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Joyce Block Lazarus, *In the Shadow of Vichy: the Finaly Affair*. New York: Peter Lang, 2008. 154 pp. Notes, archival sources, bibliography, and index. \$66.95 (hardback). ISBN 978-1-4331-0212-7.

Review by Bertram M. Gordon, Mills College.

*In the Shadow of Vichy*, volume 60 in the *Studies in Modern European History* series published by Peter Lang, is a new book by Joyce Block Lazarus who tells the story of the Finaly Affair, involving two young Jewish boys orphaned in World War II France and cared for and baptized into the Catholic Church by people who protected them during the German occupation. After the liberation of France, their family was forced to wage an eight-year legal campaign to regain custody of them. The struggle over the two boys became a cause célèbre that split postwar France into clerical and secular camps, evoked the divisions of the Dreyfus Affair, and raised the specter of a renewal of the anti-Semitism that had so recently marked the country during the Vichy period.

Briefly, the Finaly Affair is the story of Robert and Gerald Finaly, born in France during World War II to a Jewish refugee couple from Vienna who had sought shelter there in 1939. Their parents, Dr. Fritz and Anni Finaly, settled in La Tronche, a suburb of Grenoble, where Robert was born in 1941 and Gerald, a year later. Despite a clearly growing danger for Jews in wartime France, the elder Finalys had their sons circumcised, indicating a desire to see them raised as Jews. As circumstances for Jews in France worsened, the couple gave their sons to a Catholic nursery to hide them and at the same time confided to friends their desire that the boys be raised by family members should they themselves not survive. In February 1944, the elder Finalys were arrested, ultimately to perish in the Holocaust. The boys were subsequently given to Antoinette Brun, the director of the municipal nursery in Grenoble, who at some risk cared for them through the Liberation.

In February 1945, relatives of the now orphaned boys contacted Miss Brun to begin the process of gaining custody for the family, scattered in New Zealand, China, and Palestine. Desiring to see the boys raised as Catholics, Miss Brun stalled and, in 1948, in connivance with church authorities, had them baptized. Baptism in the view of many Catholics made the church the boys' "mother," guaranteeing and protecting their eternal salvation. In this view, no one, whatever the circumstances of his or her baptism, was to be removed from Catholic care and led away from the true faith. What followed was a series of legal actions by the family that resulted in a court order to return the boys to them. They were then abducted into Franco's Spain with the approval of the highest church authorities, including Pope Pius XII (p. 53). Ultimately a bitter press campaign helped turn public opinion in favor of a return to their family. The boys were brought back to France, turned over to relatives from Israel, where they were ultimately re-settled, raised as Jews, and have spent their lives since.

In a foreward, Dr. Robert Finaly, the elder of the two boys, summarizes their story, ending with: "I now lead a normal life, much like that of any other person who is surrounded by his natural family" (p. xi). Lazarus's own text begins with an introduction covering Jewish history in France from the emancipation granted in 1791 by the National Assembly through the 1950s.

Four chapters follow: "The Making of a Crisis," which tells the story of the Affair itself; "The Polemic," focusing on the role of the press at the time; and "Fifty Years after the Dreyfus Affair" and "A Lingering Shadow," both of which seek to put the Finaly story into a broader historical perspective.

Lazarus carefully sifts through the complexities of the case, the way it evolved from a religious conflict of church versus synagogue to become a battle of church law versus civil law in a country that recognized a legal separation of church and state, and ultimately to an international affair between French and Spanish officials (pp. 28, 44). She shows how influential members of the church community, including Cardinal Pierre-Marie Gerlier of Lyon, who had been involved in the abduction (p. 51), shifted positions sufficiently to allow negotiations for the boys' return in 1953 (p. 48). The denouement of the Affair helped reconcile Jews and Catholics and Lazarus maintains this contributed to the dramatic improvement in church relations with the Jews orchestrated by Pope John XXIII and Vatican II (p. 113). Indeed, she concludes that "(t)oday, a recurrence of the Finaly Affair would be unthinkable" (p. 136). In retelling the history of the Finaly Affair, *In the Shadow of Vichy* performs an important service bringing to light a painful story now largely forgotten with implications for church-state relations in France and elsewhere, as well as the tensions between religious integralism and contemporary secular society.

