Jewish culture flower during this era, and his discussion of several key Hebrew and Yiddish literary figures. Here and elsewhere, he deftly employs well-crafted biographical sketches, for instance, of the narodnik Solomon Wittenburg, Zionist Leon Pinsker, Rabbi Israel Lipkin of the musar movement, and Yiddish author Sholem Yankev Abramovich.[1]

Chapter 2, "Revolution and the Ambiguities of Liberation," covers the period from 1917 through the mid-1920s and addresses Jewish responses to the 1917 revolutions (which formally ended all legal discrimination against Jews) and the Russian Civil War (which spawned horrific and frequent cases of anti-Jewish violence). Gitelman is perhaps best known as author of a classic monograph on the Jewish sections of the Communist Party (*Jewish Nationality and Soviet Politics: The Jewish Sections of the CPSU, 1917-1930* [Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1972]), and here he focuses on the Evsektsii's attempt to "revolutionize" Jewish life by attacking Zionism and Hebrew and transforming the economic base of the shtetlekh (Jewish hamlets). Jews lent the Bolsheviks little support in 1917, but pogroms inflicted by the White armies rendered them more or less ambivalent towards the Reds, who at least did not carry out mass anti-Jewish violence. During the Civil War, as Lenin's government liquidated other socialist party organizations, many Bundists and other Jewish socialists joined the Communist Party and gave the Evsektsii a political monopoly "on the Jewish Street" (p. 73).

To the Communists, Jewish institutions and values

were petit-bourgeois remnants of a world that must be destroyed and transformed; their main targets, and the most significant threat to their political hegemony on the Jewish street, came from Zionist organizations (in particular the Zionist Hekhaluts, or "Pioneer" organization).[2] Gitelman presents an excellent brief discussion of the new regime's simultaneous campaigns against Jewish religious institutions and anti-Semitism. By the late twenties, the Party believed it had smashed the "old" Jewish world; the question facing Jewish life was now, would Jews be fully assimilated into the dominant culture, or would they constitute a distinct but entirely secular subculture?

Chapter 3, "Reaching For Utopia: Building Socialism and a New Jewish Culture," concerns the Party's failed attempt to build a secular Jewish culture on agricultural colonies and in the Autonomous Jewish Republic of Birobidzhan in the late 1920s and 1930s. The Evsektsii endorsed new, secular Yiddish institutions, but "ambitious Soviet Jews" sent their children to Russian rather than Yiddish schools, carried out union and administrative work in Russian, and otherwise blended into the dominant, "higher" urban culture. While the young and ambitious fled the shtetlekh for the cities, Party-created institutions encouraged those remaining to resettle in agricultural colonies, which would transform them from petit-bourgeois holdovers of the old world into "productive" Soviet citizens (and, it was hoped, undermine the appeal of Zionism). The aim of transforming Jews through farming had been a theme of the Zionists and of "bourgeois" international Jewish charitable organizations like the Joint Distribution Committee, which provided millions of dollars and other support for Jewish agricultural colonies in the USSR.

The colonies, however, could not attract large numbers of settlers and generally failed; most colonists returned to urban areas during the Stalinist collectivization drive of the early 1930s. Similarly, the Birobidzhan project failed. In 1934 the Stalin government declared the region a "Jewish autonomous oblast," yet Jews comprised only 20 percent of Birobidzhan's population. By that time the Party had dissolved the Evsektsii (in 1930), condemned its "nationalistic tendencies" (in 1932), and unleashed a purge on its leadership. (Gitelman argues that while Jews were open to charges of "petit-bourgeois nationalism," they were not specifically targeted as Jews in the 1934-39 purges.)[3] Attempts to construct a new secular Yiddish culture, Gitelman concludes, were "defeated by the Jewish thirst for acculturation and for economic and social mobility" (p. 106). The forces driving this acculturation were economic and demographic, a point to which Gitelman will return repeatedly in subsequent chapters.

