

JEFFREY LESSER AND RAANAN REIN (eds.): *Rethinking Jewish-Latin Americans*. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2008.

This rich collection of essays on Jewish-Latin Americans brings new methodological and theoretical considerations to a field that has been in need of change. The editors, Jeffrey Lesser and Raanan Rein, have organized the book fantastically well. It begins with a short introduction that outlines the history of Jews in Argentina and Brazil, followed by a first chapter by the editors, and nine other contributions; it closes with an afterword by Judah Cohen. The summaries of the historical context are important for a reader unfamiliar with the history of these Jewish communities, but it is the first chapter that indeed frames the book. After a brief discussion about the current state of the field, Lesser and Rein propose a new research agenda, one that is based on important theoretical reconfigurations. Primarily, they argue that the study of Jewish Latin Americans should not be the study of an ‘exceptional’ ethnic minority, but a venue for understanding how ethnicity functions in Latin America. They offer seven important “comments”: 1) They reject the assumption that transnational identity (‘Jewishness’) is more dominant than national identity (‘Argentine,’ for example). They therefore insist that the term ‘Jewish Latin Americans’ is a more appropriate option than ‘Latin American Jews.’ 2) They rethink the role played by the countries of origin of the immigrant generation (and Israel) in shaping the identity of Latin American-born children and grandchildren. 3) They question the assumption that the ‘center’ of ethnic identity is elsewhere, and not in the country where the ‘ethnics’ reside. 4) Methodologically, they stress the importance of including ‘unaffiliated ethnics’ in studies of ethnicity, and move away from the field’s ‘institutional’ focus. 5) They strongly reject anti-Semitism as a focus of Jewish Latin Americans’ experience, stating that between rhetoric and social practice there is usually a big divide. 6) They remind scholars that it is dangerous to assume that Jewish Latin Americans were or are only members of the middle and upper-middle-class, and call for more studies of the Jewish working class. 7) Lastly, they stress that Jewish Latin American communities are not homogeneous and welcome the focus on gender and other minorities within the ethnic group (e.g., Sephardim, Arab-speaking Jews, etc.).

The articles that follow address either implicitly or explicitly the propositions asserted by the editors in the introduction. José Moya’s study of the participation of Jews in the anarchist movement takes up the challenge of studying ‘unaffiliated’ Jews, as does Sandra McGee Deutsch’s study of Argentine Jewish women in the Communist Party and in the Junta de la Victoria. Deutsch also covers the study of other ‘Jewish’ women’s organizations. Jeff Lesser’s article places Jews alongside Japanese, Arabs, and Koreans, and focuses on how these groups crafted

very similar ‘origin myths’ that allow them to claim ‘Brazilianness’ in the face of the elite notion that Brazil is a “uniform, white, Catholic society” (p. 48). Two articles focus on how notions of “Jews” or “Jewishness” were utilized by non-Jews to talk about broader issues. Erin Graff Zivin analyzes a 1930 samba and a 1920 chronicle written by Brazilian authors and reveals that the “flexible signifier ‘Jew’ ... [allows the authors to] articulate a hybrid notion of Brazilian-ness” at the beginning of the twentieth century (p. 125). Rosalie Sitman’s study of Victoria Ocampo’s *Revista Sur* during the 1930s and 1940s concludes that the magazine’s ample discussion of Spanish Republicans and Jews “functioned as a cultural code” that allowed the intellectuals behind the publication to place themselves in the political and ideological context of Argentine culture (p. 134). Roney Cytrynowicz’s chapter on São Paulo argues that Jews were not passive victims of the “Estado Novo,” but rather successfully confronted “the intimidating nationalistic and xenophobic atmosphere” of the regime (p. 101). Donna Guy’s chapter on women’s organizations and Jewish orphanages sheds light on the central role Jewish women played not only within the community and with the government, but also in refashioning their identity. Natasha Zaretsky’s study of the Yiddish Chorus, which was created in Buenos Aires in the aftermath of the AMIA bombing, shows how the negotiation between Jewish ethnicity and the Jews’ relationship to the Argentine state and the non-Jewish Argentine society frames the Jewish Argentines’ experiences. The chapter makes a strong case for understanding ethnic identity not as binary but as a spectrum, another point raised by Lesser and Rein in their introduction. Edna Aizenberg’s focus on Uruguay’s *Memorial del Holocausto* serves as a starting point to ponder the ways that Jewish experience (and the construction of the memorial) allowed for the narration of the national (Uruguayan) tragedy of the military dictatorship by creating a Memorial to the Detained-Disappeared.

The collection closes with a chapter by Judah Cohen. By entitling his essay “The Ethnic Dilemmas of Latin American Jewry,” Cohen questions the editors’ arguments and forces the reader to think about the Latin American ‘ethnic,’ and to do so while trying *also* to understand the *Jew*. He welcomes the collection as a new “breath of life into a beautifully complex, deeply nuanced area,” and his comments should be read as a challenge to think about the possibility of doing both Latin American ethnic studies *and* Jewish studies (p. 281). His suggestions are useful: relying less on written documents and interviews and more on ‘performance,’ he studies the ‘boundaries’ of Judaism (rather than focusing ‘onward from the margins’), and pays attention to Jewish Latin American religious life, as well as smaller communities (such as those of the Caribbean). Finally, he reminds scholars that Jewish identity in ‘Latin America’ has been ‘cultivated’

in multiple sites and political contexts: from the old world to the new, and from there, out again. New studies should evidence that transit through time and space.

All in all, this is a theoretically and methodologically rich collection of essays, one that will be looked back on as having prompted a much desired change of direction in the field of Latin American Jewish Studies (or Jewish Latin American Studies).

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VICTORIA CARPENTER (ed.): *A World Torn Apart: Representations of Violence in Latin American Narrative*. Bern: Peter Lang, 2007.

This collection of essays is the result of a conference on Violence, Culture and Identity held in 2003 at the University of St. Andrews. It seeks to contribute to the “understanding of representations of violence in Latin American narrative,” mainly, but not at all exclusively, in literary works. Due to the protean and pervasive nature of its subject, this is a vast undertaking that can only be addressed in a fragmentary fashion. The book thus comprises a number of case studies that are diverse in focus, approach, and scope, ranging from vast surveys of literary and cultural national traditions to close readings of particular novels and films, from analyses grounded in history to those grounded in philosophy and epistemology, from examination of Colonial writing to examination of contemporary cultural products.

The diversity implied in the genre “conference proceedings” entails risk as well as opportunity. The editor, Victoria Carpenter, Reader in Latin American Studies at the University of Derby, has held the project together as a coherent intellectual enterprise rather than a disparate collection of articles. She has achieved this task by organizing the volume in five parts: “The Violent Other”; “Psychology of Violence”; “Dictatorial Violence – Forgive and Forget”; “Violence, Marginalization and Myths”; and “Women and Violence.”

Part one focuses on the “creation” of a “violent other” in the colonial and postcolonial history of three Latin American countries: Colombia, Brazil, and Peru. The article by Margarita Serje, “Violence as Context: Colonial Landscapes and Frontier Narratives in the Interpretation of Conflict in Colombia,” is devoted to the history (from the colony to the present) of the cultural construction of “landscapes of fear” (such as jungles and rural frontiers), that Serje interprets as crucial to the self-perception and self-interpretation of Colombia as a violent society. In “‘Hatreds of an Almost Spanish American Crudity’: Brazilian Interpretations of the Tumultuous First Republic, 1889-1898,” Ori Preuss analyzes