Repetitions and reintroductions of persons, however, give the book more the appearance of separate essays than an integrated whole. Cardinal Gerlier is introduced on page 9 but identified as Archbishop of Lyon only on page 49 and is reintroduced on page 85. The appeal during the abduction by Bishop Alexandre Caillot of Grenoble for anyone with knowledge of the boys' disappearance to come forward is quoted twice (pp. 42 and 72). Wladimir Rabinovitch, a writer in France's Jewish press who supported the boys' return, is introduced as "Rabi" on page 25, then again on pages 30 and 49. Father Emile Gabel, who supported the abduction and the baptism of the boys, is introduced as Editor of *La Croix* on pages 72, 84, and 99.

Additional editorial problems include both the failure to identify Papal Secretary of State Montini (Giovanni Battista Montini, pp. 53, 54, and 63) as the future Pope Paul VI or to list him in the index. Pope Leo XIII is identified as "Pope Leon" (p. 71). A quote from Colonel Paul Gaujac, head of the French army's historical section in 1994, to the effect that the innocence of Dreyfus was merely "a thesis generally accepted by historians" (p. 102) has no citation. More careful editing might have avoided the statement that the boys were brought into Spain on February 13, 2007 (p. 36), as well as a sentence that reads: "The Minister of National Education, Jack Lang, made the teaching of anti-Semitism compulsory in French schools beginning in 1991." (p. 128) A statement to the effect that the *Mémorial de la Shoah*, housing the *Centre de Documentation Juive Contemporaine* (CDJC), was opened in January 2005 (p. 129) should also be revised. Isaac Schneersohn established the CDJC in 1943 and the building housing the *Mémorial* was opened in 1956. The CDJC published the first books on the internment camps, including Joseph Weill's *Contribution à l'histoire des camps d'internement dans l'anti-France* and a magazine, *Le Monde Juif*, devoted to the Shoah, both in 1946.[1] Lazarus writes that there was a reluctance to write about France and the Shoah in the 1940s and 1950s (p. 10) and holds to the argument made by others that there was a collective repression of the memory of Vichy during that time (pp. 2 and 117). As Eberhard Jäckel pointed out in 1966, however, Vichy had already become the focus of considerable historical investigation[2] and the argument about repression of memory should be taken with nuance and reserve.[3] These issues may be minor but others are less so. The Nazi occupation of France is given as 1940-1945 (p. 8) and the liberation of France in 1945 (p. 18). The Fourth Republic did not end in 1954 as stated on page 38.

Additionally, the author seems to misread the functioning of the Fourth Republic, attributing the setting of policy to the President, as opposed to the Prime Minister and the cabinet, in ascribing the creation of NATO and the beginnings of European unity to Vincent Auriol rather than the cabinets and especially Foreign Minister Robert Schuman (p. 18). Lastly, the statement that in September 1943 the Nazis invaded and occupied all of France (p. 22) needs explanation. The armistice of June 1940 divided France into zones occupied by the Germans and Italians and an unoccupied area, sometimes called the "free zone," that covered roughly two-fifths of France, including Grenoble and its suburb, La Tronche, where the elder Finalys had found refuge. Upon the Allied landings in French North Africa in November 1942, the Germans occupied most but not the entire "free" zone. A section of the formerly unoccupied zone was assigned to the Italians whose territory was now expanded to include Grenoble and La Tronche. This meant that the Finaly family resided in territory controlled by Italy, not Germany. The Italians were known to be more lenient in their treatment of Jewish refugees than either the Germans or the Vichy French and their control of the Grenoble area may have prolonged the period in which the Finaly parents were able to avoid arrest. [4] During the summer of 1943, the Allies invaded Sicily, leading to Mussolini's overthrow and the signing of an armistice with Italy. The German response was to occupy the entire Italian zone in France, which trapped many refugees, including the Finalys, who were arrested in February 1944 and deported to Auschwitz the following month. How significant the Italian presence was in the Finalys' story has yet to be explained.

Lazarus calls the Finaly Affair a "crisis," likening it to the press battles during the Dreyfus Affair of the 1890s (pp. 1, 69, 110, and 130). She notes, however, that a "smaller segment of the French population supported the right-wing convictions of some Catholics during the Finaly Affair" (p. 104) and that "it did not crystallize ideological passions to the same extent that the Dreyfus Affair had, because the nation's republican principles and values were more firmly established and accepted during the Fourth Republic" (p. 107). That the Dreyfus Affair is arguably more widely discussed in France than the Finaly Affair would seem to bear out her second view. In comparing the Finaly Affair to the Dreyfus Affair, Lazarus emphasizes the role of the press, the subject of chapter 2, in stirring up passions on all sides (pp. 70-71). Press coverage was extensive abroad as well and she focuses on the *New York Times* and *London Times* without, however, assessing their impact on French public opinion or the course of the Finaly Affair (pp. 84-85 and 90). A survey of the Spanish press under Franco, for example, might have been more revealing.