In the fourth chapter, "The Holocaust," Gitelman argues that during the Second World War Jews suffered "proportionally" more than other Soviet nationality groups–German forces and their allies murdered as many as 1.1 million Soviet Jews.[4] He surveys the fate of the more than one million Jews who came into the Soviet sphere with the occupation of Eastern Poland, the Baltic, and Eastern Romania in 1939, who viewed the Red Army as liberators and yet were treated as dangerous or "bourgeois" elements. Still, the roughly 250,000 "western" Jews deported into the interior were "inadvertently saved by the Soviet government from Nazi annihilation" (p. 116). Moreover, their presence in the USSR meant that for the first time in two decades Soviet Jews had contact with the mainstreams of Eastern European Jewish life. Gitelman also outlines the actions of the Nazi killing squads on Soviet territory, providing grim details of mass murders, ghettoization and the "liquidation" of ghettos, and patterns of collaboration with the Nazis by local populations.

Gitelman's portrait of collaboration, resistance, and the destruction of Vilna's Jews is especially hard-hitting. He pointedly criticizes Soviet authorities' silence regarding anti-Jewish atrocities and is especially firm in his indictment of Ukrainian historiography.[5] He also effectively dispels popular Russian myths about Jewish non-participation in the Soviet war effort by highlighting the activities of the half-million Jews fighting in the Red Army and the contributions of Jewish partisans. Yet by 1946 the specter of state-tolerated anti-Semitism loomed large in the USSR. Gitelman concludes that at the war's end, Soviet Jews faced an uncertain future.

Having survived the horrors of the Second World War, Soviet Jews found no respite during the last years of Stalin's life. As Gitelman explains in his fifth chapter, "The Black Years and the Grey, 1948-1967," the regime began signaling a turn against the "excessive nationalism" of Yiddish authors in 1944. By 1948 "it became clear that Stalin had decided to liquidate the remnants of Soviet Yiddish culture" (p. 147). Gitelman surveys the repression of Jewish cultural figures in the era of the Zhdanovshchina–the murder of Solomon Mikhoels and the dissolution of the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee in 1948, the arrest of "cosmopolitan" Jewish intellectuals and artists on trumped-up charges of "bourgeois nationalism" and spying for the West, the trials and executions of 1952, and the alleged "Doctors' Plot" in early 1953. The regime's "anti-cosmopolitan campaign" and charges that

Jews constituted a "fifth column" signaled it would tolerate anti-Semitism and even pogrom activities.

Stalin's death in March 1953 ended direct persecution and physical threats against Jews; Gitelman writes that "One could almost hear the collective sigh of relief breathed by Jews all over the country" (p. 157). Still, Khrushchev never denounced Stalin's persecution of Soviet Jews, nor did the post-Stalin leadership restore Jewish institutions destroyed in the first post-war decade. Jews remained excluded from all "sensitive" posts and institutions, and the new leadership did nothing to stem the tide of popular anti-Semitism. Moreover, while Khrushchev insisted that anti-Semitism did not exist in the USSR, the 1957-1964 anti-religious campaign reinforced popular anti-Semitism by locating attacks against Judaism in the "main-stream" media (for the consumption of non-Jews), rather than in the Jewish press (as had been the case in the 1920s). In the 1960s, Jews were frequently targets of anti-corruption campaigns and "anti-parasite" laws and subjected to different legal standards and treatment than were non-Jews. The regime did permit creation of "symbolic" Jewish cultural institutions (e.g., amateur Yiddish theater groups), but treated Jewish culture as "different" from other minority groups. To the post-Stalin leadership, Jews were no longer equal members of Soviet society, but an untrustworthy marginal group with innate bourgeois characteristics.

Gitelman subtitles his sixth chapter, on Soviet Jews in the period 1967-1987, "To Reform, Conform, or Leave?" He suggests that Jews' ambivalent status in the 1960s–they were highly acculturated but not assimilated and remained "Jews" in they eyes of the law and Russian society–echoed that of the late Imperial period. This pushed a few towards trying to reform the regime, while others either "dropped out" into their own "private worlds" (p. 176), or sought emigration. Israel's victory in the Six Day War and the shrill tone of Soviet anti-Zionism heightened Jews' consciousness of themselves as Jews, popularized Zionism among a new generation, and destroyed hopes that they might be able to "coexist" with the regime.

