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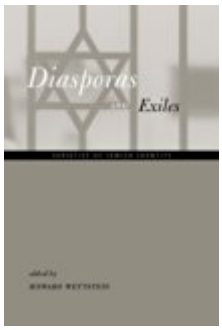
Howard Wettstein. *Diasporas and Exiles: Varieties of Jewish Identity.* Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002. VIII + 292 S. $49.95, cloth, ISBN 978-0-520-22864-1.



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How relevant are recent interdisciplinary theories of diaspora to Jewish studies? The question is worth considering, especially since many diaspora theorists see the Jewish diaspora as an "ideal type" and use it as a point of comparison for studies of other diasporas (e.g. Chinese, South Asian, the "black Atlantic").[1] Emerging as a field in the 1990s, diaspora studies has an unmistakably utopian hopefulness about it, and its proponents see in "diaspora" the potential for a new, non-essentialist conception of identity and cultural expression that exceeds the framework of the totalizing nation-state. Traditionally, Jews have theorized Jewish dispersal in the much more negative terms of exile (galut) and longing for return--or so we have usually assumed, at least. Yet, some scholars in Jewish studies--following the lead of Daniel Boyarin and Jonathan Boyarin--have suggested that there is a real value is thinking of Jewish dispersal in this more positive light.[2] In *Diasporas and Exiles: Varieties of Jewish Identity*, eleven scholars have taken a thoughtful, cautious approach to the matter, examining the role that concepts of diaspora and exile have played in Jewish identity in different historical and cultural contexts. Although they provide few simple answers, and do not celebrate "diaspora" in the way many contemporary theorists do, the collection itself serves as proof that an engagement with diaspora studies can provide significant new insights.

Although the contexts explored here range from the Hellenistic world to twentieth-century North Africa to Baal Teshuvot in San Francisco, the essays in this collection cohere remarkably well, thanks to some very hard work by the authors. As editor Howard Wettstein reports in his introduction, *Diasporas and Exiles* is the fruit of a 1997 University of California Humanities Research Institute (UCHRI) residential research group on Jewish identity. This was clearly a working group in which the nature, meaning, and value of the concepts under discussion--Jewish identity, diaspora, galut--were radically and fruitfully debated over and over again. As a result, unlike many edited collections of this sort, the essays in *Diasporas and Exiles* speak to one another. The conversations also seem to have pushed many of the authors to a high level of clarity and theoretical sophistication in their approaches and conclu-

sions. This makes many of the essays, and the book as a whole, valuable contributions to the study of Jewish identity.

Philosopher Howard Wettstein's introduction provides a useful synthetic starting point for readers. In addition to summarizing the articles, he describes the theoretical concerns shared by the authors, as well as providing a sense of agreement and disagreement. Overall, he reports, the authors in the volume did not find it possible to replace the concept of galut with the concept of diaspora, for this would be to marginalize a key aspect of Jewish experience, culture, and self-understanding. However, using this perspective did open up ways to move beyond the confines of our traditional frameworks for understanding such fraught concepts as homelessness, exile, modernization, assimilation, powerlessness, memory, and solidarity. If a shared conclusion about Jewish identity must be drawn from the volume, Wettstein suggests that it is merely a conclusion about how to approach the question. The authors agree that "there is no single account of Jewish identity, no uniquely privileged Jewish identity" (p. 7), that is, Jewish identity can never be spoken of in the singular. Thus, questions about Jewish identity cannot be pursued as if they were questions "of metaphysics--of the constitution of Jewishness"--but rather, must be explored in "the domain of the theory of human values" (p. 2). This conceptual starting point serves to connect the volume's essays.

Wettstein's promise that the essays will treat identity as a question of human values--that is, a set of choices circumscribed by what is possible and available within a context--is fulfilled with interesting results in the volume. One of the best examples of this is art historian Catherine Sousloff's excellent essay on Oscar Kokoschka's 1909 double portrait of Hans Tietze and Erica Tietze-Conrat. Here, Sousloff examines how and where the portrait was displayed, as well as contemporary theories of portraiture (including those of the Tietzes themselves by way of their renowned teacher, the art historian Alois Riegl) in order to explain how this painting represented the subjects' Jewishness without including any images we (or even the Tietzes) might normally read as "Jewish." By examining these contextual aspects of the portrait, Sousloff is able to draw some interesting conclusions about Jewish identity and also about portraiture itself.

