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Anne Freadman, *Holding On and Holding Out: Jewish Diaries from Wartime France*. Toronto, Buffalo, and London: University of Toronto Press, 2020. xi + 262pp. Notes, bibliography, and index. \$85.00 U.S. (hb). ISBN 9781487507534; \$34.95 U.S. (pb). ISBN 9781487525194.

Review by Laurien Vastenhout, NIOD Institute for War, Holocaust and Genocide Studies, University of Amsterdam.

In *Holding On and Holding Out*, Anne Freadman examines the diaries of a handful of Jewish individuals in France during Nazi occupation. Over the past decades, the ways in which scholars perceived the function and meaning of diaries written during the Holocaust has changed significantly. In the first postwar decades, historians paid little attention to personal accounts produced by “ordinary people.” In 1997, Saul Friedländer was among the first historians to show how diaries and memoirs can be used to understand the history of Nazi Germany and the Jews. In his approach, diary sources led the narrative, and they added “voices” to historiography.[1] In the same period, scholars stressed that diary writing not only reflected the experience of Jewish diarists, but also granted them a sense of agency. Apart from mere personal illustrations of events, diaries are increasingly considered to be texts that document the efforts of Jewish writers to reconstruct meaning, and to preserve selfhood.[2] Freadman’s work contributes to this development in historiography. Employing post-modernist critical theory, she examines the identity formation of the diarists in a French society that was changing radically in the period between 1940 and 1944, exploring themes such as the “act of writing,” the “enactment of identity,” and the “persistence of the self” (p. x-xi). As a result, the author provides a unique insight into the personal lives of these Jews in wartime France.

Holding On and Holding Out shows how individual Jews perceived, and responded to, a collaborationist government which increasingly rescinded their basic rights. As Freadman puts it: “This book is about the consequences of Vichy policy to rule out Jewish assimilation (depriving Jews of their rights as citizens of Third Republic) for a small number of Jews who, because they wrote about them, can be taken to speak for the large number of others who did not” (p. 10). This last point is debatable. As Freadman herself points out in her concluding remark, it is impossible to make any generalising statements about the experiences of Jews in France on the basis of the diaries discussed. The diaries and testimonies show that Jewish experiences varied, and not surprisingly so. The conditions were different for each individual, just as their positions in society and their socio-historical backgrounds varied.

Freadman does not fully clarify why these specific diaries were chosen as objects of study. The diarists are predominantly Jews who were well-educated (naturalized) French citizens, and who

were well integrated into French society. This counts in particular for the two main protagonists in this work, Benjamin Schatzmann and Raymond-Raoul Lambert. These men (who later died in the camps) were sensitive to their identity and their position in society and were able to reflect upon these themes in a thoughtful and eloquent way. While the personal backgrounds and experiences of Schatzmann and Lambert were different, neither of them is representative of the thousands of Jewish immigrants who had found refuge in France from the turn of the century to the 1930s. On the eve of the war, around 130,000-140,000 Jews in France (around 45 percent of the total) were immigrants from eastern Europe and Germany.[4] Their voices and experiences, which were radically different from those of Lambert, Schatzmann, and the other diarists Freadman discusses, are not represented. This work is, therefore, not an investigation into “Jewish diaries from Wartime France,” as the subtitle and parts of the introduction suggest, but rather an examination into “Wartime Diaries from French Jews.”

An important theme in this work is the position of French Jews vis-à-vis that of foreign Jews and how the changing relations between these groups affected individual lives. On several occasions, the diarists reflect on the (changing) social distinctions between these groups. This counts in particular for Lambert, a prominent individual in prewar France who felt a strong connection to the country. He was born to a long-established French Jewish family and served with distinction in the First World War. In the 1930s, Lambert actively engaged in the provision of social welfare to Jewish refugees in France. He continued these social welfare activities during the war, and became chairman of the controversial “Jewish Council” of the French unoccupied zone, the UGIF-Sud. Freadman’s close reading of his diary provides an excellent overview of how Lambert increasingly identified himself with a group of Jews he had long considered “the others” (non-French Jews, immigrants, stateless Jews). The author convincingly shows how the meaning of “we” in the diary changed from referring to a very particular small group of French Jews, to Jews in France, and then more broadly in Europe. Moreover, Freadman provides a very detailed understanding of how Lambert initially still believed that the government would protect him as a decorated citizen of France. Like many French Jews, he was convinced that Vichy officials only implemented anti-Jewish regulations because they were forced to do so by the Nazis. The realization that this was not the case came only much later. This change in the feelings and beliefs of French Jews towards Vichy has been recognised in existing historiography, but has rarely been analysed in such great detail.