In her introduction, Lazarus asks what may be learned from the Finaly Affair and whether it can shed light on the ability of France to accommodate a diversified population today (p. 13). Her answer suggests ambivalence. On one hand, she argues that the affair helped reconcile Jews and Catholics and that a recurrence of the Finaly Affair would be unthinkable today (see her comments, pp. 113 and 136, cited above). However, she also maintains that "anti-Semitism poses a threat today not only to Jews but to democracy itself and to the principles of 1789" (p. 136). This tension reflects an attempt to combine two related but distinct books into one. Trying to be both a historical study of the Finaly Affair and a history of Catholic-Jewish relations in postwar France, *In the Shadow of Vichy* ends up blurring the Affair's historical significance. Topics extraneous to the Affair find their way into the narrative, such as General de Gaulle's realignment of French policy to a more pro-Arab position following the Six Day War of 1967 (p. 121) and the discussion of the United Nations Conference against Racism held in Durban, South Africa in 2001 (p. 125). Raymond Barre's statement that "innocent French people" were harmed in an attack aimed at Jews in the synagogue on the rue Copernic in 1980 is curiously omitted in the discussion of that incident (p. 126). The book also has a tendency toward a facile use of terms, sometimes as rhetorical devices, as in a reference to Édouard Drumont's newspaper, *La Libre Parole* said to "spew out" anti-Semitic articles (p. 15, note 32), the "fascist"

character of Franco's dictatorship in Spain (p. 44), of Pétain's ideology (pp. 118 and 120), and the Vichy government (p. 122) in France. An extensive literature on both Franco's Spain and Vichy France has argued for more nuanced terminology in describing them. Historians Philippe Bourdrel and Jean-Pierre Rioux are said to give erroneous information about the Finaly Affair in their books but the specifics are not documented (p. 108, fn. 5).

Citing Alain Finkelkraut on the trial of Klaus Barbie, Lazarus argues that France in 1989 remained as divided as ever about its Vichy past (p. 120) but also suggests that the Vichy Syndrome (Henry Rousso's term [5]) had been overcome in part because of films such as "The Sorrow and the Pity" in 1969 and "Shoah" in 1985 (p. 128). A recent debate about the nature and extent of Vichy's anti-Semitism in the pages of the *Times Literary Supplement* attests to continuing controversies over mid-twentieth century Catholic-Jewish relations in France.[6] Lazarus is to be commended for reopening inquiry into the Finaly Affair, an interesting, important, and disturbing series of events in post-World War II French history. The last word, however, has not yet been said.

## NOTES

[1] "The History of the Center of Contemporary Jewish Documentation (CDJC)," Mémorial de la Shoah, Musée, Centre de Documentation Juive Contemporaine, <[http://www.memorialdelashoah.org/b\\_content/getContentFromNumLinkAction.do?type=1&itemId=489](http://www.memorialdelashoah.org/b_content/getContentFromNumLinkAction.do?type=1&itemId=489)>, accessed 29 December 2010.

[2] Eberhard Jäckel, *Frankreich in Hitlers Europa. Die Deutsche Frankreichpolitik im zweiten Weltkrieg* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 1966), p. 11.

[3] See Bertram M. Gordon, "The 'Vichy Syndrome' Problem in History," *French Historical Studies*, 19:2(Fall 1995): 495-518.

[4] Domenico Schipsi, *L'occupazione italiana dei territori metropolitan francesi (1940-1943)* (Roma: Stato maggiore dell'esercito, Ufficio storico, 2007), pp. 425-444.

[5] Henry Rousso, *The Vichy Syndrome: History and Memory in France since 1944*, translated by Arthur Goldhammer (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1991).

[6] See the exchange between Julian Jackson and John Rogister, "Vichy as a buffer state," *Times Literary Supplement*, 5619(10 December 2010): 6; 5620(17 December 2010): 6; and 5621/2(24 and 31 December 2010): 6. Letters relating to this exchange continued to appear in the *TLS* through late January 2011.

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