The volume also provides an interesting array of perspectives on the place of "diaspora" and/or "galut" in Jewish identity in different times and places. From the book as a whole, one gets the sense that both terms have played, and continue to play, important roles in Jewish experience and self-understanding. Erich Gruen's "Diaspora and Homeland" is particularly good. Gruen argues that Hellenistic Jews living outside Jerusalem during the Second Temple period did not think of themselves as in exile, but rather, saw their lives in more neutral or even positive terms. Through a convincing reading of texts from the period, he describes a thriving set of dispersed communities in which Jews felt connected to one another, but saw neither their distance from Jerusalem nor their integration into gentile societies as problematic. Similarly, Bluma Goldstein's article on Heinrich Heine's 1851 work, "Hebrische Melodien," offers a complex picture in which some elements of diaspora life are portrayed as liberating. She argues that Heine's three-part work points toward a new kind of Jewish identity, an "alternative diasporic life in which the modern Jew (and poet) could thrive as Jew and European" (p. 67). Finally, in his article on Jews in Arab lands, Daniel Schroeter argues that Moroccan Jews, who lived in a world where colonialism and Islam were more important factors than Enlightenment, anti-Semitism, and Zionism, developed a very different kind of Jewish identity than European Jews. Deeply connected to their local communities, they nonetheless never considered themselves Moroccan. Ironically, they only came "to be considered 'Moroccan' by others when they moved to Israel"

(p. 160). In these articles, as with most in the volume, "exile" and "diaspora" are terms that build on one another, remaining useful terms from one moment to another and from one place to another, but shifting in meaning.

Some of the best articles in this volume provide fertile ground for future research. Several contributors argue that Jewish identities and attitudes toward their dispersion were fundamentally influenced by the surrounding gentile culture, but only Sousloff actually pursues this line of research by exploring how cultural interactions were experienced and what they meant to Jews and their gentile neighbors. In so doing, Sousloff sheds light not only on the Tietzes' "Jewishness," but more interestingly, on early twentieth-century Viennese portraiture as itself a kind of diasporic site in which what is "Jewish" and what is "not Jewish" cannot be understood in simple terms. Erich Gruen's article also suggests that there is real value in examining how Jewish identity was shaped by borrowings from the surrounding non-Jewish world. Hellenistic Jews, he tells us, did not find diaspora problematic because in their world, diaspora was not abnormal. This was, after all, an empire in which colonization and the resulting ethnic diversity were commonplace, and even more importantly, did not impede Jews outside Jerusalem from full participation in the societies where they lived. The suggestion here--that Jewish ideas about diaspora are shaped by the existence (or non-existence) of other diasporas around them--is fascinating, and opens up a question that could be asked of many of the essays in the volume. This would be especially interesting to explore in the context of the contemporary world, in which Jews are once again only one self-consciously diasporic group among many.

Interesting and coherent as the overarching theoretical framework for the volume is, it must be said that readers will certainly find some of the articles more convincing, original, and thought-provoking than others. This problem, so common in edited collections, might be exacerbated in this case because of the interdisciplinary nature of the project. In addition, a few of the essays occasionally undermine the overall effort to de-essentialize Jewish identity by making overly broad generalizations about who Jews are and what Jews think, and sometimes even suggest what Jews should think. Yet the strongest essays in the volume do succeed in demonstrating that Jewish identity within any particular context is made up of multiple, at times conflicting strands.

A more serious problem with the volume is what it chooses not to do. Although many articles mention Zionism and the state of Israel somewhere in their discussion, no article focuses on either of these topics exclusively (although Kerri Steinberg's piece on American Jewish philanthropy contains fascinating observations about the diverse and changing perceptions of Israel among American Jews). This would have been very illuminating for a number of reasons. First, one cannot speak of Zionism or Israel without grappling with the concepts of sovereignty and nationhood. With these concepts, a different picture of identity is sure to emerge, and as Boyarin and Boyarin's 1993 article shows, it is both possible and illuminating to examine these issues from a diaspora studies perspective. Furthermore, since some kind of critique of Zionist/Israeli ideas of diaspora seems to inform the project as a whole, without such a study, the critique is never actually articulated. So while readers will certainly sense that the authors follow Boyarin and Boyarin in seeing diaspora as a "theoretical and historical model to replace national self-determination," without exploring this important model of collective identity, Zionism inhabits this collection like an elephant in a seminar room.[3]

Beyond these problems, ***Diasporas and Exiles*** is an edited collection highly recommended for scholars in Jewish studies interested in questions of identity, and not necessarily only those based in the fields from which the contributors hail (an-

thropology, art history, history, literature, philosophy, politics, and sociology). In addition, many of the articles are quite accessible to audiences without previous specialized knowledge in the subfield in which they fall. Such accessibility may annoy specialists accustomed to greater detail or original research, but given the collection's interesting theoretical framework, even these specialists are bound to learn something new from reading it.

Notes

[1]. In the very first issue of the journal *Diaspora*, William Safran builds his definition of diaspora around Jews as an "ideal type" in his "Diasporas in Modern Societies: Myths of Homeland and Return," *Diaspora* 1 (1991): 84. James Clifford seeks to broaden Safran's definition but still sees the Jewish case as a key example in his *Routes: Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997), 247-52. The term "black Atlantic" is from Paul Gilroy's pathbreaking *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1987).

[2]. Daniel Boyarin and Jonathan Boyarin, "Diaspora: Generation and the Ground of Jewish Identity," *Critical Inquiry* 19, 4 (1993): 693-725.

[3]. Boyarin and Boyarin, "Diaspora," 713.