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Robert I. Weiner and Richard E. Sharpless, *An Uncertain Future: Voices of a French Jewish Community, 1940-2012*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2012. xxxviii + 374 pp. Map, chronology, illustrations, notes, bibliography, and index. \$89.95 U.S. (hb); ISBN 978-1-4426-0559-6; \$26.96 U.S. (pb). ISBN 978-1442605596.

Review by Daniella Doron, Monash University.

Robert Weiner and Richard Sharpless's illuminating collection of interviews conducted between the 1990s and the early 2000s adds to a growing, yet still slim, collection of literature that focuses on the post-war French Jewish experience. French Jews as a whole have been traditionally overlooked by Jewish historians, who have preferred to keep their eyes directed eastward to the demographically larger and perhaps more historically dramatic Jewish communities of central and Eastern Europe. Of those scholars who do write about Jews in France, only in the last decade has post-war French Jewish history transformed into a developed field of study. The rebuilding and revival of the French Jewish community in the immediate aftermath of the Holocaust, the evolution of Holocaust memory, the mass immigration of North African Jews to the metropole in the wake of decolonization, and responses of Jews to the "right to be different" movement of the 1980s, have all served as sites of recent historical study. These works have largely stressed the vitality and vibrancy of the post-war French Jewish community, revealing both how French Jews had not been utterly decimated by the Holocaust and that they had not buckled in the face of the universalizing and assimilating force of the French state. This book contributes to this literature by nudging post-war French Jewish historiography into the contemporary period, a still neglected academic sub-specialty. And yet, unlike much of the current scholarly literature, this collection's focus on the last two decades means that the ultimate tone of the work remains cautionary, if not downright pessimistic. The Jews of Dijon, if not all of France, Weiner and Sharpless conclude, face an "uncertain future."

Weiner and Sharpless have chosen the city of Dijon and its Jews as the subject of their inquiry. The two scholars correctly note that the vast majority of academic works on French Jewish history and sociology focus on the capital, where half of French Jewry resides. And yet the other half of France's Jews lives elsewhere, mainly in the south and in other smaller provincial cities, such as Dijon. The editors tackle the question of why specifically Dijon in the preface. This decision to give voice to the experiences and perceptions of Dijon's Jews serves a number of functions: it extends the geographic reach of current historiography beyond Paris, and provides a litmus test as to whether the conclusions about Parisian Jews can be applied to the other half of the population. Furthermore, Dijon enjoys a small and yet rich and vibrant Jewish community. With 225 Jewish families out of a general population of 150,000, Dijonnaise Jews have built a vibrant Jewish communal infrastructure that includes a synagogue, a community center, a Jewish school, a *mikvah* (a ritual bath), and even a Jewish radio station.

The interviews conducted for the book were largely given between 1993 and the 2006, during which time Robert Weiner enjoyed extended periods living in Dijon and integrating into the Jewish community. Weiner and Sharpless have chosen to group the interviews according to how members of the community self-identify. Consequently, three main sections constitute the organizational structure of the book: "the Synagogue Center," those who are actively affiliated with the Dijon's synagogue and its

communal institutions; “the Lubavitcher Group,” Hasidic Lubavitcher Jews who have recently moved to Dijon and sought to transform Jewish life there; and “Others,” those who self-identify as Jews but prefer to remain unaffiliated with an official Jewish community. An introduction contextualizes the history of Dijon’s Jews within the larger narrative of French Jewish history, while the conclusion summarizes events since 2006 in French political and cultural life and draws tentative conclusions as to their consequences for Dijon’s Jews. Presumably prompted by the questions posed by Weiner, several common themes unite the interviews: views about France, Israel and America; the nature of contemporary anti-Semitism; the arrival of Lubavitcher Hasidim to Dijon; and the prospects for Dijon’s Jewish community in light of its rapidly aging population and dwindling numbers of younger Jews.

Even though at the turn of the twenty-first century Dijon’s Jewish community stands as a community fractured by religious and political cleavages, it is one that is overwhelmingly at home in France. The two other major poles of international Jewish life—Israel and the United States—arise as subjects of discussion in nearly all of the interviews. Certainly a range of opinions and experiences emerge, from those who find American models of ethnic identity distasteful, to those who embrace being surrounded by other Jews in Israel. While opinions about the United States and its consumerist culture and “right to be different” mentality remain generally mixed, the overwhelming majority of the interviews generally support the State of Israel, even if not always its government. At the same time, in few of the cases do the interviewees seriously question the viability of Jewish life in France or consider uprooting their lives and families to start a new life abroad. For the vast majority of these French or North African Jews, the pull of France outweighs the attraction of life in Israel or in larger diasporic communities.

