

REZENSION

**Henry Felix Srebrnik: Creating the Chupah: The Zionist Movement and the Drive for Jewish Communal Unity in Canada, 1898–1921**

*Henry Felix Srebrnik, Creating the Chupah: The Zionist Movement and the Drive for Jewish Communal Unity in Canada, 1898–1921 (= Jewish Identity in Post-Modern Society). Boston: Academic Studies Press 2011, 264 p., ISBN 978-1-936235-71-1, US\$ 69,00.*

*Reviewed by Ira Robinson.*

Those concerned with Jewish history in the modern period often understand the Jewish community of Canada in terms of its relationship with the much larger and more influential Jewish community of the United States. While in the most general terms there is some justification for this attitude, a careful and detailed study of the dynamics of the two communities demonstrates important differences as well as significant similarities. Henry Srebrnik's book, *Creating the Chupah: The Zionist Movement and the Drive for Jewish Communal Unity in Canada, 1898–1921*, is a study that invites us to understand the Jewish community of Canada in a crucial period of its development through the perspective of the Canadian Zionist movement and its impact on the development of that community.

*Creating the Chupah* is a book that initially sets modest expectations for the reader. The author is careful to explain that it was originally written in the 1970s and is only being published nearly forty years later, with due attention to literature on the subject published more recently (p. 11). He also wishes us to understand that the research for the book is not based on archival sources, but rather published material, mainly in Yiddish, from the first half of the twentieth century (p. 12).

Despite the author's caveats, Srebrnik's book greatly rewards the reader in several ways. Most importantly, it utilizes numerous and invaluable sources that, probably because of their having been written in Yiddish, were relatively neglected in English-language scholarship, though several of these important works are translated into French by Pierre Anctil. Of equal importance, Srebrnik focusses on the fairly narrow institutional history of Canadian Zionism in its crucial first two decades. He thus has the scope to present important details that other scholars, in more general works, have tended to gloss over. A good example of that concerns the 1915 struggle for control of Montreal's Yiddish-language daily, the *Keneder Adler*, between the editor, Reuben Brainin, and its owner, Hirsch Wolofsky, which resulted in Brainin being forced to leave his post. (p. 159)

These small but significant details contribute much to a portrait of a Jewish community in the process of becoming conscious of itself as a new and unique community within the Dominion of Canada that was simultaneously beginning to

take stock of itself as a separate entity within the British Empire. Srebrnik's book makes the argument that Zionism was a part of a Canadian Jewish consensus and that, unlike the case of the United States, there was little or no opposition to Zionism, which thus enabled the Zionists to create the first Jewish organization in Canada that represented communities from sea to sea.

Much of the book is taken up with a detailed description of the internal struggle within Canadian Zionism between the members of the Jewish Canadian acculturated and moneyed 'establishment' and the newly immigrated Eastern European Jews whose Zionism was heavily influenced by Socialism. We see in particular how the tensions between the two groups greatly impacted the development of the Canadian Jewish Congress, whose meeting in 1919 marks a landmark in Canadian Jewish history.

While undoubtedly Zionism was consensual in Canada in the early twentieth century in a way it was not in the United States, there was indeed opposition to Zionism among Canadian Jews. The author himself provides numerous instances of opposition among socialists and anarchists (p. 75, 84, 114, 140). There is further evidence of opposition among some members of the immigrant Orthodox rabbinate, like Rabbi Yudel Rosenberg. As well, the author's attempt to differentiate between the dynamics of American and Canadian Jewry is at least partially belied by his cogent comparison of American Jewish leader, Louis Marshall, and Canadian Zionist leader, Lyon Cohen.

These small caveats notwithstanding, the book has more than fulfilled the author's modest expectations. It must be said that reading the book is valuable not merely for those who are new to the study of Canadian Jewry, but will also be helpful to more advanced students. Its publication is a welcome addition to the literature available on Canadian Jews in the early twentieth century and clearly points to the need for more detailed, archival studies of this period.

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