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Review of *Minority Discourses in Germany since 1990*

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Minority Discourses in Germany since 1990. Edited by Ela Gezen, Priscilla Layne, and Jonathan Skolnik. New York: Berghahn Books, 2022. Pp. vi + 286. Cloth \$145.00. ISBN 978-1800734272.

Both scholarly and popularized examinations of Germany during the 1990s hotly debated the “new normal” of its national politics and cultures, from the so-called “Leitkultur” (guiding culture) of the late 1990s to the plural, intersectional identities within the Federal Republic, among them “Ossis,” “Wessis,” and the multiple minoritized groups negotiating various points on the peripheries. The publication of Jürgen Habermas’s interventions under the title: *Die Normalität einer Berliner Republik* (*A Berlin Republic: Writings on Germany*, 1997) raised further questions about democracy, anti-democratic potentials, and problematic patriotisms. With a legitimate sense of unease, Habermas cautioned against the normalizing of extreme nationalism and its German-specific legacy. By the time the Federal Republic hosted the 2006 FIFA World Cup, the official motto emphasized a sense of sports-inspired unity: “Die Welt zu Gast bei Freunden”—the slogan was translated into a number of languages as well as dialects (English: “A time to make friends”). The sports event contributed to a national branding in the early 2000s that expanded the repertory of ways to claim Germanness; expressions of national sentiment could take the leap from constitutional patriotism to “party patriotism.” Still, even as the outward-facing image of the new Germany projected inclusion and unity, deep divisions remained.

Yet another new historical beginning, the year of unification under the West German constitution was not the rising tide presumed to lift all boats. On the contrary, alleged normalization released repressed political id: acts of violence toward visible minorities increased, driven by hatred and anger in slogans like “Das Boot ist voll” (the boat is full). Frequently invoked but not the subject of extended analysis, May Ayim’s poem “blues in Schwarzweiß” (blues in black and white) calls out the euphoria of the newly unified country: “das wieder vereinigte deutschland / feiert sich wieder 1990 / ohne immigrantInnen flüchtlinge jüdische und schwarze menschen . . . / es feiert in intimem kreis” (Orlando, 2003; “a reunited germany / celebrates itself in 1990 / without its immigrants, refugees, jewish and black people / it celebrates in its intimate circle / it celebrates in white,” trans. Anne V. Adams, Africa World Press,

2003). Her enumeration of those left out could serve as a literary antecedent for this collection of essays.

The 2017 conference that preceded this collection set out to explore the “since” of minority discourses; their “intersections (and divergences) regarding cultural, political, and theoretical interventions by different minorities into German public and political discourse on issues of memory, racism, citizenship, immigration, and history” (2). The ten essays in the volume, published in the Spektrum Series (volume 23), engage the discursive plurals of intersectional identities and their positions vis-à-vis dominant whiteness in German-speaking Europe since German unification and the later founding of the European Union in 1993. To achieve a kind of coherence or common cause across the essays, the editors focus the discussions on Black Germans, Turkish Germans, and Jews in Germany. Without making any claims to being comprehensive in scope nor intention to exclude other minoritized groups, such as the Sinti and Roma or Asian and Arab Germans, *Minority Discourses* advances a coherent thesis about the urgent need for including multiple subject positions and vocal registers in the effort to refocus the projection of a “German” image as hegemonic. The collective impact of this volume makes strides toward dismantling the binary oppositions between white Germans and all others.

The strengths of the volume are based in the depth and breadth of the analyses. The volume opens with an essay by Esther Dischereit, the award-winning, Berlin-based writer and activist whose work forges connections across genres and generations. The following chapters feature astute readings of literary interventions by Emine Sevgi Özdamar, Feridun Zaimoğlu, and Elizabeth Blonzen. These three form a cluster of sorts: Turkish German imaginative archive, Günter Senkel and Zaimoğlu’s use of Jewish and Muslim material in an Oberammergau performance of their co-written play, and a focus on Black German theater and its performance space. Subsequent chapters treat the material of three popular comedians whose work constitutes a “comedy of integration” (21); the complex issues around public memorials in Berlin, the *Stolpersteine* (stumbling stones) and the Holocaust-Mahnmal (Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe); and urban soundtracks in the films of Black German and Turkish German filmmakers. The next segment returns to the literature of memory in the work of a Russian German novelist; two works by the prominent Black German author Sharon Dodua Otoo; and a final essay by Leslie Adelson on Özdamar and Michael Götting. In their introduction, the editors keenly observe that while several pieces focus on a particular text in context, Adelson’s chapter works within a “dialogue among the different minoritized groups” (21). The chapters function as stand-alone analyses. At the same time, they share a commitment to reading, writing, and thinking across and beyond the borders of white *Germanistik*, all informed by an understanding of important works by Sara Ahmed, Fatima El-Tayeb, and Michelle Wright, among others.

Each contributor is carefully and differently attuned to the need to decolonize German studies from a spectrum of positions, with reference to a growing archive of creative, performative, and political interventions from German-speaking and polylingual Europe. Indeed, the need to reimagine language without “minority discourses” continues to demand that we expand our vocabulary to increase the volubility of marginalized voices.

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