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Daniella Doron, *Jewish Youth and Identity in Postwar France: Rebuilding Family and Nation*. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2015. ix + 309 pp. Illustrations, notes, bibliography, and index. \$45.00 U.S. (cl). ISBN 978-0-253-01746-8.

Review by Vicki Caron, Cornell University.

Daniella Doron's new book, *Jewish Youth and Identity in Postwar France*, constitutes an important contribution to the growing body of literature on the revival of the French Jewish community in the wake of the Holocaust, which witnessed the murder of 75,000 Jews from France, two-thirds of whom were foreign born. In recent years, a number of studies have appeared that examine the impact of the North African Jewish immigration to the metropole in the 1950s and 1960s and analyze how this migration transformed and revitalized the Jewish community. Doron, however, returns to the immediate postwar years to examine a different aspect of this process of rebirth and renewal, and she focuses on the treatment of children. How did the Jewish community recover the children who had been hidden by gentiles during the Occupation, and how did it grapple with the profound trauma experienced by these children?

By examining these issues, as well as the broader problem of how shattered Jewish families were reconstituted, Doron emphasizes three main themes. First she claims that the process of community rebuilding was not simply the result of the arrival of North African Jews. Rather, she suggests that these processes were rooted in the community's efforts to recover and educate the children whose lives had been ripped asunder by the Holocaust. Second, she suggests, contrary to the popular consensus, that the memory of the Holocaust within the Jewish community was not suppressed until the 1960s and 1970s. Rather, she argues that the memory of the Holocaust was already vibrant during the immediate postwar years, although she concedes that any discussion of Vichy's role in the deportation of Jews to the death camps in Eastern Europe remained subdued until the 1960s and 1970s. Third and finally, Doron suggests that, in focusing on issues pertaining to children such as custody disputes between the Jewish community and non-Jewish foster families who had sheltered these children, as well as questions regarding the upbringing and acculturation of these children, the Jewish community did not shy away from stressing the particularly Jewish nature of these issues. Indeed, Jewish communal leaders insisted that the very future of the Jewish community in France depended on the continued Jewish identity of these children.

This articulation of Jewish particularism at times led to disputes with gentile foster parents who were willing and eager to keep these children after the war, especially when there were no surviving relatives in France. It also occasionally led to disputes with the state, which at times favored universal over Jewish solutions to these problems. Through this acceptance of Jewish particularism, which was expressed not only in religious terms, but in ethnic and cultural terms as well, Doron suggests that the pre-war concept of the "Israélite"—someone who expressed his or her Jewish identity as a private matter and solely in religious terms—was now supplanted by a more pluralistic notion of what it meant to be Jewish. This new Jewish identity was expressed in cultural and ethnic terms as well as religious ones, and it was predicated on the notion that there was no conflict between being French and Jewish, even when one's Jewish identity was expressed in ethnic terms. This shift was especially apparent in the widespread embrace of Zionism

by the majority of French Jews, especially after the creation of the state of Israel in 1948. Although these trends have generally been associated with the immigration of North African Jews, Doron argues that they were already evident during the postwar years and surfaced especially in these debates over the fate of Jewish children.

In the first chapter, Doron deals with how the Jewish memory of the Occupation and Holocaust conflicted with the Gaullist theme of the universal suffering experienced by all the French. As Doron shows, in publications, radio broadcasts, and public exhibits, French Jews repeatedly stressed the singularity of the Jewish experience, even while affirming their faith in the French republican tradition. In 1949, for example, the Jewish communist welfare organization, the Commission centrale de l'enfance, sponsored an exhibit of children's artwork that demonstrated the extent to which the child survivors had in a few short years "returned to life" (p. 39). Even more significantly, Doron focuses on the "Week of the Martyred Jewish Child," held in October 1945. This commemoration, which was sponsored primarily by the Fédération des sociétés juives de France (FSJF), which had a Zionist orientation, was not met with universal enthusiasm, even within the Jewish community. Some on the Jewish left, especially the communists, criticized this event as too sectarian and feared that it might spark antisemitism among non-Jews. Opposition arose outside the Jewish community as well. Some government spokesmen, especially the communist Minister of Health, François Billoux, insisted that "all French children are equal," (p. 48) and the National Committee on Children, a government agency, even held its own counter event—"The Week of Child Victims of War and Nazism." Nevertheless, non-communist Jewish leaders held firm in insisting on the uniqueness of the Jewish fate. As Rabbi Jacob Kaplan stated, only Jewish children had "been killed by persecution and fated for extermination" (p. 49).

Ultimately, however, the "Week of the Martyred Jewish Child" was held with the participation of prominent Christians, including Mgr. Paul Rémond, the bishop of Nice, who had helped rescue Jews during the Holocaust. Even then, however, Rémond's speech endeavored to reconcile the particularly Jewish aspect of this persecution with more universal themes. As the bishop declared, "No place in the world must ever see the return of the bestial crimes committed against Jewish martyred children, or against any other children" (p. 51). Notwithstanding these controversies, it is clear, as Doron contends, that a "flourishing Holocaust memory" existed among French Jewry during the immediate postwar period, even if that memory failed to address the thornier question of Vichy collaboration in the deportations (p. 46).

