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Review of Dan Stone, *The Liberation of the Camps: The End of the Holocaust and Its Aftermath*

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The Liberation of the Camps: the End of the Holocaust and its Aftermath.

By Dan Stone. New Haven: Yale, 2015. 288 pp. \$32.50.

Dan Stone, Professor of Modern History and Director of the Holocaust Research Centre at Royal Holloway, University of London, contends that the “standard narrative of the ‘Holocaust experience’” ends with “survivors being liberated amid joyous scenes at a camp” (64). Stone contests this understanding in his examination of Jewish prisoners’ liberation, long accommodation in displaced persons’ (DP) camps, and slow release to new homes. He focuses on Jewish survivors’ experience of the “sorrows of liberation” and “[t]he ways in which the DPs and the Allies [interacted] and learned to understand each other” (22).

When the Red Army liberated Auschwitz, Majdanek, and other eastern death camps in 1944-1945, they found few inmates (32). Fearing the discovery of the death camps, the SS had death-marched the more or less able-bodied prisoners westward (14-16). Allied troops who liberated Dachau, Buchenwald, and other western (labor) camps in April 1945 encountered a chaos of survivors from both labor and death camps. Since Jews amounted to fewer than a third of all camp survivors, the Allies did not immediately realize that Jews had been the focus of the death camps. However, Jews “soon became hard to overlook...[because] most...had nowhere to go” (18).

The Allies eventually recognized the Jews’ special status among camp survivors. Because they had endured different experiences during and after the war, they were more deeply traumatized than other DPs. Often they had no family or home to return to and, thus, were stateless, with little hope for the future. Understandably, Jews refused to be integrated into West Germany (151). Sadly, many liberators “regarded [Jews] suspiciously...not understand[ing] their experience and consider[ing] them primitive, unhygienic and demanding” (22).

The Allies subjected Jews, both the 45,000 camp survivors and tens of thousands of Eastern European Jews who refused to remain in, or return to, their now-Communist homelands (129-30), to a long, postwar incarceration in DP camps. Larger global issues intervened to complicate Jewish immigration to Palestine: The Soviets upheld Jewish claims to a homeland in order to support anti-Semitic satellite states and to subvert British imperialism (218-19). Great Britain encouraged European integration of Jews (while severely limiting Jewish immigration) and restricted migration to Palestine for fear of antagonizing Arab states. Stone attributes British actions to a “pseudo-liberalism” claiming to treat Jews like other DPs while serving anti-Semitic ends (181, 188-89). The United States, despite supporting Jews’ right to immigrate to Palestine, was “less than entirely altruistic,” simultaneously seeking to appease both American Jews and anti-immigration forces, while espousing a moral cause and countering British imperialism (191-92). Unable to stop travel to Palestine by incarcerating Jews on Cyprus (187-88), Britain finally acquiesced in the partition of Palestine. Israel eventually absorbed half of all Jewish DPs (192-93).

The Cold War also affected the disposition of Jewish DPs. As West Germans transitioned from foes to anti-Communist partners, the presence of (and some continuing hostility toward) Jewish DPs became an obstacle to German rehabilitation (198). When the last camp was closed in 1957, Jews moved into German communities and, by 1959, were declared “well integrated” into German society (195). Stone decries the superpowers’ “cynical exploitation of Holocaust survivors for Cold War gains” throughout the postwar period, as their fate was used to justify both anti-Fascist and anti-Communist rhetoric and actions (213-14).

Using survivor testimony, official reports, journalistic accounts, statements by liberating soldiers and relief workers, and documents from relief organizations, along with photographs taken by the DPs themselves (27), Stone argues convincingly that the Allies' actions amounted to betrayal of Jewish DPs, given the "utter tragedy" they had endured in the Nazi camps (175-76). The long accommodation in DP camps in Germany represented a continuation of imprisonment, "breeding a sense of abandonment, despair, bitterness, depression, and resentment" (121-22). This important, critical study examines a previously overlooked part of the history of the Holocaust. Stone situates his analysis within a wider geopolitical context, noting that the Jewish DPs represent a link between the Holocaust and the founding of Israel (172). Arguing that "the long-term effects of the geopolitics of liberation are still felt in the Middle East and in the politics of Holocaust memory across the globe," he envisages that "the Holocaust's after-effects will be with us for some time yet" (219).

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