

shown Professor Sachar he was utterly mistaken in these suppositions, which in any case are directly contradicted by the evidence he provides on such matters as Jewish day school enrolments. Much of his viewpoint is based on the research of Professor Medding (whom he interviewed in Israel). It is over twenty years old, and clearly out of date.

Diaspora ranges widely, covering Jewry in Uruguay, India, Switzerland, and Roumania in the same manner; perhaps this is a good advertisement for the specialist.

Professor W. D. Rubinstein

THE ETHNIC PRESS IN AUSTRALIA

Abe (I.) Wade Ata and Colin Ryan, eds., (Melbourne: Academia Press and Footprint Publications, 1989)

RELIGION AND ETHNIC IDENTITY: AN AUSTRALIAN STUDY

Abe (I.) Wade Ata, ed., (2 vols., Spectrum/VICTRACC Publications, 1988 and 1989)

These three volumes offer, respectively, sixteen essays by different authors on the Australian ethnic press, each concentrating on a different group, and no fewer than twenty-eight essays on religion and ethnic identity, each again surveying a different group.

From the Jewish point of view, alas, *The Ethnic Press in Australia* presents an object-lesson in — and I use the term advisedly — how to hijack a neutral and objective reference work for purposes greatly at variance with the mainstream Jewish viewpoint. One of the two editors, Dr. Ata, is a Palestinian Christian who was born and raised in Bethlehem, has been a visiting lecturer at Bir Zeit University in the West Bank and the Footscray Institute, and now teaches at Victoria College. Despite its evident offensiveness to many readers and its utter inappropriateness in a non-partisan work presumably advocating multiculturalism, the book is dedicated 'to five million Palestinians in the occupied territories and the diaspora. It is dedicated to their suffering and exile, and to their being made to pay the price for the guilt of Western nations'.

Worse is still to follow, for the essay on 'The Jewish Press in Australia' by Mark Braham is perhaps the single most tendentious essay on Australian Jewry I can recall reading. Braham, of course, became involved in a *cause celebre* in 1968 occasioned by his anti-Zionist essays in the *Jewish Herald*, a newspaper which, he alleges, closed down due to a boycott of the paper by mainstream Jewish sources; the story is told, though confusingly, in Braham's *Jews Don't Hate*. From 1983 until about 1988 Braham published the *Jewish Commentary*, a quarterly magazine dedicated to presenting Braham's views on Jewish life. Braham believes that Judaism is solely a religion, to be observed strictly according to *Torah*, and that Zionism, Reform or Conservative Judaism, secularism, etc., are heresies and their believers and practitioners not Jews in any real sense; his views are apparently similar to *Naturei Karta*, the rigidly anti-Zionist Strictly Orthodox sect in *Mea Shearim*.

Braham is a highly intelligent man and an excellent writer who, almost always, gets the better of his opponents in debate. His writings, however, in my view have

many unattractive features, especially an element of self-righteousness and a penchant for provocative disputatiousness, which have unquestionably led many to keep him at arm's length. More significant, however, is the fact that Braham does not appear to have a single ally or supporter in Australia: in the five years or so that his *Jewish Commentary* appeared, it apparently did not contain a single article by any Australian Jew apart from letters critical of Braham. Instead, it contained a strange pot-pourri of reprints from foreign sources, gratuitous attacks on Reform rabbis and 'secular Zionists', and in its last issue, a lengthy extract from the writings of Rabbi Meir Kahane, the notorious Israeli racist whose views on the forced expulsion of Israeli Arabs are so extreme that his *Kach* party was forbidden to contest the 1987 Israeli election. Braham has, it would seem, been increasingly drawn to the Kahane position, recently distributing a tract on the 'transfer' of Israeli Arabs elsewhere and reviewing it sympathetically in B.A. Santamaria's *News-Weekly*, where Braham is now a regular columnist, not merely undeterred by that paper's appalling and obsessive hostility to the War Crimes Act but, it seems clear from his column of 15 September 1990, totally agreeing with it. Indeed in this last remarkable essay, Braham appears to question the morality in Orthodox Jewish law of *any* war crimes trials, including, one must assume, the Nuremburg Tribunal of 1945–46 and the Eichmann trial of 1960–61.