The second half of the first chapter, together with chapter two, deals with the zeal of the Jewish community to recover every last Jewish child who had been hidden during the war. Nearly one-third of the 30,000 Jewish children in France at the war's end had been hidden either with non-Jewish families or Christian institutions. Although the majority of these children were returned either to their parents or to the Jewish community when the parents had not survived, a small number were not returned and this situation led to several contentious custody cases. The most famous of these was the Finaly Affair of 1948-1953, in which the head of a Catholic orphanage in southeastern France, Antoinette Brun, refused to return two Jewish boys, Robert and Gérald Finaly, whose parents had been deported, to live with an aunt in Israel. To prevent their return, Brun baptized the boys and ferreted them off to a monastery in Spain. This affair was resolved in court only after Chief Rabbi Jacob Kaplan publicly rebuked the Church for reenacting the 19th-century practice of "ritual kidnappings."<sup>[1]</sup>

As Doron notes, the Jewish community was united in its determination to recover every hidden child, and agents representing various Jewish welfare organizations scoured the countryside in the immediate postwar period in search of these children. Moreover, as Doron shows, the Jewish community erected group homes (they avoided the term "orphanages") to house and educate these children. Indeed, Jewish leaders were adamant about placing these "lost children" in group homes rather than leaving them with non-Jewish foster parents so as to ensure that they were not converted or lost to the Jewish community through radical assimilation. This fierce determination was motivated in part by the desire to respect the

wishes of the deceased parents so as to ensure that these children be raised as Jews. But it was also due to the belief that the recuperation of every one of these children was essential for the community's long-term survival. As Vivette Samuel, a social worker affiliated with the Oeuvre des secours aux enfants (OSE), declared, "there are few children that remain to us, and this is our entire future" (p. 130). In the eyes of these Jewish leaders, to permit these children to be lost to the Jewish community through assimilation would merely be perpetuating Hitler's genocide.

The determination to raise these children as Jews once again led to conflicts with non-Jews, and sometimes even the government. Some foster parents had already converted the children, sometimes at the child's own request, and these children were not always eager to return, especially when that involved leaving a loving family to be sent to a group home. One of these children stated that she "hates the Jews," and another told her sister that she "no longer wants to live with your kind of people" (pp. 84-85). Moreover, as the Finaly Affair demonstrated, these custody battles drove a wedge between the Jewish community and the Catholic Church. Although some clergy, most notably Cardinal Pierre Gerlier in Lyon, worked behind the scenes to secure the release of the Finaly boys to surviving relatives in Israel, other clerics and prominent Catholic journalists, most notably François Mauriac, supported Antoinette Brun's actions and insisted that once Jewish children had been converted there was no turning back. In so doing, they revived memories of the notorious Mortara Affair of the late 1850s, when Vatican agents kidnapped a Jewish boy in Bologna after he had been secretly converted by his nurse.<sup>[2]</sup> These legal battles with the Church pained Jewish leaders, who until now had credited the French episcopate with having played a huge role in Jewish rescue during the war. Doron also suggests that these custody disputes sometimes led to friction with the state, since the state, which wanted all French children to remain in the country for demographic reasons, often supported the rights of the foster parents over the claims of the Jewish community, especially when children risked being sent to relatives abroad.

In chapters three and four, Doron further develops the idea of these collective children's homes, which to some extent marked a continuation of the children's homes of the Oeuvre des secours aux enfants (OSE) and the Union générale des israélites de France (UGIF) under the Occupation. According to Doron, no fewer than seventy-three Jewish children's homes were established in France after the war and these institutions housed not only orphans, but a sizeable number of children who had one or even two living parents (40 percent of French Jewish children in these institutions had two living parents, and 35 percent had one). This sad tale reflects the fact that Jewish families were shattered after the Holocaust, and even when parents survived, they were frequently ill equipped financially and/or psychologically to raise their children. (The difficulties Jews faced in receiving restitution from the state only compounded these problems). Doron also shows that for a very brief period (1945-1950), a number of Jewish pedagogues, psychologists, and social workers, influenced by collective child-rearing experiments in Palestine and the USSR, actually favored these collective institutions over the nuclear family in order to ensure the mental health of the children and provide a Jewish education. Some of these children, however, were so deeply traumatized that even the best efforts of these Jewish professionals could not diminish the asocial, apathetic, and sometimes aggressive behavior of these children, who were suffering from post-traumatic stress syndrome.

The most striking example of these traumatized children was the cohort of 425 Buchenwald boys who were brought to France at the end of the war. These youngsters, who included Elie Wiesel, were not of French origin, but they were East European Jews, mostly from orthodox backgrounds, who had lost their parents in the Holocaust. Many of these boys ultimately emigrated to Israel or the United States, but Doron shows how French Jewish social workers and psychologists developed new techniques to treat their trauma by partnering with American Jewish institutions, which gave greater emphasis to individual therapy. Here too, however, the Jewish community's decision to house these youngsters in group settings led to conflicts with non-Jewish social workers and psychologists, who believed these children would be better served by forgetting their Jewish past and integrating into the broader French society, presumably through placements with non-Jewish families.

