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Nelcya Delanoë, *D'une petite rafle provençale...* Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 2013. 219 pp.
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Review by Sandra Ott, University of Nevada, Reno.

Nelcya Delanoë is an intrepid, meticulous researcher. Several years ago, an acquaintance gave her a copy of the poem, “Le médecin de Villeneuve,” written by Louis Aragon in August 1942. Set in Villeneuve-lès-Avignon in the department of the Gard, the poem alludes to the arrest of Jews by the French police. Aragon witnessed the roundup while visiting a group of fellow poets who, like him, opposed the Vichy regime. Rejected by Vichy censors, the poem eventually appeared in a Swiss publication. Aragon’s poem lay among Delanoë’s papers for several years. In 2009, she finally decided to undertake research on the “forgotten” Jewish roundup to which the poet had referred.

Vichy’s anti-Jewish policy first took the form of legislative action. In 1941, the regime implemented anti-Jewish statutes that excluded Jews from the professions and led to the massive confiscation of Jewish property. The summer of 1942 proved to be a crucial turning point for European Jews. In June 1942, Himmler directed that all the Jews in France should be deported. In July, the head of the French police, René Bousquet, informed the Gestapo in Paris that Pétain and Laval had agreed to the deportation of all stateless Jews from both occupied and unoccupied zones.^[1] The Germans relied heavily upon French police to carry out the roundups, internments and deportations that figured so prominently in the second phase of Vichy’s anti-Jewish program. On 16-17 July 1942, some 9,000 French policemen rounded up nearly 7,000 Jews across Paris, held them in the Vel d’Hiv, and sent them to camps that served as antechambers to Auschwitz. The major roundup of Jews in the unoccupied zone took place on 26-28 August 1942. The Jews in Villeneuve were among them.

Delanoë has had a longstanding connection with Villeneuve, a town that is historically and culturally linked to nearby Avignon on the other side of the Rhône. When her father retired to Villeneuve, Delanoë visited him often and eventually adopted the community as her own retreat and part-time residence. Yet, until her chance discovery of Aragon’s poem, she had never heard about a roundup of Jews in Villeneuve. In fact, her knowledge about the regional experience of Vichy and the occupation was at first extremely limited. Delanoë had read the memoir of Isaac Lewendel, a Polish Jew who had taken refuge with his mother near Avignon.^[2] Tormented by his mother’s disappearance in June 1944, Lewendel began to look for answers more than forty-five years later. Archival evidence revealed that French criminals from Marseille—not the Germans—had arrested his mother and “sold” her to the Germans. She perished in Auschwitz. The memoir piqued Delanoë’s interest in the Jews who had sought refuge in the Vaucluse; it also sharpened her curiosity about French complicity in their persecution.

As an anthropologist who has done extensive archival research and field work on the occupation and post-liberation period, I have particular admiration for Delanoë’s dogged efforts to engage people in conversations about wartime and postwar events in Villeneuve. Informants recalled their experiences in the Resistance: the sight of local girls dancing with German soldiers well into the night; the occupiers’ execution of two German soldiers who had refused to obey orders; the deaths of three American pilots during a skirmish in August 1944; the head-shavings of two local women who had sexual relations with

Germans. Unsurprisingly, Delanoë's interlocutors were at times reticent about the past, evasive, and sometimes suspicious about her motives. Some accused her of reviving "old quarrels" (p. 17) and longstanding animosities and of reopening old wounds. Thus the author entered into the "troubled waters" (p. 61) of wartime and postwar life in Villeneuve and the surrounding area.

Delanoë is a micro-historian with an obstinate passion for rooting out primary source material from a range of municipal, departmental and police archives, as well as from oral and online sources. She also has an ethnographic eye for detail and the patience required to piece together the strands of multiple stories relating to Jews who lived in Villeneuve-lès-Avignon during the occupation. The municipal archives of Villeneuve, however, contained no record of the roundup in August 1942. Local citizens claimed not to remember any such an event. Delanoë eventually discovered a list of Jews who had lived in the town and nearby communities in 1941. She compiled their names, places of birth, wartime addresses, and occupations. She identified certain Jewish families and painstakingly traced their relationships with other kin and other Jews in the area. Linking accounts of everyday life in occupied Villeneuve with the larger historical picture, Delanoë traced the increasingly aggressive anti-Jewish measures taken across the department in 1942. But she still lacked evidence of the roundup to which Aragon had alluded. A list of ten Jews who resided in Villeneuve on August 26, 1942, finally emerged in the archives of the gendarmerie in Vincennes. French police arrested nine of the Jews. Locally organized, a second roundup of Jews took place in Villeneuve on July 17, 1943. Paid by the Germans, French criminals, linked to the extreme right, led the raid. That *rafle* led to the arrest of eight members of two Jewish families. Two other family members were arrested a few days later. The Germans deported nine of them.