Gitelman gives special attention to the complex dynamics of emigration, which were more closely tied to foreign policy. The Jewish state served as a "pull factor" for emigration, which combined with the "push factor" of repression. Thus, when during D=tente in the early 1970s the regime expanded Jewish emigration as a means of ridding itself of "troublemakers," thousands of Jews applied to emigrate to Israel and the USA. The Aliyah became a broad, mass "national movement" among Soviet Jews. It also triggered a reaction, in the form of the Soviet state's anti-Zionist campaigns of the 1970s and 1980s, and the government created an obstacle course of restrictions and requirements for emigration. The rising number of Jews denied permission to emigrate then became the focus of an international human rights campaign, which put pressure on the USSR to increase emigration. At the same time, emigration seemed to confirm stereotypes of Jews as "disloyal." Educational and employment opportunities for Jews dried up, which in turn pushed ever larger numbers of Jews toward emigration. The breakdown of US-Soviet relations in the early 1980s brought both massive cuts in emigration and mass arrests of Jewish dissidents. (It also accelerated a nascent Jewish religious revival among Jews who created their own "internal emigration" into the world of Judaism.) But Gorbachev's opening to the West meant relaxation of the anti-Zionist campaign and re-opening of emigration. A quarter of a million Jews emigrated from the USSR in 1967-1989; twice as many left in the single year of 1990. Still, Gitelman reminds us, =migr=s constituted a minority of Soviet Jews. The "silent majority" of acculturated but unassimilated Jews continued to see themselves as "outsiders" in a country that was at best ambivalent to their presence.

Chapter 7, a brief but interesting survey of Jewish life in the Caucasus and Central Asia, is followed by a new chapter, "The Post-Soviet Era: Winding Down, or Starting Up Again." Gitelman employs an interesting array of new sources, including extensive survey data, to describe a post-Soviet Jewish revival that has taken place despite mass emigration. He stresses that there is no unitary state Jewish policy in the FSU. Jews have fared much better in "civic states" (e.g., Lithuania) that have adopted an inclusive concept of citizenship than they have in "ethnic" states (e.g., Latvia and Estonia). But since none of the post-Soviet states has adopted explicitly anti-Semitic policies, Jews have been free to build new institutions without fear of state repression. Gitelman provides interesting case studies on the Baltic, Belarus, and Ukraine. Most of the chapter, though, is devoted to the Russian Republic, home to the majority of the remaining Soviet Jewish population.

"The tragedy of Russian politics" in the 1990s–by which Gitelman means in particular "the failure of institutionalization" (p. 220)–presented Jews with a familiar if difficult choice: emigrate, or "gut it out" in hope of a better future in Russia. The most interesting sections of this chapter deal with the minority active in Jewish institutions. Gitelman provides an excellent brief history of grass-roots Jewish voluntary and cul-

tural associations, which in their lively disputes over the best means of promoting Jewish cultural interests seem to be reprising many of the basic debates among Jewish organizations of the early twentieth century. In the early 1990s, Jewish organizations lacked both resources and popular support. But survey data demonstrates that economic hardships in the Jewish community created a growing awareness of charitable and cultural organizations in the late 1990s, particularly in provincial cities, where organizations relied heavily on aid from foreign agencies such as the Joint Distribution Committee and the Chabad-Lubavich.[6] Gitelman's final chapter, "The Paradoxes of Post-Soviet Jewry," presents a substantial updating to the conclusions offered in this book's first edition. He points out that although there is no "official" state-supported anti-Semitism in the FSU, popular anti-Semitism has been on the rise. He does a fine job of describing both the social conditions that foster popular anti-Semitism and the political groups that manipulate it (the "Red-Brown Bloc" of Communists and ultra-nationalists), provides evidence on contemporary political anti-Semitism from the Russian press, and makes excellent use of polling data to chart attitudes towards Jews. He argues that fear of pogroms and anti-Jewish policies have not been the sole cause of the mass Jewish exodus from the former Soviet Union–the dismal Russian economy is perhaps a more significant factor. Moreover, the freedom now enjoyed by Jews has itself allowed for mass emigration: around one million Jews emigrated in the decade 1989-1998 (half of the Jewish population recorded in the 1989 Soviet census). These =migr=s have created a trans-national community that flows between Russia, Israel, and the USA, and Gitelman provides interesting observations regarding their impact on Israeli society.