In terms of the book’s audience, *Holding On and holding Out* will primarily be of interest to specialists in postmodernist critical theory, as well as specialists in the history of wartime France. Among other things, a solid knowledge of the Third Republic, the Vichy regime, French Jewry, and Zionism is necessary in order to fully understand the diarists’ remarks and the analyses of the author. In some instances, individuals and organisations are not properly introduced. For example, a reference is made to Jacques Helbronner, but there is no mention of his role or position in the Jewish community (that of chairman of the Israelite Central Consistory) (p. 29). Lambert makes a reference to the Commissariat Général aux Questions Juives (CGQJ), the body that directly oversaw the French “Jewish Council,” but it is not introduced as such (p. 79). Also, if we want to understand what a diarist means in discussing the “required number of grandparents,” (p. 45) knowledge of the Nazi definition of what constituted a Jew is required. Moreover, there are some statements that are problematic from a historical viewpoint. For example, when Freadman discusses Schatzman’s diary entries after the infamous *Vélodrome d’Hiver* roundups in July 1942, when 13,000 Jews in Paris were arrested and many were transferred to transit camp at Drancy, she writes how he was affected by the “thousands of people being funnelled through

Drancy toward their death”(p. 137). The knowledge people had of the mass extermination of the Jews in Eastern Europe is a reoccurring subject of debate in Holocaust historiography. It is uncertain whether Schatzman had “knowledge” of this at this point in time, when the large-scale deportations from France to the East were just beginning.

The postmodernist critical theories with which the author engages are complex and challenging for those who are not familiar with such theories. Furthermore, while the method of close reading of these diaries is an interesting exercise, the larger implications of the findings are not always clear. For example, according to Freadman, diarist Jean-Claude Stern fulfilled the promise of a “topos of continuity” after the end of the war by regaining his true identity (after having used a fictional name during his wartime resistance activities, he took on his own name again), and by paying the outstanding debts of his family home (which ensured that he could reclaim the property). According to the author, by retrieving elements of his previous life, he wanted to reconstitute his identity. This is an interesting finding, but the broader implications of this finding are not elaborated on. For example, can this “topos of continuity” be identified among a larger group of Jews in postwar France? And, if so, what implications did this have for the ways in which they addressed their wartime experiences and losses? Unfortunately, the book does not have a concluding chapter, which is generally a place where authors zoom out and reflect on the wider relevance of their observations. It would have been interesting to read the author’s thoughts on this.

Diaries written by Jewish individuals during the Second World War are an invaluable source of information, and our historical understanding of this period has benefited greatly from the existence of these sources. While most scholars have by now recognized their importance, there are few studies that use the diary as an object of study in itself. Freadman demonstrates that diaries are more than mere descriptions of the events that occurred, or individuals’ experiences of those events. She shows that the diarists’ recordings of these events provide important information on their identity formation, their self-perception, and the ways in which they coped with persecution. This work therefore serves as an important reminder of the invaluable nature and richness of personal testimonies for historical research.

NOTES

[1] Saul Friedländer, *Nazi Germany and the Jews, 1939-1945: The Years of Extermination* (New York: Harper Collins, 2007; first ed. 1997), pp. xxv-xxvi.

[2] See, for example, Rachel Feldhay Brenner, *Writing as Resistance, Four Women Confronting the Holocaust: Edith Stein, Simone Weil, Anne Frank, Etty Hillesum* (Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania University Press, 1997); David Patterson, *Along the Edge of Annihilation: The Collapse and Recovery of Life in the Holocaust Diary* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1999); and Steven E. Aschheim, *Scholem, Arendt, Klemperer: Intimate Chronicles in Turbulent Times* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001).

[3] Michael Marrus and Robert Paxton, *Vichy France and the Jews* (New York: Basic Books, 1981). A second, and revised, edition of this work was published in 2019 by Stanford University Press.

[4] Serge Klarsfeld, *Vichy-Auschwitz: la 'solution finale' de la question juive en France* (Paris: Fayard, 2001), pp. 359-360; Pim Griffioen and Ron Zeller, *De Jodenvervolging in Nederland, Frankrijk en België, 1940-1945: overeenkomsten, verschillen, oorzaken* (Amsterdam: Boom, 2011), p. 170.

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