Nor does the resurgence of anti-Semitism in France seriously challenge this outlook. Certainly anti-Semitism amongst Muslim youth and the New Left emerge as central topics of discussion in nearly all of the interviews. Unsurprisingly, here, too, a range of opinions arise, from those who understand recent anti-Semitism as a troubling but ultimately ephemeral development, to those who feel personally threatened in certain neighborhoods and deeply worry about the resurgence of anti-Semitism in French society and politics. In particular, one notices a notable shift in perceptions about anti-Semitism from those interviews conducted in the mid-1990s to those conducted a decade later. By the start of the twenty-first century, Jews in Dijon are discussing anti-Semitism amongst Muslim youth in particular at length and worry about the consequences of the Muslim population for the status of French Jews. And yet despite the attention and anxiety caused by anti-Semitism at the turn of the century, these Dijonnaise Jews, some of whom are Holocaust survivors or their descendants, feel ill at ease, but not personally imperilled.

If external forces, such as anti-Semitism or immigration abroad, do not pose a serious challenge to the long-term future of Dijon’s Jewish community, internal forces are another matter. Those interviewees affiliated with the synagogue—the vast majority of the interviews published in this volume—identify the recent arrival of Lubavitcher Hasidim and the departure of Dijon’s Jewish youth for Paris as constituting considerable threats to the viability of Jewish life in this provincial city. In fact, a surprising degree of acrimony about the Hasidim and concern over Jewish youth emerges in the volume, as clearly certain Dijonnaise Jews understand these developments as tearing the community apart and seriously imperilling its future. In terms of the Hasidim, a young Lubavitcher Hasidic couple relocated to Dijon in 1993 with the mission of reinvigorating Jewish life and missionizing amongst the Jewish population. Whereas agreement generally existed amongst synagogue-affiliated Dijonnaise Jews about religious standards and decorum prior to their arrival, the Lubavitcher Hasidism’s exacting religious standards ultimately created a communal schism between traditional and less observant Jews. For instance, the Hasidism demanded a *mechitza* (a partition separating men and women) in the synagogue so that they could pray according to their religious strictures. The synagogue leadership, and presumably the laity, refused to cede to this demand, fearing that it would drive large numbers of less religious Dijonnaise Jews from the synagogue who would object to gender inequality. This inability to arrive at an agreement between the synagogue leadership and the Lubavitcher ultimately inspired the Hasidic

couple to establish their own Jewish communal institutions that now serve as a source of competition. While the Lubavitcher see their move to Dijon as offering a welcome jolt to Jewish religious life there, the synagogue-affiliated members lament the newly fractured nature of Jewish communal and social life. For those Dijonnaise Jews who remain unaffiliated from both the synagogue and the Hasidim, the group Weiner and Sharpless refer to as “the Others,” this issue seemingly contentious issue fails to pop up on their radar.

The future of Dijon’s younger Jews constitutes an additional threat to the viability of Jewish life in Dijon, according to many of the interviewees and to Weiner’s concluding thoughts. Older Dijonnaise Jews see the younger generation leaving the city in droves, usually for Paris which holds greater economic and social allures for those seeking to start their lives and livelihoods. Several of the older interviewees worry about the consequences of this trend for the vitality of the Jewish community in future decades, and see this development as constituting probably the greatest challenge. Interviews with teenage Dijonnaise Jews confirm this perception. They regard Dijon as having little socio-economic mobility and feel socially stifled in this relatively small French city and Jewish community. While this development may indeed undermine the future security and stability of Dijonnaise Jewry, these social and economic patterns are mirrored elsewhere in the country and amongst non-Jews as well. Teenage Dijonnaise Jews are hardly the first to feel suffocated in the provinces, and their parents and grandparents are not alone in expressing anxiety about the toll of urbanization on provincial life.

This leads to the question as to whether the French Jewish community actually faces an “uncertain future.” The tone of Weiner’s conclusion and some of the interviews are overwhelmingly pessimistic, as evidenced by the choice of title. But a more optimistic reading could be offered to some of the evidenced presented in this volume. In terms of the flight from Dijon of young adults, these younger Jews largely prefer Paris as their port of call rather than Tel-Aviv or New York. That these younger Jews choose to remain in France means that the French Jewish community as a whole is not necessarily imperilled by internal migration. It may be just that French Jewry will become increasingly centralized, with only a few major cities enjoying large Jewish communities. Furthermore, the most despondent interviews took place around 2005 and 2006, hardly shining years for France and French Jewry. Between 2000 and 2005, the Second Intifada raged on, leading to increased tensions between Jews and Muslims and a disconcerting rise in anti-Semitic incidents. In the fall of 2005, the civil unrest in French suburbs amongst immigrant youth sparked a national discussion about Muslim minorities and their chances of integrating in French social and cultural life. In 2006, the kidnapping, torture, and murder of Parisian Jewish teenager, Ilan Halimi, by African immigrants rocked the French Jewish and non-Jewish worlds. Given this moment of crisis, it is hardly surprising that interviews conducted in 2005 and 2006 occasionally voiced grave concern about the status of French Jews. It would have been illuminating if Weiner and Sharpless had conducted more recent interviews to see if these individuals still harbour feelings of uncertainty. In the conclusion, Weiner hypothesizes that economic and social developments in the last eight years have only aggravated these concerns, but we would need hard evidence to support these conclusions. Regardless, Weiner and Sharpless present provocative evidence that will hopefully spark a further scholarly conversation about the security and stability of contemporary French Jewry.

Daniella Doron
Monash University
daniella.doron@monash.edu

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