Gitelman devotes most of his conclusion to a theme common in contemporary Jewish literature–the threat that Jewish life (in this case in Russia) may soon disappear.[7] He warns that emigration, high rates of intermarriage, and low fertility rates have created the threat of a Jewish "demographic collapse" in the post-Soviet states (p. 254). Moreover, he questions the ability of the existing Jewish community to sustain a viable Jewish culture and asks what Jewishness has come to mean in the former Soviet states. His survey data demonstrates that post-Soviet Jewry does not feel a strong connection to Judaism or to Hebrew; instead, they identify Jewishness with a sense of common nationality, of belonging by birth to a common people, of "Jewish pride," and of having a "Jewish soul."

Gitelman concludes that, "After religion, language, territorial concentration, and ethnically defined lifestyle were taken away, what may have remained was a state-imposed identity (no longer required in either Russia or Ukraine), social apartness–imposed in its most extreme form by anti-Semitism–lifestyle differences, and an awareness of being different" (p. 269). Gitelman frets that Jewish identity in the Post-Soviet era is a Soviet construct, a "passport identity" that has left Jews "others" even after the specifically Jewish "content" has been drained out of their lives. He views Jewishness devoid of Judaism as a "hollow identity," "emptying the category 'Jew' of any meaning at all" (p. 271). He concludes that secular Jewish identity simply is not viable–secularism is tantamount to assimilation–and the only hope for a sustained post-Soviet Jewry lay in contact with other (religious) Jews.

This conclusion locates Gitelman's book in broader debates that have dominated Jewish intellectual and cultural life for more than a century. While I disagree in principle with Gitelman's assessment of secular Jewish culture, and while I wish that the he had directly engaged with the abundant research on Jews in Late Imperial Russia and the USSR published since the 1980s, this remains the best introductory volume on modern Russian Jewish history available in any language. Indiana University Press deserves thanks for bringing it to a wider audience in this excellent new edition.

Notes

[1]. My one general criticism of this and other "revised" chapters is that Gitelman pays slight attention to research published in the past decade, even if one considers only works in English. He might have profitably engaged, for instance, with recent work on the social and political history of pogroms by Robert Weinberg, Shlomo Lambroso, Charters Wynn, Stephen Berk, Michael Aronson, and Edward Judge. He might also have addressed the findings of recent works on anti-Semitism, Russian-Jewish intellectual life, and Jewish narodniki by (respectively) John Klier, Benjamin Nathans, and Eric Harberer.

[2]. Newly available archival sources are revealing just how seriously the party-state regime took the "threat" posed by Hekhaluts. In a 1925 secret report, for instance, Smolensk's Procurator identified Hekhaluts as the most significant opposition party organization active in the province. (State Archives of Smolensk Oblast [GASO], Fond r-495, opis 2, sv. 4 (1924), delo 39, ll. 9-14.) Again, Gitelman might have profitably engaged recent work on Jews during the war, revolution and civil war, including, for instance, essays by Boris Pudalov, Oleg Budnitskii, Eric Lohr, and myself.

[3]. Arch Getty and William Chase reached similar conclusions on the basis of their database on the victims of the Great Terror. See their essay "Patterns of Repression among the Soviet Elite in the 1930s" in J. Arch Getty and Roberta T. Manning, eds., *Stalinist Terror: New Perspectives* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 225-246. Data collected on victims of political repression in Smolensk Province (home to one of the largest Jewish populations outside the former Pale of Settlement) also suggest that the local terror did not specifically target Jews as Jews. See the =, at http://admin.smolensk.ru/history/repr/index.html.

[4]. This figure is from David Vital, *A People Apart: The Jews in Europe, 1789-1939* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 897. It should be noted that Gitelman edited a groundbreaking collection of essays on the Holocaust in the Soviet Union, *Bitter Legacy: Confronting the Holocaust in the USSR* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997).

[5]. One might note that Gitelman underestimates the significance of Belorussian collaboration with the Nazis, which has been the topic of some very useful recent research. See, for instance, Martin Dean, *Collaboration in the Holocaust: Crimes of the Local Police in Belorussia and Ukraine, 1941-44* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999). An excellent recent account that graphically supports many of Gitelman's observations regarding Jewish participation in the war effort and the fate of "zapadniki" is Gabriel Temkin, *My Just War: The Memoir of a Jewish Red Army Soldier in World War II* (Navato, Calif.: Presidio, 1998).

[6]. My own observations of Jewish voluntary and cultural organizations in Smolensk accord with Gitelman's generalizations.

[7]. See, for instance, Bernard Wasserstein, *Vanishing Diaspora: The Jews in Europe since 1945* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996).

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