It is clear from all this that a more eccentric and unrepresentative choice to write on the Australian Jewish press is difficult to imagine. An independent view of the Jewish press or anything else is, of course, often productive of much insight, but in his essay in the Ata/Ryan collection Braham has ridden his hobby-horses as if he were simultaneously the jockey on every entry in the Melbourne Cup. Braham's essay is not so much an analysis of the Jewish press as an attack upon it, for the crime of covering non-Orthodox Judaism and Zionist affairs. The two Jewish newspapers 'have abandoned all pretence to being Jewish in the Jewish sense' (p.32). 'There is an unbridgeable gulf separating Judaism from secular and democratic Zionism' (p.26), many readers will be surprised to learn. If Braham edited one of our two Jewish weeklies, it would, presumably, abandon all press coverage of (among other organisations) the Zionist Federation, the B'nai B'rith, the Australian Union of Jewish Students, the Bund, the Kadimah, WIZO, the State Boards of Deputies, and, of course, the Progressive Movement in any aspect whatever. Feature stories on any or all of the following would presumably disappear: Einstein, Freud, Herzl, Ben-Gurion, Jabotinsky, Marx, Isaac Singer, Sholem Aleichem, Woody Allen, Monash, Isaacs, Leo Baeck, nearly all Israeli politics, all non-Orthodox Soviet Refuseniks. One wonders if Torquemada ever urged quite so narrow a view of the Spanish press of his day. Nor, it is important to note, are Braham's strictures echoed by any Strictly Orthodox Jewish leader in Australia. For instance, the *Jewish News* currently publishes a weekly column 'Around the Shules', edited by Victor Kleerekoper (a Strictly Orthodox Jew) in which reports on Adass Israel rub shoulders with reports on the Temple. Although the *News* publishes many letters critical of its stance on a range of issues, it has never printed a single letter attacking its comprehensive coverage of all synagogues. Despite Braham's assurance that 'it is merely a question of time before an Orthodox Jewish weekly is launched in Australia' — as a rival to the two existing newspapers — the fact that Braham's own *Jewish Commentary*, presumably reflective of this viewpoint, failed through lack of interest hardly inspires confidence in the accuracy of this prediction. Needless to say, Braham is totally oblivious to (and totally antipathetic to) what might be termed the 'non-frangibility' of Jewish identity, wherein debate on *Halachah*, dis-

cussion, often fierce, on Israel's West Bank policies, a literary essay on Elias Canetti or Saul Bellow, a history of the Polish *Bund*, and a review of a Woody Allen film are all, mysteriously but undeniably, part of a common experience in a way in which their equivalents in, say, Australian policy and culture are not. Virtually every reader will instantly know what I mean.

Another point which might be made about Braham's essay is that while it covers the two weekly newspapers, albeit in a thoroughly tendentious way, it completely ignores those small magazines (like *Australia/Israel Review*), newsletters of synagogues and organisations, and monthly periodicals of the Jewish community in the smaller States (like the *Maccabean* in Western Australia) which disseminate Jewish news to parts of the community. One has just to consider the masterly accounts of the Jewish press in Australia that have previously been written, such as Suzanne Rutland's outstanding monograph *Seventy Five Years: the History of a Jewish Newspaper* (1970) or the deeply researched historical introduction by Dr. Alan Crown and Sister Marianne Dacy to *Periodical Publications From the Australian Jewish Community: a Union List* (1986), both subtly nuanced and cogently searching, to regret all the more the opportunities that were lost in Braham's bizarre essay. Given Braham's outspoken attacks on Zionism and the community's 'Establishment', and the editors' declared anti-Israeli bias, the evident inference is that he was chosen as a contributor to their volume because of the maximum discomfort he was likely to cause mainstream Jewish readers, and in this he has not disappointed the high expectations placed in him by the editors.

The other relevant Jewish-interest essay in the two collections reviewed here is an entirely different kettle of fish — Manfred Klarberg's 'Rabbis in Melbourne', in the companion volumes on *Religion and Ethnic Identity*. Dr. Klarberg is well-known for his pioneering studies of language policies in the Melbourne Jewish community and its schools. In this essay he presents a good, straightforward account of the role of the rabbi both historically and at the present time, and the structure of the rabbinate in Melbourne. Although Dr. Klarberg is a practising Orthodox Jew, it is interesting to note, *qua* Braham, that one-third of his essay concerns the Reform rabbinate, which he treats with complete fairness. Although Klarberg's essay is excellent for the general reader, as a work of scholarship it would clearly have benefitted from greater familiarity with recent research, for instance that by Dr. Hilary Rubinstein and Suzanne Rutland.

Many of the other essays in these collections are quite valuable, shedding light, often for the first time, on other ethnic groups. For Jewish readers, there is a special, albeit perverse, value in the analyses of the Press among communities which have a clear track-record of hostility to Jews or Zionism, ranging from the Eastern European to the Arab. The standard of the collections in general is a tribute to the competence of the editors when they have no axe to grind and no (highly visible) hidden agenda.

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