Shumsky, Dimitry: Zweisprachigkeit und binationale Idee: Der Prager Zionismus, 1900-1930.

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Can different nationalities share the same state or are multinational states doomed to fail? Does nationalism inevitably transform and divide multiethnic societies or can it also serve as an integrative force? These questions remain as pressing today as they were at the turn of the twentieth century, when mass politics, rapid socio-economic change, and new cultural and political identities transformed multiethnic states such as Austria-Hungary. In "Zweisprachigkeit und binationale Idee", the historian Dimitry Shumsky tells the story of how a remarkable group of young Jewish intellectuals in Prague wrestled with the meaning of Jewish collectivity in an age of nationalism. In the years before the First World War, they developed a form of Zionism that envisioned Jewish nationhood as a platform for Jews' participation in the multinational society that was emerging in Bohemia and Austria-Hungary more broadly. Significantly, these activists and thinkers envisioned Jews acting as a bridge between Czechs and Germans thanks to the Czech and German bilingualism of Prague and Bohemia's Jews. In the wake of Austria-Hungary's collapse and the emergence of nationalist successor states, some of these Zionists emigrated to Palestine. Here, they became the driving force, adapting their particular brand of Zionism to this new multiethnic context, behind the efforts to create a bi-national Arab and Jewish state in Palestine.

Shumsky's study focuses on the leading personalities in the important Zionist student organization Bar Kochba in the years before the First World War. The seven men at the center of his study, whom he denotes the "Bar Kochba men" – Hugo Bergmann, Hans Kohn, Robert Weltsch, Max Brod, Leo and Hugo Hermann, and Franz Kafka – would become well-known scholars, writers and Zionist activists. Unlike most historians, Shumsky rejects the idea that Prague Zionism was "an escape" from the national conflict between Germans and Czechs. Similarly, he dismisses the notion that the later bi-nationalism was an utopian ideal that reflected its proponents' disillusionment with Zionism. Rather, Shumsky convincingly shows that it was these men's own experience living in a "multicultural mosaic" of pre-World War One Prague that served as a model for how different nationalities could coexist and benefit mutually from intercultural exchange. Indeed, the book's major contribution is Shumsky's examination of the interplay between everyday experiences and political ideas arguing that it was these men's socio-cultural environment and their experiences of diversity that shaped their Zionist activism.

Refreshingly, Shumsky leaves behind the debates about the degrees of Prague Jews' German or Czech acculturation and seeks to understand this society as a cultural mosaic that produced, what he calls, a Czecho-German Jewish culture unique to Prague and Bohemia. Rather than seeing language practices as a sign of political belonging or cultural identification, Shumsky highlights the everyday bilingualism and multiethnic interactions that shaped Jewish culture here. When the Bar Kochba men turned to Jewish nationalism, they molded it in a way that elevated their own Czecho-German Jewish culture to an ideology and political platform. Significantly, the Bar Kochba men were developing their ideas within a context that appeared to forecast a new political order where the Austrian state recognized nationalities' cultural autonomy and facilitated their equal access to public resources and representation. After the First World War, when Bohemia became part of Czechoslovakia, most of the Bar Kochba men lost faith in Zionism's potential here and transferred their political aspirations to Palestine. Thus rather than the utopian visions of intellectual dreamers, Shumsky shows that the Zionism developed by these Prague activists was shaped by their own social and political experience in late Habsburg Bohemia.

The book's first chapter examines the socio-cultural and political milieu of late nineteenth and early twentieth century Prague and more broadly introduces the reader to the particular multi-linguistic and multiethnic environment that shaped the everyday experiences of Bohemia's Jews. In order to do so, however, Shumsky launches a fierce critique of the existing historiography on the subject. He is particularly critical of historians' adoption of ethno-nationalist frameworks in writing the history of the region. Indeed, even if political discourse, public institutions, and legislation were increasingly nationalized in the decades before the First World War, people's everyday lives, Shumsky argues, were marked by interaction, integration, and cultural and linguistic diversity. In rejecting the old terminology, Shumsky invents a new one, describing his subjects as "Czecho-German Jews", a category meant to capture the multiethnic context and highlight the multifaceted, ambivalent, fragmented, and fluctuating nature of this culture.

