

Book Reviews

Deutsch, Sandra McGee (2010) *Crossing Borders, Claiming a Nation. A History of Argentine Jewish Women, 1880–1955*, Duke University Press (Durham, NC and London), xii + 377 pp. £70.00 hbk, £17.99 pbk.

Jewish women immigrants to Argentina, marginalised by the paternalistic society into which they came and by the patriarchy of their own families and organisations dedicated to ‘improving’ them, have largely been omitted from history. Deutsch demonstrates that they entered the Argentine historical process through their daily activities and their

willingness to contest the limitations placed upon them, thus participating in the formation of Argentine state and society.

Deutsch's command of Argentine history was earlier deployed in her important study, *Las derechas: The Extreme Right in Argentina Brazil, and Chile, 1890–1939*, as well as in other books and articles concerning counter revolutionary forces in the southern Americas. Here she analyses her interviews with more than 30 Argentine Jewish women, supplemented by scores of interviews recorded by the Buenos Aires Archivo de la Palabra Centro Marc Turkow and the Institute of Contemporary Judaism in Jerusalem. She utilises these, plus extensive archival and periodical sources, not to celebrate Jewish women's achievements but to historicise them.

Deutsch identifies women who, operating within the financial, religious and gender constraints they encountered as immigrants, farmed alongside their fathers and husbands, agitated for the education of girls and for the right of females to teach and to practice medicine, and worked in commerce as employees and employers. Political action was closed to them in an era when women lacked the vote; in addition, Jewish and non-Jewish social mores discouraged women from enacting public roles. Barred from the male dominated national political arena, many Jewish women turned their attention inward towards community improvement and charitable work. Their efforts were both ratified and extinguished by their absorption into the Partido Peronista Feminino.

Leftwing groups – anarchists, Communists, Socialists and the labour unions – did admit women, and Jewish female activists were attracted to them, a point remembered by Argentines, for good or ill, to this day. Deutsch uses the lives of leftist Jewish women to develop insights into the appeal these movements held for their mass membership. By the 1940s, Argentine leftists had 'appropriated and expanded the liberal project, extending it to safeguard the rights of so-called subversives, whom most liberals stigmatised' (p. 192).

Peron's policies towards Jews, Judaism and Zionism are analysed by Deutsch. Creation of an alternative peronista Jewish political party won favour among some Jews and alienated others; the repression of dissidents caused Jews to rebuff him, while his support of Israel gained their support. 'While many Jews favoured [his] policies, few genuinely backed the administration' (p. 196).

Deutsch also examines the ways in which lives of Jewish women immigrants were coloured by others' perceptions of their sexuality and race. The perception of Jewish women as exotic, accounts in part for the enduring fascination, in Argentina and abroad, with Jewish prostitutes. Sex work was scarcely the only trade practised by Jewish immigrant women, as this book attests, but their perceived 'oriental' exoticism, and the public campaign against them by a Jewish establishment determined to close the business down, paradoxically caused Jewish prostitution to be seen as salient within a scene that also featured French, Polish and criolla prostitutes.

As for race, Jews regarded themselves as white and correspondingly a social cut above darker-skinned criollos. On the other hand, one of the most popular entertainers of the day, Paloma Efron, a Jew who performed 'Negro' music for Argentines, went by the appellation 'Blackie'.

Anti-Semitism does not figure prominently in Deutsch's account, unlike the major space it occupies in Jewish communal histories and personal narratives. In her view, anti-Semitism was less of a hindrance to women's professional careers than prejudice based on gender and political affiliation.

A gap in this immensely detailed history is the absence of reference to child-rearing practices. Marriage, which in this period was legally and in practice highly patriarchal, attracts the author's disapproval, which she aims at Jewish philanthropic organisations.

Book Reviews

These sought out lone female immigrants and orphans in order to bring them into a protected environment, separate them from pimps and white slavers, and steer them into marital safe havens. If these organisations were overly protective of their charges, enforcing conformance to the most conservative community standards, yet a US-based, feminist view of male-dominated marital unions may not be the best perspective to project onto their efforts.

With this book, Deutsch demonstrates the power of women's history to enlarge the dimensions of historical narrative. The originality of the present work lies in the idea that the ordinary and extraordinary activities of Argentine Jewish women constructed connections to a society that originally marginalised them, turning immigrants into Argentines and adding a Jewish element to Argentine identity.

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