

H-France Review Vol. 4 (April 2004), No. 37

Maud Mandel, *In the Aftermath of Genocide: Armenians and Jews in Twentieth-Century France*. Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2003. ix + 317. Notes, bibliography and index. \$84.95 U.S. (cl). ISBN 0-8223-3134-9; \$23.95 U.S. (pb). ISBN 0-8223-3121-7.

Review by Jonathan Judaken, University of Memphis.

Sadly, comparative histories are few and far between. It is unfortunate because they are so illuminating, since they provide at least one control group that helps define and delimit the generalizations produced by a study. In the case of Maud Mandel's *In the Aftermath of Genocide: Armenians and Jews in Twentieth-Century France*, the comparison yields insights about the impact of genocide on these two transnational groups, the immigrant and minority experience in twentieth-century France, and, more generally, on the negotiation of identity within the French polity. While these are more typically the questions of a cultural historian, Mandel favors the methods of the social historian, focusing primarily on demographics, institutional factors, and the policies of the French state, spicing her investigation with cultural sources. The analysis that unfolds reveals two very different histories about two very different communities that, apart from the structural dynamics that she considers, actually share little in common. Hers is thus the quintessential cautionary tale of the historian, warning that appreciation of the specific context is crucial to understanding the after-effects of genocide, the lived experience of transnationals, and how minorities face and respond to the dominant culture.

On the face of it, drawing together the experience of Armenians and Jews in the French setting makes perfect sense. Each were victims of state-sponsored genocide, with some scholars arguing that the Armenian genocide was most similar to the Holocaust in motives, killing methods, and the extent of the destruction (p. 4). Prior to World War I, four thousand Armenians lived in France, to be joined by sixty-five thousand *apatrides* (stateless refugees) seeking asylum after the Great War and the Armenian genocide. There were 300,000 Jews living in France in 1939, nearly half of whom had emigrated there since 1919, with another 50,000 arriving after the German invasion of Holland and Belgium. Two hundred and fifty thousand Jews survived the German occupation and Vichy persecution to be joined by 35,000 new Jewish immigrants between 1944 and 1949. Each group, as an immigrant minority, confronted the state-centered assimilationist model of French integration. And both Armenians and Jews wrestled with their relationship to a nation-state outside of France that claimed their allegiance as the homeland of each people. "These four parallels, then—genocide, position in the polity, diaspora, and homeland—provide the central thematic concerns of this study" (p. 5). In the six chapters that follow the introduction, what emerges most pointedly is that despite these structural parallels, these two different communities have different stories that result from their different histories in France: the length of time they lived within the hexagon, how each fit into the social and political structures, the characteristics of the communities themselves, and the nature and context of their persecutions.

In the aftermath of genocide, the overarching concern of both groups was the reconstruction of the basic facets of their material existence. Like Jewish immigrants, Armenians had to learn the language, find a home, get a job, and relocate relatives. But Mandel insists that the after-effects of genocide were more traumatic for Armenians since "the migration to France transformed the primarily rural, agriculturally based peasant population into an urban, working-class ethnic minority" who were forced from their ancestral lands and had to seek refuge abroad (p. 4). Armenians (and many Jews) came to France in a period when the borders were open to any who were willing to work as industrial laborers given the shortages after World War I. France accepted more refugees per capita than any other nation. But Armenians came as "orphans of the nation," without "passports or visas to facilitate their movements, no consulates to represent them, nor any treaties to protect them. Nor could they return to the lands from

which they came” (p. 21). Armenians thus arrived in France with their civil and juridical status stripped by a foreign power, while Jews after the Holocaust had to rebuild their lives and institutions in the land where they were persecuted.

The nature of the difficulties they encountered were thus different. As Mandel makes clear, in the 1930s, “Jews were France’s internal outsider, the ‘other’ against which the society defined itself, whereas Armenians were clearly not part of the host society but an oppressed minority group from another society (in which *they* had been the internal ‘other’)” (p. 50). As such, she shows that “French xenophobia was not monolithic. By the mid-1930s, Jews occupied a particular place both symbolically and materially in the surrounding society...by the late 1930s Jews and refugees had become synonymous (both sharing an entirely negative connotation) in the public imagination, yet it is clear that Armenian refugees who had arrived prior to the major anti-refugee wave were, at times, able to escape such antagonism” (p. 44). Even within the discourse of race scientists and immigration theorists prior to and during World War II, Armenian racial distinctiveness was downplayed, in part because they were Christians (p. 47). Jews, on the other hand, suffered “state-sanctioned oppression in the form of loss of citizenship, property, and civil rights and ultimately deportation, [while] Armenians suffered no particular loss in status” (p. 180). However, when the provisional government and then the Fourth Republic restored the social contract that defined Jewish ‘emancipation’ in France, most Jews looked at Vichy as an aberration of modern French history. They colluded in what Emmanuel Mounier called the “strange silence” (p. 53) about the Jewish question which underpinned the postwar Gaullist myth of the occupation, and willingly returned to their place within the Republican order, focusing on rebuilding their lives in France. Unlike that of Armenians, whose struggle was to work to put food on the table, to create new families, and to establish basic communal institutions (p. 91), the reconstruction of Jewish life focused instead on five areas that Mandel does an excellent job discussing: (1) restoration of rights and suppression of racial distinctions, (2) reintegration of surviving deportees, (3) the establishment of welfare and relief activities, (4) return of confiscated and stolen property, and (5) punishment of functionaries, *administrateurs provisoires*, and others who profited illegally from Vichy laws.

