Jews and Gentiles in Central and Eastern Europe during the Holocaust: History and Memory, eds. Hana Kubátová and Jan Láníček, (London: Routledge, 2018), pp. 230.

by *Tim Corbett*

The edited volume presents a collection of twelve essays that showcase recent research in Holocaust studies with a focus predominantly on East Central and Eastern Europe. The contributions go back to a pair of workshops organized in 2012 and 2014 and were originally published as a special volume of *Holocaust Studies* in 2017. The principal aim of this volume is to reexamine "Jewish-Gentile" relations from the Holocaust to the collapse of socialism in 1989-90, thus extending significantly further beyond the years of the Holocaust than the title suggests. Although the volume has as its subject the experience and aftermath of the Holocaust, the editors conceive of this work as an intervention "in the joint field of Jewish and Eastern European [!] Studies" (p. 11).

The eleven essays are arranged chronologically, beginning with examinations of various aspects of the Holocaust as it unfolded in Poland and Slovakia. The scope then extends to the postwar years with examinations of antisemitism, restitution, and commemoration in Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Greece, and Poland, closing with a couple of essays extending the disciplinary scope to literary and film studies. As already outlined in the introductory essay by the editors, the volume not only presents a review of recent research trends in these geographic and thematic fields but also intervenes in the problematic societal and political discourses of post-socialist Europe with regard to the history of antisemitism, the Holocaust, and relations with Jews in Central and Eastern Europe as a whole. This attempt to "challenge the narratives of the Holocaust as an all-German responsibility (and as an all-German story to tell)" (p. 11) is arguably the greatest contribution of this volume, particularly in the way it highlights the failure in Central and Eastern Europe to deal with complicity in the crimes of National Socialism and the reprehensible treatment of surviving Jews after 1945, as well as the politics of denial and revisionism in the region today.

The essays offer critical overviews of the historiography in the respective countries under consideration, proceeding to highlight particular source materials from – as well as innovative approaches to – the history and aftermath of the Holocaust in Eastern Europe. For example, the first essay, by Natalia Aleksiun, uses trial testimony to examine the betrayal of Jews by non-Jews under German occupation

in Galicia. With the trials often dismissed in historiography as communist show, Aleksiun's contribution is essentially a call to reexamine these trials as a source for Jewish/non-Jewish relations. Without going into each contribution individually, it is this synthesis of historiography, source pools, and methodologies that should make this volume a textbook for students of the Holocaust in Central and Eastern Europe and a basis for further exploration into the manifold themes and problems opened up, even if not necessarily explored in great depth, here.

A major problem with the work, however, lies in its failure to deal in any critical or explicit manner with its very own terms. The title alone – Jews and Gentiles in Central and Eastern Europe – predicates an unreflected upon dichotomy that virtually every essay in the volume unquestioningly adopts and perpetuates. The abstract before the title page already speaks of "Jewish-Gentile relations" as a form of "interaction between the individual majority societies and the Jewish minorities," whereby Jews are categorized as a collective that is a priori separate – and foreign – to the "majority societies" (a term used throughout) among whom they lived until their wholesale destruction during the Holocaust. This ethnicization and reification of Jewish "difference," unfortunately, shapes the entire volume, as reflected in the use of repeated categorical pairings such as – to take a couple of examples from the introduction – "Czech-Jewish coexistence" (p. 5) or "Polish-Jewish relations" (p. 8), the dichotomy in all such cases throughout the volume underlining the unspoken assumption that Jews are, per se, not Czechs, Poles, etc. In a particularly striking example, we find not only "the Jews and Slovaks" (p. 215) being contrasted – note the definite article here to emphasize the collectivity of "the Jews" compared to the vague collective of "Slovaks" – but also Nazi discourses being unquestioningly perpetuated in attributions such as "half-Jew" (p. 213) and "Aryan" (p. 215).

This is a troubling example of how essentialist categories have been adopted in a volume that otherwise criticizes nationalizing discourses in Holocaust memory. Ironically, this point is actually made in one of the essays by Máté Zombory, who critiques the emergence of dichotomous discourses in what he calls the present-day "regime of Holocaust memory" (p. 193). Zombory shows how in Hungary, the Holocaust was originally cast in national terms which occluded Jews in a categorical sense while incorporating crimes against Jews in the prosecution of war crimes against Hungary generally, thereby refuting the widespread tenet of Holocaust studies that the persecution of Jews was absent in early postwar discourses (pp. 181-184). The earlier discourse, Zombory finds, did not follow "the classification of the Nazi persecution," meaning the "homogenizing racial

identification of 'the Jews,'" and he concludes that it is striking "how diverse the conceptions of the recent past [i.e., right after the Holocaust] were compared to the regime of Holocaust memory [i.e. today]" (p. 193). He thus criticizes the fact that in the static, dichotomous, and hegemonic Holocaust discourse of recent years, "the distinction is not visible between Jews (who identify themselves as such) and those qualified as Jews (forcibly identified as such by Nazi authorities)" (p. 178) – a charge I would make against this volume, and more broadly against the field, as a whole.

The fact that this critical analysis was included in two successive printings of findings that perpetuate precisely this discourse suggests a worrying tone deafness in the field – an inability or unwillingness to engage with fundamental concepts or parallel developments in research. This is an issue, I believe, that resonates in the related field of Jewish studies, with its tenacious narratives of Jewish "assimilation," "acculturation," and "integration" into essentialized national "majority" societies, despite manifold developments undermining precisely this paradigm. This volume unfortunately needs to be regarded at least partly as a manifestation of the very nationalizing discourses it claims to be problematizing. I repeat that this work offers a concise showcase of the current state of the field as well as a (commendable) critique of the politics of memory in the countries under consideration, which can serve as a basis for comparative perspectives on universal issues in Holocaust research, such as collaboration, restitution, and commemoration. However, an equally critical reflection on precisely those national, cultural, "ethnic," perhaps even "racial" discourses that stood at the heart of the violence of the twentieth century is evidently still sorely needed in the field.

Another criticism that needs to be made, albeit one that goes beyond the immediate authorship of the contributors, is the astonishing lack of copy-editing of the majority of the articles, which at times presents difficulties in following the arguments being made. Beyond plain grammatical issues, this includes poor translations of source materials as well as confusing use of terminology. For example, Kateřina Símová's essay translates a passage from a Communist Party report speaking of the "revision [?] of their [the Jews'] property," presumably meaning expropriation (p. 113), and employs the terms "semiotic" (twice including the tautological "semiotic sign," pp. 120 and 126), "linguistic," "semantic," "rhetoric," and "textual" so interchangeably that they lose all meaning. This seems to be par for the course for Routledge's output these days, which churns out such volumes to the astounding tune of 120 pounds sterling apiece (to be fair, now also

in paperback for only 36.99), obviously with very little regard to quality. This does a disservice not least of all to the authors themselves.

I would nevertheless conclude on the positive note that this volume absolutely makes a contribution as a textbook and a point of departure for further research into specific geographical, chronological, and thematic areas in the already well-trodden field of Holocaust studies. I hope, however, that scholars in Holocaust studies, Jewish studies, and beyond will in future spend a little more time engaging with the fundamental concepts they employ as well as with the critical reflections of their colleagues in the field – particularly when those reflections are published repeatedly in the very same volume.

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