

Response Page

The following responses were posted on the H-France discussion list in response to Jonathan Judaken's review of Maud Mandel, *In the Aftermath of Genocide: Armenians and Jews in Twentieth-Century France*.

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The original review may be found on the H-France web page at:

<http://www.h-france.net/vol4reviews/vol4no37Judaken.pdf>

Wednesday, April 07, 2004

David Slavin

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Dear Colleagues

Frequently I find reviews and comments on this list that ignore North Africa, the "blindspot in the eye of France," to paraphrase WEB DuBois remark on African Americans' role in the Reconstruction era. In reviewing Mandel's book, I wonder if Jonathan Judaken (or Maud Mandel for that matter) could provide more information on North African Jewry beyond the one clause of the sentence I have appended below. The Jews of Tunisia, Morocco and Algeria numbered over 400,000 in 1945. Algeria's Jews alone were at least 125,000. All of them were French citizens and hence would not count as "immigrants." Almost all of them migrated to France and not to Israel despite repeated warnings and urgings from the Mossad (whose early job it was to round up Disaporic Jews esp. in the Arab world). Most of these Jews were assimilated into French "civilization" (the Paris-based Alliance Israelite Universelle having opened French schools in the 19th century; unnecessary in Algeria after 1870 because Cremieux Decree granted those Jews full citizenship rights en masse). Yet most of them had been fully integrated into Arabo-Berber-Islamic civilization and society since the 8th century CE and had lived in the Maghreb since the Roman Disapora or even earlier ("newcomers" were those Jews expelled from Spain in 1492 and later from Portugal under Philip II). They are part of a much larger "mosaic" (apologies for pun) of Judeo-Arabic communities in the Mediterranean and beyond. A broad spectrum of cultural life describes these Jews, from almost completely assimilated French/Francophones to those who were still deeply embedded in the surrounding Arabo-Berber society of the Maghreb. Aron Rodrigue of Stanford, among others, has written about this group, although he focuses mainly on the AIU and its "civilizing mission" (and that's _French_ civilization they are referring to) to their beknighted brethren. Andre Chouraqui and Michel Abitbol have written more comprehensive histories of North African Jewry, Genieve Dermenjian has a monograph on the Dreyfus Affair period and Michel Ansky's 1950 work on Algerian Jews is excellent up to the late 1940s. But there appears to be little effort to track this community to the 1950s and beyond. Given what we know from both Vicki Caron and Nancy Green about tensions between "native" French Jews and more recent immigrant refugees after

1900 and after the 1920s, what was the relationship between the post 1945 arrivals and the older Jewish community as well as the larger gentile French population?

My own work on this subject derives from my fellowship last fall at the US Holocaust Memorial Museum's Center for Advanced Holocaust Studies. I am looking into the critical years of 1940 to 1943, when Vichy revoked Cremieux, fulfilling the goal of the Franco-Hispano-Italo settlers, who had been agitating for treating the Jews as "natives" and "subjects" since the Dreyfus Affair. After the Allied landing of 8 Nov. 1942, first Darlan, then Gen. Giraud, US special envoy Robert Murphy's handpicked men whom he was using as a counterweight to DeGaulle, kept the discriminatory laws vs. Jews in place. In March 1943 Giraud went so far as to revoke the Cremieux Decree a second time, in the interests of "equality" with Muslims! To the Americans he argued that his goal was to minimize unrest among the natives who would cause trouble if Jews got back their rights. Jews in North Africa, international Jewish groups, Muslim Algerians, even US consular officials and OSS agents in the field in Algeria all recognized that the argument was nonsense, and Hannah Arendt wrote an article about this issue pointing out that Giraud's actions were motivated more by a desire to cater to the anti-semitism of the settlers than to avoid unrest among Muslims. Getting back their rights was crucial for Algerian Jews and for the Jewish and anti-Axis forces at large it was an issue of tremendous import, since it was the earliest situation in which the restoration of status was faced and could have set a precedent for all sorts of post-facto discrimination in Europe after the German surrender.

My point of this long discourse is once more to raise the issue of the role of this community and of Algeria in France's internal affairs. Comments and discussion would be of great interest.

Wednesday, April 07, 2004

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I think that Maud Mandel's book doesn't deal with the North African Jews since they were, with notable exceptions, spared from the experience of the Holocaust. This is in response to David Slavin's posting about including North Africa in discussions of French history-

Having written a recent dissertation just on this subject - Algerian Jews and their migration to France in the late 1950s-early 1960s - here's a very quick summary of some of its main characteristics.