The best example of the similarities between Armenians and Jews is how each confronted the establishment of national homelands after genocide. “Both Israel and Soviet Armenia,” Mandel indicates, “sought to create dynamic relationships with Jews and Armenians across the globe” (p. 149). The vast majority of both populations living in France, however, were not ready to pack their bags even when they supported the national homeland, which most did ideologically and economically in diverse forms. Pushed by the desire to no longer live in the liminal status of the *apatride*, the hazards of which became apparent under the German occupation, most Armenians seized the opportunity after World War II to become French citizens. This was made possible by a new state policy that increased the pace of naturalizations and the fact that many children of immigrants were born in France and had reached the age of eligibility for French citizenship after the war. Nonetheless, spurred in part by Soviet propaganda, which dovetailed nicely with the heroization of those Armenians who participated in the Resistance, 10 percent of Armenians did decide to leave France for Soviet Armenia. The majority eventually returned to France with their ideals crushed by the reality of the Soviet Republic. Until the advent of the Cold War, most Armenians and their community institutions (political parties and the church) still supported Soviet Armenia from a distance, but they were ambivalent about the differences between their idea of an Armenian homeland and the reality of the Soviet Armenian state, established when Bolshevik forces invaded the Republic of Armenia in 1920. Since the French state was no friend of the Soviet Union, given their *apatride* status, most Armenians kept a lower profile in their support for Armenia than did Jews in their support of Israel, which retained its autonomy from its inception in 1948 and was supported by the French government until 1967. Still, only a fraction of the 25,000 Jews from France who made *aliyah* between 1948 and 1985 did so before the Six-Day War. Even so, Mandel details how pro-Zionist sentiments spread amongst Jews after the Holocaust and the creation of the State of Israel, a central facet of a developing consciousness of their ethnic identity, which either substituted for or supplemented their religious identity, continuing a pattern already established in the interwar period.

Thus, in response to the establishment of national homelands, there were those in both populations who defended and upheld the Jacobin conception that citizenship demanded loyalty to only one nation. But the majority found ways to articulate a transnational allegiance that ultimately avoided conflict with their French citizenship.

In the case of both Jews and Armenians, there was “a striking commitment to maintaining visible communities despite the assimilationist rhetoric of the [French] state” (p. 152), but how each community expressed and experienced their minority identity was different. Armenians remained quietly on the margins, evidenced by patterns in lifestyle, culture, familial structures, institutional forms, and settlement choices, each of which reinforced their distinctiveness. Jews had a much longer history of integration in France, and when they were welcomed back into the nation in the aftermath of genocide, they were basically distinguished from their compatriots only by their different religion. Nevertheless, a really original and interesting aspect of Mandel’s research is to show how, “aided by the infusion of American Jewish money and influence [specifically in fundraising approaches and community building], French Jews began exploring new ways of identifying that placed their ethnic and cultural distinctiveness in the foreground” (p. 176). This laid the groundwork for the very visible presence of Jews in contemporary French society, especially after the migration of Jews in the wake of decolonization in North Africa, making today’s Jewish community in France the largest in Europe outside of Russia.

To sum up, Mandel’s work often reads like two separate histories of two distinct transnational minorities in France with many of the chapters divided into separate discussions of the Jewish and the Armenian situations. One wishes that the analysis could have bridged this divide through the comparative framework, because the way she structures the text reinforces the differences between the experience of Armenians and Jews. A chronological discussion rather than thematic organization would have facilitated bringing these two accounts into closer dialogue, but it would have centered the work on the minority experience in twentieth-century France rather than on how the two communities rebuilt after their respective genocides. Her choice is nonetheless a little frustrating, since the comparativist’s sensibility seems almost instinctual in her writing, with the result that we frequently learn more than just the history of these two communities in France. Indeed, she often draws comparisons to the wider diaspora of Armenians and Jews. We are taught much about the history of immigration and communal institutions more generally because of her wide reading in the secondary literature, peppered by the colorful and apt examples she draws from the archives. As such, Mandel’s work fills a gap in our understanding about what happens in the aftermath of genocide, and teaches us that, to understand how communities rebuild, we must be sensitive to the specific contextual factors that condition how they respond to their traumatic past.

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ISSN 1553-9172