The second chapter examines the significance of bilingualism and multiethnic interactions in the everyday social experiences of the Bar Kochba men. While some, like Max Brod and Hans Kohn, would later describe Prague Jews as isolated in a sharply divided city, Shumsky notes that these men's own life experience points to a very different picture. Using census forms, residency lists, and other sources that reflect the social environment, he finds a more complex picture of bilingualism and everyday, cross-cultural interactions. Hans Kohn, for example, grew up in a Czech-speaking Jewish family, who were recent arrivals to Prague from rural Bohemia. Kohn went to German-language schools and lived alongside Jewish and non-Jewish Czech and German-speaking neighbors. Indeed, at the core of the Czecho-German Jewish culture was its bilingualism. This was a reflection of a demographic shift that brought rural Czech-speaking folk, including large numbers of Jews, to Bohemia's growing towns and cities in the late nineteenth century. Bilingualism was thus part of the urban landscape in which these men grew up, an everyday experience that was central to their sense of Jewishness. For the Bar Kochba men, Jews' bilingualism became a marker of Jews' national distinctiveness and rootedness in Bohemia, a third nationality that could act as an integrative force among the region's other national groups. Their model for Jewish nationhood was a way of legitimizing and solidifying the Czecho-German Jewish culture at a time when other nationalists demanded that Jews show their allegiance to either the Germans or the Czechs.

The third chapter examines the group's leading thinker Hugo Bergmann's efforts to articulate the place of Jewish nationhood in a multinational society. Bergmann saw Jewish education as the key to creating the kind of Jewish individual that would embody his Zionist ideal. He promoted an education that would anchor the individual in Jewish and general knowledge, including knowledge of Hebrew, Czech and German languages. He also believed that the admittance of non-Jewish students to Jewish schools was central to this program. As Shumsky describes Bergmann's plan: a deep understanding of Jewish culture (thesis) and openness to the non-Jewish world (anti-thesis) that will lead to mutual and complimentary cultural exchange (synthesis). In short, the Jewish nationalism that Bergmann advocated emphasized both Jewish cultural renewal as well as Jews' social and cultural integration into their non-Jewish environments.

In Chapter Three Shumsky begins his investigation of the Prague activists' relationship to the broader Zionist movement when he examines Martin Buber's visit to Prague in 1909 and 1910 and the debates that followed. Chapter Four continues this theme as it focuses on the Bar Kochba's men's discussions of broader questions of Diaspora, "Exile," and national minority rights that preoccupied Zionist thinkers. Shumsky shows that in the years before the First World War, when the Habsburg state was experimenting with province-wide reforms meant to place different nationalities on equal terms and thereby diffuse national tensions, Prague Zionists sought to have Bohemian Jewry recognized as a nationality. In making their case, they worked to produce and disseminate new narratives about Jews' historical belonging in Bohemia. They hoped that Bohemia would become the test case for transforming Austria into a multinational federation with national cultural autonomy for its peoples. Indeed, the Bar Kochba men remained focused on Bohemia as the home for

their Jewish nation until the end of the First World War. Only then did they turn their attention in a serious way to Palestine.

The fifth and last chapter discusses Hans Kohn's and Hugo Bergmann's view of Palestine as a Jewish homeland. As Shumsky shows, Hugo Bergmann was disillusioned by the triumph of what he saw as a chauvinistic form of Czech nationalism that became dominant in Czechoslovakia. He no longer believed there was a place for his brand of Zionism in the Bohemian Lands and decided to immigrate to Palestine to pursue his political vision. Here, he hoped to promote a multicultural society much as the one he had experienced in Prague. Shumsky thus shows that Bergmann's pursuit of a bi-national state for Arabs and Jews drew directly on the type of Zionism he and his fellow Bar Kochba men had developed in Bohemia before the First World War.

In this book, Dimitry Shumsky intervenes in several recent scholarly debates. First, he seeks both to integrate Zionists into their European environments, considering the significance of this context beyond the "alienation" thesis, as well as to highlight the diversity of Zionist thought before and after the First World War. Second, alongside a number of other scholars who have recently taken historians to task for imposing ethno-national models on their historical work, he seeks to introduce a terminology and approach that highlights the everyday, the multifaceted, and the dynamic character of cultures and identities thereby allowing for a better understanding of the past in its complexity. Although the book's long journey to its current form – from dissertation to monograph, from its Hebrew original to the German translation – has resulted in some significant gaps in terms of the most recent scholarly literature on the region, this doesn't in the end take away from Shumsky's analysis. This is a book that offers an important and masterful critique of much of the existing scholarship on Bohemia and the region's Jews as well as new insights into the social lives of Jews and non-Jews alike in Prague in late Habsburg Austria.

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