In the fifth and final chapter, Doron deals with the longer-term solutions devised by the Jewish community to address the crisis facing the children. Already by the early 1950s, Jewish leaders abandoned the idea of group homes for children, and they returned to a traditional emphasis on the nuclear family. At the same time, however, they continued to emphasize certain aspects of the group experience, such as dormitories for Jewish college students away from home, sleep-away camps, and Jewish community centers. As Claude Kelman, a representative of the FSJF exclaimed, "For better or worse, from now on the continuity [and] future of our community rests on an extra-familial Jewish education" (p. 205). Doron shows that these endeavors were largely inspired by American Jews, who provided huge sums of money and manpower to get the French Jewish community back on its feet. She nevertheless argues that French Jewish leaders were not passive recipients of this assistance; rather she insists that they adapted this aid to French Jewish needs.

Most significantly Doron argues that these initiatives, which emphasized Judaism as an ethnic and cultural identity, and not strictly a religious one, went far to nudge French Jewry closer to an American model of cultural pluralism, which maintained that there was no inherent conflict between being Jewish and French, even when Jewishness was defined in ethnic terms.

The greatest proof of this shift away from the "Israélite" model of Jewish identity and toward this new pluralism was the nearly universal affirmation of Zionism in the postwar years, even among Jewish elites such as the Rothschilds. Doron argues that the communal solidarity forged to deal with problems of postwar children, as well as the willingness of Jewish leaders to set aside their sectarian differences, set the stage for the positive reception accorded to North African Jewry just a few years later. These immigrants, just like the youth right after the war, were perceived as the essential lifeline to the community's future.

Doron's analysis of the treatment of children in the immediate postwar period provides an important corrective to historical writing that locates the rise of Holocaust memory only in the 1960s and 1970s. Here Doron suggests that French Jews, irrespective of political affiliation, were united in their insistence on the uniqueness of the Jewish experience during the war. At the same time, however, she concedes their continued reluctance to discuss Vichy collaboration, at least until the late 1960's and 70s. Doron also highlights the extreme fragility of the Jewish family during these years, since even parents who had survived the Holocaust were frequently willing to confide their children to Jewish group homes, since they were unable to care for them financially or emotionally. Above all, Doron shows why the greater openness of French Jewry toward a pluralistic vision of Jewish identity that emphasized ethnicity as well as religion, together with a willingness to challenge the Gaullist insistence on the universal suffering of the entire French population during the war, prepared the way for the more public and assertive affirmation of Jewish ethnicity generally associated with the influx of nearly a quarter million North African Jews in the late 1950s and 1960s.

I have only a few criticisms of this work. In terms of substance, I wonder whether Doron's claim that communal unity ultimately triumphed over sectarian discord may go a bit too far. Clearly Jewish communists continued to voice their disagreements with more centrist and pro-Zionist Jewish leaders, and many Jews who were unaffiliated with the official Jewish community may also have held contrary views. Moreover, at least some of the supposed disagreements between Jews and non-Jews over the upbringing of Jewish children may actually have been intra-Jewish disputes, since several of the individuals mentioned as non-Jewish critics of the Jewish community's policies had names that sound Jewish or partly Jewish, such as Yvonne Haguener and Simone Marcus-Jeisler.<sup>[3]</sup> There are also some editorial inconsistencies that should have been fixed: the date of the children's artwork exhibit mentioned above is given both as 1949 and 1950 (pp. 38-39); the number of Jewish children's homes is given both as seventy and seventy-three (pp. 4, 118); and the number of Buchenwald boys who came to France is given both as 425 and 426 (pp. 192, 194). Moreover, the book could have been better organized. For example,

it is not clear to me why the discussion of custody disputes and especially the Finaly Affair is split between two chapters. On the whole, however, the book is well written, and it is based on extensive archival research and a wide reading of the contemporary press, both Jewish and general. In addition, Doron has done an exemplary job of situating her study within the growing body of secondary literature on the fate of children throughout Europe during the immediate postwar period. Doron's study should ultimately stimulate research into the way teachers, social workers, and psychologists addressed issues regarding childhood trauma and the ways in which these children, in whom all hope for the future was invested, handled this difficult transition.

This work ultimately fills an important gap in the scholarship, and it will serve as a bridge between the numerous studies on the Holocaust and those that examine the impact of the North African Jewish migration. It furthermore highlights the way in which the debate over the fate of Jewish children simultaneously mirrors and diverges from broader European-wide debates over the most effective means of reintegrating children, who had been deeply traumatized by war and genocide, back into society.

#### NOTES

[1] Maurice Szafran, *Les Juifs dans la politique française, de 1945 à nos jours* (Paris: Flammarion, 1990), p. 72, as cited in Paula E. Hyman, *The Jews of Modern France* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), p. 189.

[2] See David I. Kertzer, *The Kidnapping of Edgardo Mortara* (New York: Knopf, 1997).

[3] The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM) has a photo of Yvonne Haguenaer, who is identified as the director of a Jewish children's home in Sèvres, together with her charges, that is dated 1944. See <<http://collections.ushmm.org/search/catalog/pa1156451>>.

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