Nations is a thought-provoking book that turns the tables on the modernist school and forces them to defend their assumptions. As such, it contributes greatly to the debate and reinvigorates, and with its historical examples arms the primordialists to stand their ground. It may not convince its opponents to throw in the towel and accept the deep roots of political ethnicity and nationalism, but it clearly exhibits that the primordial school has answered the bell and is ready to go as many rounds as necessary to win the fight.

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http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/00905992.2014.929238

Bukharan Jews and the dynamics of global Judaism, by Alanna E. Cooper, Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 2012, xxvi + 261 pp., notes, bib., index, photos, $76.50 (hardcover), ISBN 978-0253006431, $27.00 (paperback), ISBN 978-0253006509

Alanna Cooper places her research within the framework of Jewish Studies, seeking to "accommodate both a global Judaism and robust local forms … This book argues that there is, indeed, a normative Judaism, but that it does not have an essential, static, or given form" (xiii). Rather than approaching Bukharan Judaism as a peripheral form, Cooper argues that Bukharan Jews view their own Judaism as normative, and that Bukharan forms of Jewishness have been in constant interaction with other norms. To demonstrate this dynamic, Cooper, an anthropologist, begins with a reflection on her own experience in a Brooklyn Torah Academy, where Orthodox Chabad teachers thought that they were enabling their newly arrived Central Asian Jewish students to rejoin the true faith. Cooper then asks what this interaction looks like from the perspective of Bukharan Jews.

Cooper's core questions are not about Bukharan Jews and the Russian imperial state, or about Bukharan Jews and their Central Asian neighbors, but about the interaction between Bukharan Jews and Jews from elsewhere in the world, those who consider themselves representatives of global Judaism. This focus allows Cooper to make use of nineteenth-century travel accounts, but also of letters sent by representatives of the Bukharan Jewish community to their acknowledged authority, the Rishon LeTsion (office of the Chief Rabbi for Sephardic Jews) in Jerusalem. Through these lenses, Cooper provides evidence for some of the ways that Bukharan Jewish practices were distinctive, and then examines the contesting claims that Bukharans and foreign emissaries made about their practices. Foreign Jewish emissaries tended to depict Bukharan Jews as cut off, backward, or deficient in their knowledge of religion. Cooper turns both to primary sources in the form of letters and to family histories to illustrate the range of ways that Bukharan Jews created personal, business, and religious connections, and their own constructions of religious authority.

Bukharan Jewishness was and continues to be constructed in Palestine/Israel, where Bukharan Jewish emigrants established a neighborhood in Jerusalem in the 1890s. Cooper posits that these emigrants were the ones who made "Bukharan Jew" the standard term for Central Asia's Tajik-speaking Mizrahi Jews, some of whom had never lived in Bukhara but had, for example, immigrated to Tashkent or Samarkand from Kabul or Meshhed in the nineteenth century.

https://doi.org/10.1080/00905992.2014.929239 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Cooper's focus on interactions shapes her choices: she explores evidence from a two-century period, but mostly ignores the Soviet years (1918–1991) precisely because this was (or perhaps she assumes it was) a time of stability and lack of interaction with global Judaism. Was Bukharan Jewishness as dynamic in the mid-twentieth century as in the pre- or post-Soviet periods? Half of this book is a history and half is a discussion of Bukharan Jewish identity in the post-Soviet period, when the overwhelming majority emigrated to Israel or the USA. Cooper was drawn to her research on interaction not only because she met Bukharan Jews in Brooklyn, but because in her initial research in Central Asia (in the early 1990s) she encountered a community where many had already left, and the rest were discussing how, when, and where to go.

In the 1990s, Bukharan Jews in Samarkand and Tashkent were again the objects of attention and mission: Zionist organizations sent representatives to teach them Hebrew and prepare them for emigration to Israel; while Chabad-Lubavitch missionaries created religious schools, rewarding students with stipends for their efforts to learn Orthodox practices. Cooper explores both sides in these exchanges, trying to understand who the emissaries were and how they thought about their work, but focusing more strongly on the participants in Samarkand and Tashkent (not all of them Bukharan Jews) to ask what drew them to these organizations, their goals in these interactions, and their perceptions of the global Jewish organizations.

Although Cooper largely avoids the traditional ethnographer's attention to customs, food, and other such markers of group identity, she explores Bukharan traditions of mourning, presenting a fascinating analysis of the role that these very frequent evening feast and prayer gatherings play in reproducing religious knowledge and community relationships. However, the author of this constructivist ethnography rejects the idea of strictly bounded communities: instead, she follows contemporary self-identified Bukharan Jews in Israel and in the USA to ask about the ways that they understand Bukharan Jewishness. While some see it as an important element in their family histories, others regard Bukharan Jewishness as a network of relationships or as a set of cultural practices and values. Cooper concludes that "… the Jewish people are a single people. Not because these are natural, sui generis categories … But rather, because they are enacted as such" (260).

Bukharan Jews and the Dynamics of Global Judaism is written in an engaging style, not laden with jargon or with so much detail as to lose the inattentive reader. Cooper situates her work within Jewish studies, but she provides enough explanation of her key interests and questions that a reader who knows little about Judaism will still find the work very accessible. Similarly, non-anthropologists will find her explanations of method and theory to be useful and easily understood. Cooper's bibliography reveals an exhaustive reading of scholarship in English and Hebrew, but minimal attention to the Russian-language primary sources and scholarship on Bukharan Jews. This is not a volume for those who want to understand Bukharan Jews in a Central Asian political and social context, or their interactions with Muslims or Russians. Rather, Cooper delivers on the promise of her title, listening to the voices of Bukharan Jews in their dynamic interactions with global Judaism.

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