In the penultimate chapter of *D'une petite rafle Provençale*, Delanoë provides "her" list of sixty-four Jews who had lived in Villeneuve-lès-Avignon, Pont-d'Avignon and Les Angles from 1939 until 1944. Wherever possible, she traced bonds of kinship, dates of birth and marriage, nationality, the circumstances of arrest and deportation. The list served as a springboard for further research into the life and death of one particular man, Julien Lévi. Delanoë discovered his kinship (by marriage) to a Jewish family who had sought refuge in Villeneuve. She managed to find Lévi's daughter, who had lived in the town from 1941 until 1943. Delanoë learned that Julien Lévi had been arrested because of his political views, not his Jewishness. Delanoë's excitement over finding a Jewish eyewitness to the roundup of July 17, 1943 is palpable. At last the author was able to fill in many gaps in her micro-historical reconstruction of wartime relationships and events. She obsessively tried to locate the houses in which Villeneuve's Jews resided in order to gain a clearer understanding of the circumstances and location of the arrests. A puzzling pattern emerged. In several cases, the authorities did not arrest all family members simultaneously when they were found together at home. Typically, the authorities returned to the house a few days later to make a second round of arrests. Such delays did not derive from any sense of compassion. As in the case of Lewendel's mother, the men conducting the raids belonged to small bands of French racketeers who extorted Jews by taking their money and valuables in return for leaving them alone until the next roundup, only to betray them. Such French *voyous* worked as paid informers for the German police.

Although the two "forgotten" wartime roundups in Villeneuve are the primary focus of *D'une petite rafle provençale*, the author also weaves detailed accounts of "the making" of her book into the narrative. The reader learns about her frustrations in the archives, the obstacles she faced, the setbacks she experienced, and the silences she sometimes encountered. (Her observations will strike a chord of sympathy in many readers of this review.)

Delanoë also intertwines the story of the Villeneuve roundups with personal reflections about her Jewish grandmother, Eugénie Delanoë. Her grandmother had left her native Poland to study medicine first in Russia, then in France. In 1913, she set up a practice in Morocco and spent some thirty years there with her Moroccan-born husband.[3] During the occupation, Vichy authorities struck Eugénie

Delanoë off the medical register and froze her pension, owing to her Jewishness. Although Nelcy Delanoë published a biography of her grandmother in 1989, she found that she had not yet “turned the page of that family history on Moroccan soil.”^[4] Her archival research on the Jews in Villeneuve rekindled memories of her grandmother’s exclusions and deprivations under Vichy and her unsuccessful postwar petitions for compensation from the French government. Eugénie Delanoë had asked to be reinstated on the postwar French register of medical doctors in order to restore her professional dignity. The authorities agreed to do so only if she paid a substantial fee, which Eugénie Delanoë could not afford. In 2011, having finished *D’une petite rafle provençale*, Nelcy Delanoë and her brother asked the medical association, created under Vichy and distanced from that regime by de Gaulle in 1945, to rehabilitate their grandmother. However, the association was unable to proceed with what appeared to constitute a “just rehabilitation,” owing to bureaucratic regulations.

Nelcy Delanoë links her grandmother’s frustrations with Vichy and postwar authorities to her own tribulations with French bureaucracy in the twentieth century. In 1995, the government required its citizens to replace their existing national identity cards with plastic, “un-falsifiable” ones (p. 208). Delanoë had acquired French citizenship through her father and paternal grandfather. She could not, however, provide the authorities with documents that proved her citizenship owing to “too many wars, too much domestic upheaval, too many mishaps and carelessness” by family members over the years. Like her grandmother, Nelcy Delanoë felt disillusioned with the French Republic. By intermingling her narrative about the wartime roundups with her own personal and familial experiences, Delanoë raises uneasy questions about the status and treatment of foreigners in France today.

Overall, the book makes a very valuable and interesting contribution to our understanding of Jewish experiences during the occupation at grass roots level. The book also deepens our knowledge of public reaction to the roundups, the role French criminals played in that tragic phenomenon, and the factors that enabled some Jews to evade detection and arrest.

Delanoë is a good ethnographer who tirelessly looks for missing pieces of each family puzzle that emerges from the archives, from published and unpublished sources, as well as from conversations and correspondence with informants and archivists who (willingly and unwillingly) helped the author to reconstruct the story of Villeneuve’s “forgotten” roundups. While Aragon’s poem, “Le médecin de Villeneuve,” is not a masterpiece, it did inspire a thorough and fascinating piece of scholarship at the intersections of history and ethnography.

NOTES

[1] Michael R. Marrus and Robert O. Paxton, *Vichy France and the Jews* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995 edition).

[2] Isaac Lewendel, *Un hiver en Provence* (La Tour d’Aigues: Éditions de l’Aube, 1996). The English edition is entitled *Not the Germans Alone: A Son’s Search for the Truth of Vichy* (Chicago, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1999).

[3] Eugénie Delanoë published her memoir, *Trente ans d’activité médicale et sociale au Maroc* (Paris: Librairie Maloine, 1949).

[4] Nelcy Delanoë, *La femme de Mazagan* (Paris: Seghers, 1989).

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