The Jews from Algeria, French citizens since 1870, migrated en masse to France as part of the larger repatriation of French citizens of Algeria. They were eligible for the aid that the government offered rapatriees, but were fortunate to also benefit from the help of Jewish social organizations such as the FSJU, and of the religious aid of the Consistory. In fact, their arrival forced the Consistory to expand its focus from the solely religious sphere to also help in cultural and social activities. Smaller numbers of Moroccan and Tunisian Jews also came to France in this period, but many were not French citizens and had additional problems getting papers,

applying for social aid, etc. The migration had the interesting effect of altering the French Jews' ideas about assimilation. Whereas it was formerly seen as a goal, both the experience of Vichy, and the realization that there would be no future migration of "traditional" Jewish communities from E. Europe to France meant that much of the rhetoric from the Jewish community leaders focused on the fear that if the Maghrebin Jews assimilated, French Jewish religious and cultural life would face an uncertain future. They wanted the Algerians (and Moroccan and Tunisian Jews) to instead form the basis for a revival of French Jewish religious and cultural life. The FSJU and Consistory thus split the job of creating not only synagogues for them (importing American ideas promoted by the Joint Distribution Committee to make sure that the newcomers contributed to the organized community), and establishing community centers, which combined religious, cultural, and social functions.

This migration also changed Jewish demography in France. Like the *pieds-noirs*, most went to Paris and large southern cities such as Marseille, but as part of the repatriation policies they also ended up in provincial towns with no previous Jewish populations. Because of housing shortages and the priority given to rapatriés in the new housing projects, there was also a shift in Paris from the center to the *banlieues*, and much of the community-center building took place to provide the new arrivals, and their children with a religious and cultural space to save them from the perceived dangers of their new environment. In many places, the Maghrebin Jews quickly overtook their Ashkenazi neighbors in numbers, and conflict initially arose between Sephardi or local North African customs and Ashkenazi traditions, particularly within the Consistory.

Thursday, April 08, 2004

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It is worth noting that the granting of citizenship to Algerian Jews by the Cremieux Decree was widely regarded as unfair -- why the Jews of Algeria should be considered French while the Muslim were not. This helped to make the European settlers in Algeria, a motley crew of French, Italian and Spanish riff-raff, even more anti-Semitic than previously. The Republican politicians who pushed this citizenship decree through were engaged in the old French practice of political manipulation, and the French Jews allowed themselves to be used in this way. Not that this would have prevented Vichy or any of that but it did make the anti-Republican Right even more certain that the Jews of France were a problem for them.

Wednesday, April 07, 2004

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David Slavin raises some important issues in his comment on my review of Maud Mandel's *_In the Aftermath of Genocide_*, most significantly why are the 400,000 Jews of the Maghreb not dealt with in Mandel's work. The simple answer is that she confines her analysis to the hexagon

and there are good reasons for doing so, considering all of the complexities of North African Jewry that Slavin sketches (and many that he does not raise, including the differences between the Algerian, Moroccan and Tunisian cases).

Most of the literature on Jews and Judaism in France that I have read deals with Maghrebian Jewry separately even though the Cremieux Decree granted Algerian Jews full citizenship. Not to treat Algerian Jewry separately (not to mention Morocco and Tunisia) would, in a funny way, acquiesce to the claim that Algeria was France, wouldn't it? Unlike the Algerians, only a slight majority of the Tunisians and less than half of the Moroccans who emigrated to France were French citizens. Most emigrated to France in the 1960s and when they did so there was a new period of integration that is discussed in Bensimon-Donath and Claude Tapia and beautifully synthesized by Paula Hyman. This period is beyond the time frame of Mandel's study. Since an immigrant is a person who leaves one country to settle permanently in another, I am not sure why Slavin says that North Africans, even the Algerians, "would not count as 'immigrants'." North African Jews were immigrants and went through a process of immigration when they moved to the hexagon.

Slavin is also incorrect in saying that "almost all of them migrated to France and not to Israel." Only 220,000 emigrated to France and Israel was the second major destination for Maghrebian Jews. I know because I lived in an apartment owned by one of them overlooking the Temple mount during my stay at Hebrew University. My first year there was, in fact, facilitated by Michel Abitbol (whose important work Slavin cites) who is only one of tens of thousands who made aliyah.

It is my personal policy as a reviewer to try and assess a work on its own terms and not to suggest that it should have included what I would have preferred it discuss, unless the exclusions impact the history that is written. My review, I believe, accurately reflects Mandel's work. Professor Slavin intimates a more complete history of French Jewry in the immediate aftermath of genocide necessarily should treat North African Jewry. This is a provocative suggestion. I will defer to Mandel to defend her own choices as a writer if that is his critique.